



**FOTO was inaugurated in Kolkata in 2006 in presence of Augusto Boal after a two day conference. FOTO was formed to create a united front platform of political and cultural activists in India. Following is an excerpt from the document based on which FOTO was formed.**

Creative action is basic to the history of human evolution. Creative action has not only helped construct multiple forms of societies (simple or complex), it has also been the process through which people have understood and analyzed the society in which they live and the societies in which they wish or hope to live. Today creative action is defined and manifest, promoted and institutionalized under highly constrained conditions. By employing the method of theatre of the oppressed in our practice we make a sincere attempt to generalize the opportunity for all in society to engage in creative action. However the situation within which people's creativity is expressed is so constrained by the immediacy of survival that the opportunity to develop a wider range of creative expression and practice, sustained critical thinking and intellectual progress is not available. In contexts where survival is at stake, citizens find it opportune to vote for parties that protect interests but not social relationships, or intellectual development, or healthy cultures, or freedom. While there is an emphasis on creating cultural spaces for people, the very meaning of culture is pre-scripted in these spaces.

We wish to democratize the terms in which culture and creative action is imagined, constructed, and realized. We wish to broaden the spaces within which people's voices and views are heard and acted upon. We want to bring art back into people's lives as constant companions that can help express people's belief in themselves and in their value. We wish to create a practice through which people come to recognize, understand, and believe in their desire for change. We believe this can enable people to follow in the footsteps of thoughtfully chosen leaders rather than blindly follow pre-scripted economic, political and cultural goals. We have seen this process of thought develop, and when we do see it, it is surely a sign and consequence of years of work. In other words, we are promoting people's art not as a showcase of a particular place, a static aesthetic feature of a distant world.

We believe that promoting people's art is about developing people's ability to think, represent, question, critique, and reconstruct their experience as citizens. We believe that this political action, this battle for citizenship involves creative action. Cultural action does not serve a secondary function for political action as some politicians are inclined to believe. It is not just celebrities who ought to share the platform with

politicians. After all celebrities already have a captive audience. I suppose that is the service celebrities perform for politicians. In fact, it is the relentless and unrecognized creative action of people that should adorn the platforms of politicians – the politicians who always claim to represent their constituencies.

Nor does political action belong to a different realm of action and practice as some cultural activists tend to believe. We are not collecting a crowd so that the real political activists can begin real political work. We believe the creative action we are encouraging to be political work. We are constructing people who can learn to recognize the multiple social relations through which they are connected to others in society. We believe that this process of constructing a collective can only emerge through a constant dialectical questioning, reflection, and action - both onstage and offstage. This means that we make every effort to fight the tendencies of propaganda within our work.

There is a difference between having a thesis at all and making that the focus of propaganda. I do have a thesis. But we don't require people to think the same thesis. We can only support this process of searching for a thesis that addresses people's critical understanding of their social relations. Only they can do this for themselves. We cannot take the responsibility for the thesis on our shoulders.

We require people to think about and study the multiple relations they have with others in their societies. We believe that the more they learn about how they relate to others in society, the more they are scripting their own power. We believe that people must develop their knowledge about their relation with others. Accumulating this power to reconstruct social relations can fight individual alienation in society. This process can only happen through interaction with others. And through this process people can construct their thesis of what kind of social relations to build. Unless they are truly committed to their belief in their equal worth as humans, and in the equal worth of every other human, in the power of every human to recognize the set of social relations within which they are living, they will not be constructing a thesis of a future society that is truly collective in nature. Nor will it be truly reflective of an individual's power and creativity in constructing the nature of change.

We have discovered a connection between Indian thinking and the methods for political theatre that came in the form of Brecht, and Boal. We have brought their vision together with the capacity for constant argumentation so widely seen in folk art practices to make something like dialectical theatre. In this we have brought the onstage-offstage experience of humanization to the fore. This dialectical theatre can only be constructed by handing over the means of producing art to the downtrodden through various mass organizations.

We have handed over the means of production related to art to many Dalit proletariats in India. We are proud of the fact that we worked with all our heart and commitment for last 20 years to see that people are engaging themselves in a debate, discussion before taking political action. We sincerely want to counter the culture that is acting to seek??? Globalization and for that we have to have our own cultural front which will construct relation instead of destroying it among working class people. And which will teach the world the art of democracy. Let us come together to make it a success. Let us spread this practice of art all over the country. Let us open a democratic space in front of oppressed, let us not only teach, let us also learn from them to construct a political perspective. And let that political perspective be developed with the joint contribution of oppressed people and the activists who work for the liberation of the oppressed.