

Stage, Society and Stricture: Bengali Theatre, 1800-1876

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Abstract : *The consecutive occurrence of Sepoy Mutiny and Indigo Rebellion immediately after it pushed the reformist zeal of a self-confident Victorian liberalism of the British to a back seat, as many of them in the administration started to believe that the Indians were beyond reform. A new mood of 'conservative brand of liberalism' was initiated into the British administration. This conservative reaction evidently made the empire more autocratic and denied the socio-politico-cultural aspirations of the educated Indians for sharing equal space. The offshoot was the rise of a feeling of frustration among the educated middle-class, which finally led to the formation of different political associations in different parts of the country to voice their grievances. In Bengal, during this time, parallel to the formation of political associations, one of the dominant cultural expressions, apart from literature, the theatre activity, initially started in the region under the European influence, was also undergoing through some fundamental changes, be it in the form of content, or technology and most importantly in the approach, much more concerned and reflective of the contemporary time. The playwrights of the region felt the need to address to their time; and gradually the performances on the stages of Calcutta started to show more maturity by addressing to the contemporary social evils. The middle class intelligentsia of Bengal as well as the moneyed members of Bengal intelligentsia, the babus, who were also sometimes linked with the rise of political associations, were also largely connected, directly or indirectly, with the theatre activities. It was either under their influence or under the influence of British legitimization of India's rich heritage, a trend of patriotism, through glorious portrayal of*

heroes of the country, also started to feature in the themes of contemporary plays. However, Dinabandhu Mitra's play *Neel Darpan* (*Neeldarpanang Natakam*), which was published in 1860, dared to alter the scenario, hinting at a potential where plays and theatres reflect the mirror image of contemporary social condition and practices. The play exposed the rampant atrocities of the Indigo planters in the countryside of Bengal and thereby making a charge directly against the British authority, the allies of the planters. *Neel Darpan* set up a trend and many plays with strong social and political message were started to be penned or staged. This made the British apprehensive of consolidation of an alternative front, through which the colonised mind could have sought to assert their voice.

Key Words: *Theatre, Proscenium, Bengali Stage, Neel Darpan, Satire, Dramatic Performance Act.*

The consecutive occurrence of Sepoy Mutiny and Indigo Rebellion immediately after it, pushed the reformist zeal of a self-confident Victorian liberalism of the British to a back seat, as many of them in the administration started to believe that the Indians were beyond reform. A new mood of 'conservative brand of liberalism', as observed by Thomas Metcalf, was initiated which rested upon the 'solid support of the conservative and aristocratic classes and upon the principle of complete non-interference in the traditional structure of Indian society'.¹ This conservative reaction evidently made the empire more autocratic and denied the socio-political-cultural aspirations of the educated Indians for sharing equal space. The offshoot was the rise of a feeling of frustration among the educated middle-class, which finally led to the formation of different political associations in different parts of the country to voice their grievances, centring different issues.

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region felt the need to address to their time; and gradually the performances on the stages of Calcutta started to show more maturity by addressing to the contemporary social evils. The middle class intelligentsia of Bengal as well as the moneyed members of Bengal intelligentsia, the babus, who were also sometimes linked with the rise of political associations, were also largely connected, directly or indirectly, with the theatre activities. It was either under their influence or under the influence of British legitimization of India's rich heritage, a trend of patriotism, through glorious portrayal of heroes of the country, also started to feature in the themes of contemporary plays. However, Dinabandhu Mitra's play *Neel Darpan* (*Neeldarpanang Natakam*), which was published from Dhaka in 1860, dared to alter the scenario, hinting at a potential where plays and theatres can reflect the mirror image of contemporary social condition and practices. The play by Mitra exposed the rampant atrocities of the Indigo planters in the countryside of Bengal and thereby making a charge directly against the British authority, the allies of the planters. In fact, *Neel Darpan* was unique in its content and nature, as in no other contemporary Indian plays there was any such example of portraying the British/European as the oppressor. While the playwrights belonging to other parts of the country were still engaged with translated works or satires or themes reflective of age-long scriptural tradition,² Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neel Darpan* was certainly a marked shift on stage towards actual reality.

The Beginning

Prior to the introduction of European theatre into the cultural life of Bengal, different folk forms of entertainment like *jatra*, *tarja*, *kabi-gaan* etc were in practice in the region. However, mainly because of gradual absorption of obscenity in the content as well as loud enactment style, these folk forms were started to be disliked by the urban people, especially the educated rich and middle class of Calcutta. With the time, those folk forms were pushed to the periphery and vacant cultural space thus created in and around Calcutta was captured by the European style of theatre during the second half of 18th century. It introduced the concept of proscenium stage, where

the performance was to be on an elevated platform while the spectators will sit in a dark close auditorium on the front. Earlier, in the traditional form of *Jatra*, people used to sit around the flat stage at the centre, while the new style of proscenium theatre initiated a division into that cultural space with a concept of height and distance. The earliest known English theatre in Bengal, a proscenium playhouse known as 'The Theatre', was built in Calcutta in 1753 and was closed following Nawab Sirajuddaula's attack on the city in 1756.³ In 1775, during the time Warren Hastings, 'The New Playhouse', also called 'The Calcutta Theatre', came up. Until 1808, when it went out of business, the theatre performed plays written by William Shakespeare,⁴ Philip Massinger,⁵ William Congreve,⁶ Richard Brinsley Sheridan⁷ etc. A host of other proscenium playhouses soon followed, of which the Chowringhee Theatre (1813–39) and the Sans Souci Theatre (1839–1849) were most noteworthy.

The people of Bengal had three options to get associated with this new cultural trend – as a viewer, as an owner or as an actor; and it is interesting to note that they played all the three roles over the time.⁸ As the entry fees were quite steep, only the affluent section of the Bengali society, not the common people, could see those productions. However, with Dwarkanath Tagore purchasing the Chowringhee Theatre on 15th August, 1835, by quoting the highest price in the auction, the owner's role was also executed by a Bengali. The performance of Baishnab Charan Auddy in the role of Othello on 1st August, 1848 ensured a Bengali's participation in the capacity of an actor. However, it goes without saying that the Bengali association with the theatres were of a very limited character as there were no more instances of a Bengali owner of a theatre or a Bengali actor enacting the role of the main character. However, the Bengali viewership of these English theatres increased over the time, signifying a genuine interest for these proscenium productions. This interest for European theatre could develop because of inclusion of English plays in the curriculum of English medium schools and colleges of Calcutta. Even the genuine interest that some of the teachers took in the skill of acting, like Richardson and Derozio as is evident in the writings of the members of the Young Bengal group, also could have mattered.

It is learnt that in 1805, sixty pieces of Shakespeare's works came to Calcutta from London, second highest after the Bible.⁹ The students of the Hindu College, Metropolitan Academy, Oriental Seminary, David Hare's Academy started to produce and perform Shakespearean plays like Julius Caesar, Merchant of Venice, Othello, Henry the Fourth etc on a regular basis. It is evident that an urge to portray different facets of life through realistic performance on stage slowly but surely taking control of the imagination of the people, but they were no more satisfied with performance or content of the plays of foreign origin, which were surely beyond their own socio-cultural understanding. They wanted plays to be written and performed in their own language.

Bengali Theatre: First Half of 19th Century

It is now a well-known fact that the first performance of a play in Bengali, on a proscenium stage, by an 'all-native cast' (both male and female), was produced by a Russian named Gerasim Stepanovitch Lebedeff (1749–1817), on 27 November, 1795. The second production took place on 21 March, 1796. The play, *Kalpanik Sangbadol*, a Bengali translation of Richard Jodrell's comedy, *The Disguise*, performed at the Bengali Theatre was surely a surprise event in the history of Bengali theatre. Though it is known that Lebedeff had an intention to perform in Calcutta as well as in the countryside, and to have a permanent theatre hall and stage under his possession, he could not fulfil his dreams; because of circumstances beyond his control.¹⁰ It is obvious that Lebedeff got little scope to initiate the process of creating original Bengali plays and to perform those on the stages, but it is equally true that he, for the first time, thought of modifying the content and language of the play, trying to make it much more acceptable to the people of Bengal. There was another less famous attempt at Chandannagar in 1808, where a French play *L'Avocat* was translated into Bengali and was staged.¹¹ It should be interesting to note here in this context that following the early proscenium performances in Bengali language, the Bengali intellectuals, from the early decades of the nineteenth century slowly but surely started to take interest in the form of theatre, from a creative point

of view, mainly in two forms; either by taking part at the organizational level and/or by translating original Sanskrit and English plays in to Bengali.

Private Theatre

For the affluent section of the contemporary Bengali society, starting from landed magnets to the new middle-class emerged following the permanent settlement to owners/editors of newspapers; the proscenium form of theatre production with an Indian content, and preferably in Bengali language gradually became one of the main cultural activities apart from their commitment elsewhere. The trend, commonly being termed as *Babu Theatre* or *Baganbarir Theatre* started to develop centring the private spaces owned by these new patrons from around mid-19th century. Those productions were mainly staged in the private residences or farm houses (*baganbari*) of the babus on specific occasions. This new area of activity opened for the *babus* new avenue to show off their wealth as well as to become close to the English officials for their favours. However, exceptions were there where a genuine interest for the development of a distinct form of Bengali theatre could also be found. But, as the invited guests to these productions belonged to the same class as of the host, the opportunity for the common people to watch those productions was minimal.

‘Hindu Theatre’, owned by Prasanna Kumar Tagore in 1831 is regarded as the first Theatre established by a Bengali intellectual.¹² The first production of the house was the English translation of Bhababhuti’s *UttarRamacharita* on December 14, 1831. Horace. H. Wilson¹³ was the translator, director and one of the main actors in the play. The next production, *Nothing Superfluous*, based on an Indian content, was staged by the ‘Hindu Theatre’ on March 29, 1832. This new trend, subsequently and substantially was enriched by Nabin Basu’s Theatre at Shyambazar, Pyarimohan Bose’s Jorasanko Theatre, Asutosh Dev’s (Satubabu) Theatre at Beadon Street, Ramjoy Basak’s Theatre at Natun Bazar, Gadadhar Seth’s Theatre at Bara Bazar, Kaliprasanna Singha’s ‘Bidyotsahini Ranga Mancha’, ‘Belgachhia Theatre’ by the Rajas of Paikpara,¹⁴ ‘Metropolitan Theatre’ at Ramgopal Mallick’s palace at Chitpur, ‘Pathuriaghata Banga Natyalaya’ at Jatindra Mohan Tagore’s residence, ‘Shobhabazar Private Theatrical Society’ by

Radhakanta Deb etc. They made several experiments with techniques and formats like introduction of quality orchestra as background score, fine perspective backdrops, gas-lanterns, and limelight. However, it seems that *the babus* were more comfortable either with translated works from English masterpieces or plays based on traditional themes from the *Puranas*. The plays reflective of contemporary social issues, which generally found them at the centre, were naturally not promoted by them. However, with the time, when people of the region were no more satiated with mere translation works or Indianization¹⁵ of western plays because of their thin connection to the indigenous socio-cultural scenario, the incorporation of contemporary social issues in the content of the plays became inevitable, leading to the gradual fading away of private theatre towards the end of 1860s.

Parallel to the existing practice of translation and indianization of Sanskrit or English plays, a new form of play-writing, much more conscious and committed to the age, began to flourish. It was in 1854 that a large section of Bengali audience were moved to see Ramnarayan Tarkaratna's *Kulin Kula Sarbasva*, as they could relate it to a contemporary social evil of polygamy. Though it had some influence of Sanskrit dramaturgy, the play was contemporary and hence was very near to a 'true' Bengali theatre, at least from the angle of the content. If one looks at the list of the theatres produced or plays written during this time, only the mere names of them would suggest that they dealt with contemporary social evils as their theme.¹⁶ Apart from this, farces and plays based on ancient Puranic themes were also written during this time.

Bengali Theatre: Second Half of 19th Century

The dominant trends during this period included a definite shift of Bengali plays towards more maturity in form and content, based on the individual talents like Madhusudan Datta or Dinabandhu Mitra; social plays occupying the centre stage, attempts to organise public theatre and finally the British apprehension of Bengali '...social plays that gradually slipped into making political statements through theatrical means.'¹⁷

Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873)

Dutta was one of the stalwarts among the Bengali dramatists who wrote some of the earliest original plays in Bengali. His composition of blank verse, sonnet and epic only enriched Bengali literature. That he was aware of the demand of original plays in Bengali is evident from his writings on the issue. He wrote,

The friends who wish that our countrymen should possess a literature of their own, a vigorous and independent literature, and not a feeble echo of everything Sanskrit, will rejoice to hear that a taste for the Drama is beginning to develop itself rapidly among the highest classes of Hindu Society. I am fully convinced that the day is not far distant, when the princely munificence of such patrons as the Rajahs of Paikparah will call onto the field a host of writers who will discard Sanskrit models and look to far higher sources for inspiration.¹⁸

Dutta's most productive years were between 1858 to 1865 and he penned some brilliant pieces like *Sharmistha* (premiered at the Belgachia where he made his debut in 1859), *Padmavati* (published 1860, premiered 1865) and a historical tragedy titled *Krishna Kumari* (published 1861, premiered 1867). Madhusudan shines most brilliantly with his farces, where the language is easy, the attack is sharp and relevant, and the characters are drawn distinctly. In *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata* (published 1860, premiered 1865), he ridiculed the ultra-progressive members of the Young Bengal group who blindly copied European culture and in *Budo Shaliker Ghade Ron* (published 1860, premiered 1867), he exposed the hypocrisy of the affluent class of the society, which may be relevant for any country in modern age.

Dinabandhu Mitra (1830-1873) and *Neel Darpan*

Dinabandhu Mitra, as a playwright, was most modern in his approach as he completely discarded the Puranic themes and concentrated on depicting the evil aspects of society of his time. It is interesting to note that his given name was Gandharba Narayan, but he took the name of Dinabandhu Mitra, a man dear to the destitute. Whether to do justice to the name that he took

or as a playwright with different approach, Dinabandhu created a stir with the publication of his play *Neel Darpan*, published in 1860, immediately after the outbreak of indigo revolt. For the first time a Bengali play struck the chord of history and *Neel Darpan* secured its place in the same bracket with *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (related to reforms of the jails) or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (related to abolition of bonded labour).¹⁹ The play was published from Dhaka and soon after its publication it ignited a major argument concerning the issue, with many contemporary Bengali intellectuals sharing Mitra's views through publication of editorials in newspapers on a regular basis.²⁰ His first hand experience of the indigo cultivators, while on the job as the post master in rural Orissa and Bengal, were reflected in the drama. Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated the play into English and Reverend James Long published it. The *Neel Darpan* got wide publicity even in Europe where it was translated into many other languages. No other Bengali book at that time got so wide publicity at such large scale. A lawsuit was filed against Rev. Long by 19 July 1861 for libelling the indigo planters. Rev. Long was fined a sum of 1000 Rs. and a month of time in jail. On the other hand, the revolt had a strong effect on the government, which immediately appoint the "Indigo Commission" in 1860.

Neel Darpan holds a unique place in the history of Bengali Theatre for reasons more than one. Although because of the weak portrayal of some of the central characters like Nabinmadhab, Raicharan, Sairindhri or Bindumadhab, it is alleged that the peasant characters of the play display more urban *babu*-like behavioral attributes than anything else;²¹ *Neel Darpan*, apart from being first of its kind with a strong stance against the European oppressors, became also a trend setter. More plays of so-called social protest, a large number of them in the darpan (or mirror-) style, began to follow suit; plays that purported to hold up a mirror, as it were, to the ills of society. Most notable among them were Mir Masarraf Hossain's *Jamida-darpan* (The Mirror of the Landowner, 1873), which was about a peasant rebellion against the land-owning babus, *Cha-Kar-Darpan* (The Tea-Planter's Mirror, 1875), by Daksinaranjan Cattopadhyay, that dealt

with the poor working conditions at the British tea-estates in North Bengal and *Jel-darpan* (The Mirror of the Prison, 1876) that dealt with the terrible life of prisoners in the jail houses of Bengal, also by Daksinaranjan Chattopadhyay. All three plays protested against the atrocities by colonial authority directly or indirectly through some of its agencies, targeting mainly the lower tier of the society

Era of Public Theatre

The content of *Neel Darpan* suited the mood of the time as associations in different parts of the country started to voice their grievances on different issues against the colonial rule by this time. The younger generation of theatre enthusiasts of Calcutta, outside the aristocratic ambit of the city, also felt the mood and decided to do their part of the job through theatre. On 7 December 1872, history was made with the opening of the first public playhouse in Bengal, the National Theatre, formed by a group of theatre-crazy youths belonging to Baghbazar Amateur Theatre (1869–1872),²² some of whom like Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, Amritalal Basu, Girish Chandra Ghosh, were to become stars of professional theatre in the next few years. Among the patrons, they got people like Sisir Kumar Ghosh, editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Nabagopal Mitra, editor of *National Paper* and founder of *Hindu Mela*, Manmohan Basu, the noted playwright and journalist. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neel Darpana* was the automatic choice for the premier. The playhouse with its proscenium stage was a temporary construction in the courtyard of the private residence of Madhusudan Sanyal in the Chitpur area of Calcutta. The National Theatre took another important decision of introducing ticket system for the viewers. It is known that first class ticket cost Rs. 1, second class 50 annas, reserve seats Rs 2 and 4 annas to sit on the flight of steps. The ticket sale for the first show of *Neel Darpan* was Rs. 200 and it was so well received that the sale jumped to Rs.450 for the second show of the play.²³ There were several shows arranged for *Neel Darpan* with all the tickets sold off, but the demand for the next show was still high. Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi was so emotionally motivating in portraying the role of Mr. Wood, the planter, that during one of

the shows, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, taken in by the realism of the performance of Mustafi, threw a shoe at the actor on the stage. National paper reported on the success of staging *Neel Darpan* as ‘The event is of national importance’. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* suggested that the play should not be restricted to Calcutta, but should venture beyond Calcutta to such places as Krishnanagore, Berhampore, Jessore and other such areas where the issues addressed in the play would be more relevant. However, the staging of *Neel Darpan* earned the displeasure of the *Englishman* which, in its 20 December 1872 issue condemned the play for having had damaging effects on the dignity and prestige of the British government and ordered that the performance of the play be immediately stopped. It wrote:

Considering that the Rev. Mr. Long was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment for translating the play, which was pronounced by the High Court as a libel on the Europeans, it seems strange that the Government should allow its representation in Calcutta, unless it has gone through the hands of some competent censor, and the libelous parts excised.

Neel Darpan also travelled to other parts of the country, mainly north Indian cities. Towards the end of May 1875, some earlier members of the National Theatre (that had now become the “Great National Theatre”) went on tour. In Lucknow, during a scene of *Neel Darpan*—the scene where Torap, an Indian ryot, holds down the European Mr. Rouge who assaults the helpless woman Kshetramoni—British soldiers among the audience, enraged, rushed onto the stage and began behaving violently, which led to the breaking up of the play.²⁴

The following year, Edward, Prince of Wales visited Calcutta. Soon after his visit, the Great National Theatre presented the play *Gajadananda O Jubaraj*(or *Gajadananda and the Crown Prince*), which sought to target Jagadananda Mukherjee, a well-known citizen of Calcutta, Junior Government pleader and member of the Bengal Legislative Council. This man had invited the Prince to his Bhowanipur residence on 3 January 1876 and had taken him on a tour of the ladies’ apartment of the house where he

was given a traditional Bengali welcome by the female members of the family. This incident enraged the orthodox Bengali society for it appeared to them that Jagadananda had sacrificed his ethics and culture in a bid to placate the British masters and win favours from them.²⁵

The satirical play *Gajadananda O Jubaraj*, based on this incident, was penned by playwright and director of Great National Theatre, Upendranath Das. It was first staged on February 19, 1876, followed by another show on 23rd of the same month. The wide public appreciation irritated the British Government and the play was stopped by police order, yet it returned the following week on 26 February under a different name, *Hanuman Charitra*. It was again banned by the British government.

On 1 March, Upendranath Das's play *Surendra Binodini* was followed by a satire called *The Police of Pig and Sheep*, making mockery of Sir Stuart Hogg, Commissioner of Police, and Mr. Lamb, Superintendent of Police for their hostile behaviour towards the common people.²⁶ After the show Das gave a speech in English to the audience where he attacked the Govt.

It is interesting to note in this context that on the previous day, on 29 February 1876, Lord Northbrook, Governor-General of India, promulgated an ordinance. The *Indian Mirror* of 1 March 1876, reported as follows: A Gazette of India Extra-ordinary was issued last evening containing an Ordinance to empower the Government of Bengal to prohibit certain dramatic performances, which are scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene, or otherwise prejudicial to the public interest. The Ordinance shall remain in force till May next by which time a law will be passed by the Vice regal Council on the subject.²⁷

On 4 March 1876, when the play *Sati Ki Kalankini* was being performed on the stage of the Great National Theatre, the police stormed the place and arrested the director Upendra Nath Das, the manager Amritlal Basu and eight others on the charge of immorality for an earlier play, *Surendra Binodini*. On 8 March Upendra Nath and Amritlal were sentenced to one month's simple imprisonment while the rest were released. Later however, the High Court overruled the order of the Police Court and released

the duo on March 20, 1876.²⁸

On the same day, the draft of the *Dramatic Performances Control Bill* was introduced in the Viceroy's Council and despite strong public opposition; the Bill was passed into law on December 17, 1876. While the immediate provocation for the promulgation of the ordinance was the play *Gajadananda o Jubaraj*, the actual motive of the Government was to silence such nationalistic plays as *Nil Darpan*, *Bharat Mata*, *Puru-Vikram*, *Bharate Yavan*, *Banger Sukhabasan*, *Beer Nari*. This Act also served as a weapon for the British Government to ban plays like *Anandamath*, *Chandrasekhar*, *Mrinalini*, *Chhatrapati Shivaji*, *Karagar*, *Palashir Prayaschitta*, *Matripuja*, etc among others.

Conclusion

The Dramatic Performance Act was a clear hint that the British Government became apprehensive of the potential of Bengal public theatre. The protest mood or the exposition of patriotic sentiment on the stage irritated the British Government whose mood by that time got tuned with James Fitzjames Stephen's assertion on inferiority of the Indians as subjects. It is noteworthy in this context that within fifteen months of DPA, the British Government introduced two more acts, the Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act, both of which were vehemently protested by the Indians. However, it is surprising that the Indian protest was half-hearted in case of DPA,²⁹ the reason for which is still not clear. A trend of commercialization of theatre immediately emerged to fill up the space that got vacant following the sudden closure of patriotic plays being staged in Bengal. The sole objective of making material profit gradually overshadowed the trend of hosting 'meaningful theatre'.³⁰

Notes and References

1. Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870*, Princeton, 1965, p.viii.
2. A study of the plays written in different languages of India till the 1880s suggests that playwrights were either focussed on contemporary social evils or took shelter in the *Puranic* storylines. There is hardly any example where

a dramatist has come out openly to criticise the foreign rule through his works. The works like Hem Barua's *Kania Kirtan* (1861) or Ramakanta Chowdhuri's *Sitaharan* (1875) in Assamese; Narmada's *KrishnaKumari* (1869) or N.T. Marfatia's *Gulab* (1862) in Gujarati; Bharatendu Harishchandra's *Vaidiki Himsa Himsa Na Bhabati* (1873) or *Satya Harishchandra* (1875) in Hindi; Karki Venkatraman Shastri's *Iggappa Heggadeya* (1887) in Kannada; C.V. Raman Pillai's *Chandramukhi Bilasam* (1885) in Malayalam; Vishnudas Bhave's *Sita Swayambaram* (1843) in Marathi; Ramshankar Roy's *Kanchi Kaberi* (1880) in Odiya; Sundaram Pillai's *Mana Vijayam* or *Kalavati* (1880s) in Tamil; Korad Ramachandra Kavi's *Manjari Madhukariyam* (1860) in Telegu are some of the noteworthy examples in this regard. However, a Hindi play, *Nil Devi* (1881) by Bharatendu Harishchandra was an exception where, along with the issue of women emancipation, an urge for freedom from the rule of the British India Government had also been reflected.

3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_theatre, last accessed on 28.3.2014.
4. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet and playwright. He is widely regarded as one of the best writers in the world in English language.
5. Philip Massinger (1583-1640) was an English dramatist. His plays were famous for satire and were reflective of contemporary social and political issues.
6. William Congreve (1670-1729) was an English poet and playwright. Some of his famous plays were *Love for Love* and *Double Dealer*.
7. Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was an Irish poet and playwright. *The School for Scandal* or *The Rivals* were some of his noteworthy works.
8. Pabitra Sarkar, 'Unobingsho Shatabdir Bangla Natak O Tar Proyogkala' in Swapan Basu and Indrajit Chowdhuri (eds) *Unish Shataker Bangali Jibon O Sanskriti*, Kolkata, 2003, p.513.
9. *Ibid.* p. 513.
10. Lebedeff had to face stiff opposition from his contemporary European owners of the theatres of Bengal. He didn't get permission for staging his production in any of the theatre halls in Calcutta. Therefore he built up his own theatre stage at 25, Domtollah (present Ezra Street) and staged two productions successively there. His language teacher Goloknath Das was his chief source of inspiration. It is known that Das took the responsibility of arranging the actors and actresses for the play. Lebedeff decided to curtail the price of tickets for his plays. All these might have led to a sense of apprehension

among his competitors. His arch rival Thomas Roworth, owner of Calcutta Theatre, conspired against his group and Lebedeff finally had to return back to his own country empty handed leaving a disbanded group behind. [Subir Roychowdhury and Swapan Majumdar (eds.) *Bilati Jatra Theke Swedish Theatre*, Calcutta, 1999 (Reprint), pp. 14-15.

11. *Ibid.* p. 18.
12. Darshan Chowdhury, *Bangla Theatre-er Itihas*, Kolkata, 1995, p. 62.
13. Horace Heyman Wilson (1786-1860) was one of the early English orientalist, who came to India as a medical professional. He learnt Sanskrit language and in 1927 published *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus*, which contained, apart from a detail study of Indian drama tradition, translation of six complete plays from Sanskrit to English.
14. Belgachhia Theatre is considered to be the first permanent proscenium stage in Bengal.
15. One may cite as example in this context Hara Chandra Ghosh's *Bhanumati Chitta Bilas*, a translation of *Merchant of Venice* or *Charumukh Chittahara* which was based on *Romeo and Juliet*.
16. One may cite in this context *Bidhaba Bibaha* by Umesh Chandra Mitra (1856), *Bidhaba Manoranjan* by Radha Madhab Mitra (1856), *Sapatni Natak* by Tarak Chandra Churamani (1858), *Balya Bibaha Natak* by Sripati Mukhopadhyay (1860) etc. [Pabitra Sarkar, *op. cit.* p. 516]
17. Sudipto Chatterjee, 'Performing(Domi-)Nation:Aspects of Nationalism in Nineteenth-CenturyBengaliTheatre', in <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/southasia/TESTold/Sudipto.html>, last accessed on 28.03.2014
18. Madhusudan Dutta, *Madhusudan Rachanabali* (ed) Kshetra Gupta, Kolkata, 1982, vol. Xxvii, cited in Sudipto Chatterjee, *ibid.*
19. Pabitra Sarkar, *op. cit.* p. 519.
20. *The Englishman* and *The Hindu Patriot* published regular articles on the issue. However, according to Ranajit Guha, the middle-class attitudes towards peasants in this context were 'a curious concoction of an inherited, Indian-style paternalism and an acquired western-style humanism'. [Ranajit Guha, 'Neel Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in a Liberal Mirror', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2:1, 1974, reprinted in David Hardiman (ed), *Peasant Resistance in India, 1885-1914*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 64, 92.
21. Sudipto Chatterjee, *op. cit.*
22. Darshan Chowdhury, *op. cit.* p. 96.

23. *Ibid.* p. 97.
24. Binodini Dasi in her memoir mentioned about the incident which took place in an area called Chhatrmandi in Lukhnow in the month of May, 1875.
25. Renowned poet Hemchandra Bandopadhyay wrote on this occasion, *Ami swadeshbasi amai dekhe lajja hote pare Bideshbasi Rajar chhele lajja ki lo tare*. [You might be ashamed of me, your fellow citizen; But why should you be ashamed of the King's son, Even if he is from an alien land!]
26. Darshan Chowdhury, *op. cit.* p. 119.
27. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramatic_Performances_Act, last accessed on 28.03.2014
28. Darshan Chowdhury, *op. cit.* pp. 119-120.
29. Jatindra Mohan Tagore from British India Association protested against this act, while Raja Narendra Krishna Bahadur supported the Act. It should be of interest to note that the clauses, charted out by the British authority way back in 1876, were prevalent in independent India also. Though Allahabad High Court in its ruling of 1954, declared it as unconstitutional, many state governments, including West Bengal, could not afford to abolish it.