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Eds.

Subir Dhar, Ronan Paterson, Bryan Reynolds, Papia Mitra

A Special Publication of
Tagore Gandhi Institute /
The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India



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In Memoriam

Shakespeare Society of Eastern India & Tagore-Gandhi Institute
mourns the passing away of



Amitava Roy
(1947–2024)

Professor Emeritus, Bankura University,
Former Shakespeare Professor & Head, Department of English,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Former Director, Shakespeare Centre for Advanced Research,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Executive President, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India,
Globally renowned Theatre Director and Actor.
You left thousands of students and admirers disconsolate
on 12th April, 2024
Farewell and Rest in Peace after your journey's end.

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From the Editor's Desk:

This issue is wideranging focusing on several themes. It takes traditional theatre and films into consideration, moves onto OTT platforms, explores impact of digital media on mass psyche, memes, and polls as new mediums of communication with the political public, Rabindrasangeet and how to tackle climate change. Nearly every topic that is of relevance today can be found here. Veritably a feast for the mind!

Dr. Tapu Biswas argues that in Bengal the first non-Aristotelian drama – rejecting Aristotle's theory of three unities – was created by Badal Sarkar. His first famous play *Evam Indrajit* was not a drama in the conventional sense; it was according to the playwright himself a collection of feelings and impressions. Other plays like *Baki Itihas* which can be regarded as a kind of sequel to *Evam Indrajit*, *Pagla Ghora*, *Nayan Kabirer Pala* bring out the theme that in today's world mere socio-economic or psychological explanation is not enough; the condition of modern man and insignificance of life in today's world comes into play. Dr. Biswas elaborately brings out these aspects of the plays.

Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty compares Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika* with Nagraj Manjule's Movie *Fandry*. Both focus on the plight of Dalits. The heroines are trapped in their castes and cannot escape, but they protest. They love men belonging to 'higher' castes/status but cannot have their dreams fulfilled. Chakraborty brings out how the sense of inferiority becomes ingrained among people traditionally treated as untouchables but revolt against oppression is possible when they gain self-realization.

Shreyoshi Dhar brings out how as beauty standards change through the decades, the entertainment industry also changes the way mythological characters are portrayed on screen. In earlier versions the heroes and heroines were more ordinary, as if they are our domestic

partners; but in later versions they are more cosmopolitan and sophisticated. Dhar points out that thanks to commercial demands, even mythological characters cannot escape the narrow standards set by the Beauty Industry.

Tapan Kumar Rana and **Dr. Moupihta Mukherjee** discusses how women can be empowered by communicating effectively, particularly in media. Movements like MeToo# brings out the pervasive nature of systematic gender oppression in everyday lives by providing women a platform where they can speak and share experiences. Thus, communication and empowerment are linked together.

Natasha Chatterjee explores the ways in which OTT platforms have challenged traditional broadcasting media. OTT content can be broadcast directly to viewers' device at a time of their choosing and location compared to movie or TV which cannot be enjoyed at will. The content is wide, offering access to many channels and different types of content while TV can offer limited number of channels. The middleman is removed since OTT is directly available to the viewer. Chatterjee observes that traditional media is in a crisis because of growing dominance of OTT, but they can take this as an opportunity as well.

Agnidepto Datta critiques the ways how disability and body politics is portrayed in media. The able body is regarded as normative and so the disabled body becomes a source of disturbance, even a challenge to authority. Datta takes the help of Foucault's theory to demonstrate how media portrays the disabled as one-dimensional characters, thus marginalizing them and even validating discrimination against them.

Debarshi Arathdar analyzes how Pinter's *Birthday Party* portrays the dilemma of modern man who tries to articulate his presence beyond passive conditioning. The characters suffer from insecurity and apprehension which paralyses their will. Arathdar points out that Pinter denies them agency as such since they do not have the will and thus there is no definite ending to the play, only eternal deferment.

Sonakshi Mukherjee reviews the portrayal of mental health in the series *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix. The series deals with topics

like depression, self-harm, and how to treat them. Mukherjee concludes that the positive aspect is that such a series removes stigma from mental health problems while the negative aspect is that some viewers might find suicide, self-harms to be glamorously portrayed.

Anirban Banerjee carries out a feminist reconstruction of the 1971 film *Dhanyee Meye*. He shows how the female protagonist is used as a tool by her guardian and given in marriage to keep a lifeless valuable object within his control.

Dr. Tirna Sadhu discusses two works Rituparno Ghosh's "*Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*" and Sanjay Nag's "*Memories in March*" to show how social identities can be reconstructed. The first focuses on gender fluidity where the man's desire to experience motherhood challenges social norms; the second focuses on how shared grief can overcome communication barriers between 'straight' characters and homosexual characters. Both works focus on moving away from the normative while reflecting on complexities of social relationships.

Anup Kundu and **Dr. Shantanu Siuli** focuses on how the rise of digital media and accompanying digital literacy is gradually leading to homogenization of culture, globalization, instant gratification, and rebuilding of new social narratives that influence politics. Rise of newer technologies only enforce these trends.

Manidip Chakraborty and **Dr. Shubham Bhattacharjee** analyzes the strategy of Dystopian narratives on OTT platforms. Series like *Leila*, *Ghoul* brings out the propaganda of authoritarian states and the mechanism they use to impose control. Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee point out that such series also serve as a warning to the audience – they must not allow such a state of affairs to come to pass.

Samadrita Mukherjee and **Dr. Pramiti Roy** takes up a novel topic – opinion polls and exit polls in politics. They focus on the experience in West Bengal from 2014-2021. Their argument is that these polls are tools of political communication, different from standard political philosophies. Such polls are usually accurate though in some cases due to hidden factors they might not reflect reality in toto. But they tell us about the narratives of common people in real time.

Pritha Misra studies the comparatively new field of how memes in political discourse can influence public opinion. She analyzes certain memes and finds that they are of great use for individuals and parties to convey a message and that they simplify complex political issues and thus public can more easily digest them and share them.

Dr. Mahendra Kumar Jena questions how credible citizen journalism is. Traditional journalists are trained in their field and act as gatekeepers of information. Citizen journalism makes the profession more inclusive and democratic and authentic; but also brings in the issues of credibility and bias. User-driven content on social media must adhere to ethical standards and be transparent.

Dr. Moumita Chakraborty studies how social media impacts public opinion. In India digital content has influenced politics for a long time. Nowadays its influence is growing and thus it must be studied carefully.

Srabani Das analyzes selected portion of Gandhi's *Young India* to find out his views on freedom of expression and freedom of press. Her findings that Gandhi believed in them but he did not write much on them, particularly because desiring freedom of press during British Raj was equivalent of insanity.

Bhavya Katyal focuses on climate change and the risks it brings and how to communicate effectively about it to the youth. Young people were interviewed and while many argued that cultural shift is necessary to tackle environmental problems, others argued that preserving culture leads to respecting and preserving nature. Katyal concludes that culture, inequality, lived experience, urbanization, religion, different social experiences all intersect and interact to frame Climate Change as a matter of wider social concern.

Subhrajyoti Kundu discusses how Rabindrasangeet presents aesthetics and cognitive elements. He discusses Tagore's own opinion on the topics and analyzes songs to find out their aesthetic and cognitive appeal.

Srijani Bose discusses how media portrays affects intimate relationships. Women are disproportionately the victims of male violence,

whether at home or outside. Media portrayals often sensationalizes these aspects and can normalize them leading to escalation of such abuse and women's acceptance of them. Bose argues that there is a lacune regarding such studies and much more research needs to be done.

Subinita Paul focuses on another new topic – Facebook groups of women, specially in West Bengal. Social media platforms enable women to connect to each other, but also allows stereotypes to flourish. In her analysis of Facebook posts, Paul finds out that mothers in their roles as primary caregivers are idealized and women talk to each other focusing on such roles more. Such backstages provide social capital, friendship and self-esteem. Thus Facebook becomes a site to construct gender roles.

Sayan Mukherjee studies the condition of various tribes that live all over India. However general public is usually unaware of their experiences and problems. The media helps to bring out their issues to the mainstream. Particularly folk media and traditional media helps them to retain their cultural heritage.

Harinandana R, Balagopan and Dr. Shibani Chakraverty Aich demonstrate how in *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*, manipulation and memory play crucial roles in constructing historical narratives, reflecting the New Historicist perspective that views history as a product of various power struggles and interpretations. The film depicts the manipulation of historical events and characters' memories to serve specific agendas, highlighting the subjective nature of history. This aligns with New Historicism's emphasis on the interplay between literature, history, and culture, revealing how texts both shape and are shaped by their historical contexts.

Sreedevi G and Dr. Shibani Chakraverty Aich provide a vivid portrayal of racial discriminatory patterns in the context of 1960s Mississippi. Through the characters and their interactions, the film illustrates the systemic racism ingrained in society, particularly within the domestic sphere. It exposes how African American maids are marginalized, exploited, and subjected to degrading treatment by their white employers. The film also delves into the complexities of race

relations, power dynamics, and the courage required to challenge the status quo. Overall, *The Help* sheds light on the pervasive nature of racial discrimination and the resilience of those who resist it.

Sourav Chatterjee, Soumen Nath and Dr. Kallal Banerjee explore cultural diversity in Indian literature through a comparative analysis, offering a rich tapestry of perspectives, themes, and narratives reflective of the country's vast and varied landscape. From the intricacies of regional languages to the nuances of customs and traditions, Indian literature encompasses a multitude of voices and experiences. By comparing works from different regions, languages, and time periods, one can discern common themes such as identity, tradition, modernity, and social change, while also appreciating the unique cultural expressions of each literary tradition. This comparative approach not only illuminates the diversity within Indian literature but also highlights its role in shaping collective consciousness and fostering dialogue across cultures.

Happy Reading

Subir Dhar & Papia Mitra

REFUTING ARISTOTLE: The Rejection of Linear Plot in Bengali Drama

Tapu Biswas

ABSTRACT

The present paper argues that the real non-Aristotelian drama was born in Bengal not under the influence of Brecht, but through the experimentations of Badal Sircar, the most significant and innovative Bengali playwright since Tagore. It was a gradual rather than a drastic rejection of the Aristotelian idea of the unity of Action which entails the temporally linear growth of the ‘story’ element of a play. From *Evam Indrajit*, in which a montage-like treatment of the banality of middle-class life conceals a linear story-line relating to Indrajit’s life, Sircar had moved on towards incorporating alternate versions of stories in a play, and further on to combined fragments of several stories relating to several people, eschewing the unities of action as well as of the hero to convey his philosophy of love, life and death. His introduction of the unity of Theme rather than that of Action finally led him to such non-proscenium plays as *Michhil* and *Bhoma*, plays which wholly eschew the ‘story’ element in a play. The impact of his experimentation left a deep mark on Bengali theatre by encouraging later significant and powerful playwrights such as Nabhendru Sen and Manoj Mitra in their plays *Nayan Kabirer Pala* and *Kinu Kaharer Thetar* — both of them landmark plays in modern Bengali theatre.

Keywords : Aristotelian, myth, social, experiment, Third Theatre, montage, indigenous.

Like perhaps all theatres the world over, Bengali theatre, whether of content mythical, historical, or social, has been story-oriented from its birth. And significantly, the demand for neatly turned out stories was most urgent in realistic plays, although there is a universal agreement that real life does not take place like a story. Among the major modern western

playwrights, Luigi Pirandello was among the first to methodically challenge the notion of reality itself and thereby depreciate the relevance of neatly constructed story lines for the theatre. The first major wave of western dramatic influence on modern Bengali theatre came with several plays in translation, significantly including two plays by Pirandello: *Six Characters*, and *Henry the Fourth*. Moreover, the subsequent experience of the so called ‘Absurd Drama’— especially that of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* — did a lot to open the Bengali mind to the possibility of writing plays that do not cling to a storyline. The object of the present paper is not to trace western influences on Bengali urban theatre (which was modelled on the European theatre anyway), but rather to suggest how, through a series of indigenous explorations, Bengali drama, or a part of it, rose above these obvious influences, and came to eschew the story element altogether in the play.

In a sense, it all began with Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit*. An interesting fact about this text is that the playwright himself was not certain whether what he had written was a ‘play’ at all. According to him, what he had written was neither poetry, nor narrative, nor a drama, but just a representation of some thoughts and feelings which could not be contained inside any specific format pertaining to this composition. Concealed behind this admission, however, there seems to be present an acknowledged preference for form over content, or presentational mode over story.

Evam Indrajit opens with an inverted echo of Pirandello, with an Author in search of some Characters, because the playwright lacks a ‘story’ to build a play upon. His helplessness comes from knowing nothing of the real, productive, and suffering lives that form the core of human existence: the hard-working masses constantly struggling to wrest a livelihood out of life. Therefore, he picks up four spectators at random, and tries to build a play out of the experiences of their middle class lives. But on further exploration he finds it all extremely banal – that there is nothing in their lives to write a play about. Every aspect of their lives — academic, conjugal, employment, career advancement, is stereotypical. The monotony is conveyed in this trial poem by the author:

এক— দুই— তিন
এক— দুই— তিন— দুই— এক— দুই— তিন
চার— পাঁচ— ছয়
চার— পাঁচ— ছয়— পাঁচ— চার— পাঁচ— ছয়
সাত— আট— নয়

সাত— আট— নয়— আট— সাত— আট— নয়
নয়— আট— সাত— ছয়— পাঁচ— চার— তিন— দুই— এক।

One—two—three
One—two—three—two—one—two—three
Four—five—six
Four—five—six- five—four—five—six
Seven-eight—nine
Seven-eight—nine—eight—seven-eight—nine
Nine—eight—seven—six—five—four—three—two—one

The characters are said to be Amal, Bimal, Kamal, and Nirmal, but it is soon clarified that the last person is not Nirmal, but Indrajit. He is only member of the group of four who sounds a discordant note in the otherwise drab orchestra of middle-class existence. He is a man who dreams of a different existence, aspires to change society, gets into a socially disapproved love-affair with his cousin, travels, and thinks in poetry:

ভেসে থাকি আন্তিকের দৈন্য নিয়ে
কুটোয় এলিয়ে রাখি জীবনের ভার।
মুছে গেছে অন্য পার কুয়াশার সাদা দীর্ঘশ্বাসে।
মেঘের ওপারে যত সোনামোড়া রাজ্যপাট আছে,
আকাশে তারার কাছে যত স্বর্গ ভাসে,
এ প্রবাসে সবি মিথ্যে হলো।
জেলো সাস্ত্রনার বুলি ছেড়ে দাও,
কেড়ে নাও বিশ্বাসের অন্ধ ঠুলি
ডুবে দেখো কতখানি গেলে মেলে তল।
মানুষ সচল।
মানুষ আশ্চর্যতম প্রাণী :
ডুবো পাথরের ভিতে পাতালে সে পাতে রাজধানী।

I float with the poverty of a believer
Laying the burden of living on a straw.
The white sigh of the fog erases the other shore,
All the golden kingdoms beyond the clouds,
All the heavens floating near the stars in the sky
Prove false in this exile.
Leave off the jargon of watery sympathies

Rob me of the blinkers of faith,
Sink, and see how deep a dive brings you to the floor.
The mobile Man
The most wondrous Being
His kingdom he founds on sunken stones in Hades.

Indrajit changes jobs, travels around, eschews marriage — or perhaps, alternatively, he does get married — but keeps alive his love for Manasi (who, incidentally, doesn't marry). His failure to find meaning even in domesticity becomes a part of his spiritual crisis which is inaccessible to others. Finally, he is so tired and so convinced of his mediocrity that he contemplates giving up his objectless quest for the purpose of his existence and becomes a part of the drabness around him and as someone contemplating suicide. But he cannot achieve even that, because he is not Amal, Bimal, or Kamal, but is Indrajit.

Hence, what had begun with an expression of the impossibility of finding a story with a neat and coherent plot, does after all turn out to be the story of the life of Indrajit, who in despair hides behind the social identity of Nirmal. The name of the play itself (*And Indrajit*) is indicative of the centrality of this character in the play; and what had purported to be a pastiche of the lives of several people turns out in a bird's-eye view to be the somewhat romantic story of one person set against the banality of the life that the other characters embody. It is only the formal treatment of this story as a dramatic structure that gives the play its apparently fragmented appearance.

But the success of the play was phenomenal. After this epochal play one would have expected the playwright to follow it up with more plays along the same lines, having had found the 'true way' to write a modern play, so to speak. But contrary to popular expectation, Badal Sircar went on to write in the regular dramatic mode — witness his subsequent plays *Kabi-Kahini* and *Ballavpurer Rupkatha* — two of the richest and neatly turned out hilarious Bengali comedies. Both were great plays; but curiously, not nearly as commercially successful as Badal Sircar's later serious plays *Baki Itihaas* and *Pagla Ghora*, both produced by the theatre group Bohuruppee, although Shambhu Mitra, the legendary actor associated with the group, appeared in neither. In the absence of this 'star attraction' on stage, the reason for this success must be sought for in the structure of the plays themselves.

The remarkable handling of the story line of *Evam Indrajit* was initially overlooked because it was regarded as being essentially a poetic drama

and altogether too startling an experience to encourage cool analysis. In fact, it was promptly dumped into the then fashionable category of ‘Absurd Drama’ at its first appearance. But *Baki Itihaas*, the play which Sircar considered to be a thematic sequel to *Evam Indrajit*, shows an even more blatant disregard of the Aristotelian ‘single action’ principle in dramaturgy. Here is the outline of the play in brief:

It is Sunday morning in a childless couple’s home. Saradindu is a college teacher, a Lecturer in the academic discipline of Bengali Literature, and an essayist; his wife Basanti who is professionally a school teacher, is an emerging story writer in search of a plot for a good story. They come across the news of the suicide of a man called Sitanath, whom they think they had once met for a few brief hours. This becomes the starting point of a story that Basanti writes; and as she reads it out to Saradindu, the following action of the story occupies the stage:

Sitanath’s wife Kana had spent her youth in extreme poverty. Her mother had died of consumption without medical care. Her eldest sister was worked to death at her in-law’s house. The second sister escaped a similar fate by becoming a rich man’s mistress. Kana, the youngest, is obsessed with the idea of possessing a house of her own. She idolizes her dead father, who, she believes, would have saved them from all this suffering. She is approached by Sitanath’s rich friend Nikhil who deeply loves her, but she disregards his advances.

Sitanath had one bought a piece of land for Kana, and is now saving up every bit of money to build a house on it, knowing of Kana’s compulsive desire for economic security. But it gradually becomes clear that the Kana’s apparently dead father had actually been long incarcerated in jail for theft. After his release, he had been bleeding Sitanath for money—blackmailing him with the threat of disclosing his dark history to his daughter. Sitanath had concurred in order to sustain his lie to Kana that her father was dead. But now his savings have petered out; his land is mortgaged, and as the court bailiff comes to his house, everything comes to light and his wife leaves him for Nikhil. Devastated, Sitanath commits suicide.

From this story-line strongly reminiscent of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (and the characters of Engstrand in *Ghosts* and Mr.

Doolittle in *Pygmalion*), we return to the present. Saradindu thinks that Basanti's story does not adequately explain Sitanath's suicide which must have had a deeper psychological reason behind it. At Basanti's insistence, he writes his own version of the story, of why Sitanath had committed suicide.

Sitanath then appears onstage as a school headmaster. His repressed paedophilia has caused him to rusticate a student for reading Nabokov's *Lolita*: a vicarious punishment on himself for his latent sexual perversity. As he comes to understand the reason for his 'moral' fury, he also realizes that his present attachment to a beautiful girl child signals a resurgence of his long repressed perverse urges. He retracts his decree of rustication, and commits suicide to save both himself and the child. This story also reminds us of Hopkins' stirring psychological play *This Story of Yours*.

Coming back to the present again, before retiring to bed, Basanti asks what had caused the *real-life* Sitanath to commit suicide. Before the alone Saradindu now, the spirit of Sitanath appears. Apparently a mental projection, the spirit demonstrates that Saradindu's life had become a bundle of banalities under a veneer of a desperate make-believe that life is still meaningful and satisfying. This is the history of all men who continue living their empty self-satisfied lives like Amal, Bimal, and Kamal, although the 'remainders of history'—literally the *Baki Itihaas*—of mankind have been nothing but records of cruelty, torture, war, and murder. Sitanath insists that the question is not why he has committed suicide, but rather why Saradindu still has not. Saradindu has no answer to this; and as he is about to follow Sitanath's example, when reality suddenly intervenes in the form of the news of his promotion to Assistant Professorship. He is relieved and elated, but then a nagging awareness of the *Baki Itihaas* starts haunting him.

The playwright is clearly proposing here that socio-economic and psychological explanations of our actions are no longer adequate in the contemporary world. The awareness of the history and the situation of man in this world, an awareness of the insignificance of the lives that we live, is the major factor here. But to convey this idea cleverly used two plays within his play—two cameos of formal dramaturgy—both intense

pieces of social and psychological realism that cancel each other out by implication, and are finally negated by the *unreal* ghost episode that paradoxically reveals the *reality* of this historical dimension of our existence.

The theme of the finale too was not really an invented one. Consider the following lines from Jibanananda Das ‘আট বছর আগের একদিন’ (Once Eight Years Ago):

জানি, তবু জানি
নারীর হৃদয়, প্রেম, শিশু, গৃহ, নয় সবখানি।
অর্থ নয়, কীর্তি নয়, সচ্ছলতা নয়,
আরও এক বিপন্ন বিশ্বয়
আমাদের অন্তর্গত রক্তের ভিতরে
খেলা করে।
আমাদের ক্লান্ত করে
ক্লান্ত, ক্লান্ত করে।
লাশকাটা ঘরে
সেই ক্লান্তি নাই
তাই
লাশকাটা ঘরে
চিৎ হয়ে শুয়ে আছে টেবিলের পরে।

I know, yet I do know
That woman's heart, love, child, home, aren't everything.
Not wealth, achievements, not ease of life,
But a more imperiled wonder
Within our involved blood
Disports itself.
Tires us out
Tires, tires us.
In the dissection room
There is no such fatigue
And so
In the dissection room
He lies on his back on the surgery board.

What the playwright has added as the backdrop to this unearthly feeling of an undefined imperiled wonder is the sketchy background of

Saradindu's life, and the defined issue of human cruelty. The banality of Saradindu's life is demonstrated here by the re-enactment of snippets of apparently meaningful communication between husband and wife (which we have already seen earlier on the stage — and which, re-viewed now in the present context) suddenly appear banal: insignificant empty exchanges which sum up the substance of their conjugal life.

The interpretation of the play hinges on a curious question. Neither of the couple was sure that the reported suicide was the Sitanath they had previously met. But then, whose ghost is it that appears at the end of the play? Is the ghost a real one, or a projection of Saradindu's own suppressed awareness of the shared guilt of mankind? This question leads us to consider the crisis behind suicide as neither a material one, nor a psychological one, but rather a historical crisis that issues from one's awareness of the accumulated sins of inhumanity perpetrated on one's fellow beings; his historical inheritance and his responsibility.

As suggested earlier, *Baki Itihaas* defies the Aristotelian concept of the unity of Action in as much as it is built on three different stories built around the character of Sitanath (and Saradindu, by extension). This should have jarred upon the theatrical sensibility of the contemporary Bengali audience brought up on the tradition of witnessing 'a neat story' on the stage. But the fact that it did not do so indicates a great deal about the force that *Evam Indrajit* had exerted on the minds of contemporary theatre-goers who had been encouraged to look at theatre from a fresh perspective. This fact is attested to also by the huge popularity of *Pagla Ghora*, where even the unity of character was eschewed, causing an even greater fragmentation of the story line.

The popularity of *Pagla Ghora* was occasionally sardonically ascribed to the fact that the audience got to enjoy four love-stories at the price of only one theatre ticket. But while this may have been applicable for the appreciation of a certain small section of the audience, a deeper reason was perhaps that the play is grounded on a more profound unity — the unity of theme — which holds the play together and presents a more universal picture of human nature with all its illusions, vanities, failures, and memories of guilt that turn man's life into an organism of mechanical existence.

Pagla Ghora presents a similar but infinitely more complex structure than did *Baki Itihaas*. Structurally, it is a potpourri of the love experiences of four people: the elderly Kartik (a village compounder); the older but still

vigorous Satkari (a labour contractor); the youthful Himadri (a school teacher); and the middle-aged Shashi (the local Postmaster). Mutual acquaintances, they have come to cremate a rich man's young mistress expired under doubtful circumstances. They drink whiskey to keep themselves warm, play cards, and egged on by the spirit of the dead girl, gradually recall how they had betrayed the call of love in their own lives and caused tragedies in the lives of the women concerned.

If the immediate stage action consists of this quartet killing time by playing cards, and consuming alcohol, the stories come out through flashes of unconnected flashbacks from their lives — ordered in their apparent arbitrariness — with the spirit of the dead girl, eager for love stories, hovering in the background and urging them to disclose their various pasts.

A girl from high society had fallen hopelessly in love with Himadri, and he had rather cruelly rejected her on the ground that their statuses, and consequently their life-styles, would not match. As a man committed to his ideals, he had strongly disapproved of the girl's wealthy background. The heartbroken girl had crashed into a tree while drunkenly driving a car at full speed. Himadri had gone to cremate her.

Satkari had rescued a poor girl from some goons, and the girl had become a willing slave to him, asking not marriage, but only the favour of being his willing slave. But Satkari, fearing that such a permanent liaison might damage both his reputation and his business prospects, arranged for her to stay with a respectable family. There she was used, handed over to another, sold again and again, and finally dumped in a brothel. Here Satkari had discovered her dead in the room next to the one he himself was occupying the same night. Satkari had performed the last rites — the *mukhagni* — for her, as a husband would have.

The fiancée of Shashi's cousin had fallen in love with Shashi. Shashi was fully aware of his cousin's cruel and perverted nature, but he had refused to listen to the girl's pleas because of a mistaken sense of personal honour and integrity. Tortured by her jealous husband, the girl had finally immolated herself, and Shashi had gone to cremate her.

The story of the girl now being cremated (named simply as “the Girl” in the play) is revealed through tattered pieces of narration

— not scenes in flashback. She, the only child of a poverty-stricken father was married off to an insane scion of a rich family. She never saw her husband, was cooped up in a big house, and was desperate for a little air and light. Finally, she ran away from her in-law's place only to find her father bedridden at home. A local benefactor had helped them with money in exchange of 'favours' extorted from her. Finally, she had committed suicide, because she could not find any meaning in living life any longer. She desperately desired the frenzied horse of love, the 'Pagla Ghora', to play havoc with her life, even if it destroyed her like it did with the lives of the other three. But the frenzied horse had never come her way.

And finally, there comes the story of Kartik the compounder. To the other three he retells his personal story as the story of a cobbler who had loved a young girl, but couldn't even dream of talking to her. The girl had grown up, had been married off, and had returned home when the cobbler had once again seen her ... and there Kartik's story trailed off unfinished.

In the final movement of the play, we see in a flashback "the Girl" coming to Kartik to ask for a dose of lethal poison, and Kartik asking for a week's time to convince her that her life still has possibilities, if only she lives her life through. Actually, he needed time to steel himself for a declaration of love at the age of forty-nine. He had even promised to provide her with the requested dose of poison if he failed to convince her; but the girl was past having faith in such possibilities, and ended her life by hanging herself.

As the flaming pyre finishes its job offstage, Satu, Shashi, and Himadri go out to tidy things up there. Kartik brings out a packet of poison, dilutes it in his drink, and is about to swallow it, when the spirit of the Girl, an invisible witness to all the stories, suddenly realizes that she had, after all, been loved by Kartik, that the frenzied horse had indeed been at her door. She desperately begs Kartik to drag her remains out of the fire so she can feel the frenzied horse stampede her life— but in vain. Kartik cannot hear her ghostly pleas. About to swallow the poison, Kartik suddenly throws it away, wondering, whether it is true that everything is possible if one lives on.

While it is possible to talk at length about the intricate dramaturgy and the verbal texture of the play, there is space here to only point out that the central story of Kartik and the Girl, which occupies the smallest segment of time in the play, is mostly narration, and avoids all the emotionally wrought crises that characterize the other three stories. In effect, it is virtually empty. So one may reasonably ask: where does the dramatic core of the play lie?

What the play finally tells us is that none these stories — not even that of Kartik the compounder — are conclusive in a finite sense. What they indicate instead is that even if life is ultimately about suffering and death, it is better to die sucked into a vortex of passion than to decline ossified, clinging to given sets of conventions and ‘ideals’, refusing life its due. The central enigmatic proposition of the play remains almost a paradox to us — and therein lies its strength. And this, incidentally, may throw some light on the question of why Aristotle differentiated *mythos* from *praxis*: the plot from the action.

Evam Indrajit was not only highly appreciated in spite of its lack of a unified story, but it also inspired generations of playwrights to think differently about dramaturgy, and it made later theatre directors ask questions about the nature of the theatrical experience itself. Reviewing the play from the distance of nearly half a century, one is intrigued less by its achievement than by the question: was the play really as radically nonconformist as it was held to be? Whether it was because Sircar was at that time less mature as a playwright, or because of certain autobiographical strains suspended in the play, or because a good playwright can often unconsciously apprehend the expectations of his audience, the central story-line of *Indrajit* pivots on the theme of love: the perennial weakness (or perhaps the strength) of the Bengali middle-class mindset. The action of the play distracts our attention away from Indrajit’s dissatisfaction with the banality around him and his struggle to rise against it, and towards his unfulfilled love for Manasi, whom he proposes to marry, but who is too convention-bound to accept his proposal. In the end, it seems that Indrajit failed because Manasi did not marry him. In fact, Manasi herself once suggests so.

This issue is deliberately left unsettled, with no clear-cut conclusion drawn: but its emotional effect on the audience is unmistakable. One

should not forget that the play was written at a time when the first generation of youths born in independent India had come of age; when the idea of a 'love-marriage' was a living and vibrant myth which all dreamed of living up to (however few might actually have succeeded), and when the silver screen couple Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen ruled the waves of mass emotion. But from here to *Pagla Ghora* is like an epic quest in search of an non-Aristotelian drama.

A late example of fragmentation exemplified in Bengali theatre would be Manoj Mitra's *Kinu Kaharer Thetar* ('The Theatre of Kinu the Kahaar') — a dramaturgical exegesis in four parts — in which the present reality, historical reality, the life in the theatre, and the world of the dramatic story interact with each other to build up and break down the developing story repeatedly — a life, a reality, and a play set in a world that exists no more, but which backlashes onto our present reality with furious political satire. Though too complicated a play to handle within the span of a short essay, the play appears unique in its construction until one realizes that it actually has a predecessor: *Nayan Kabirer Pala*, Nabhendu Sen's first play, which is arguably his greatest piece of dramatic construction. It cannot really be summarized, but a rough outline may be hazarded here at the risk of watering down its intense theatrical essence.

Kabir and Nayan, two played-out stage veterans now engaged as mere stage hands are waiting at the end of a play for the transport van to load the stage equipments, and to go home. But the van is delayed, and to kill time, they decide to put up a play in front of an imagined audience.

As usual, they search for a story, and when all types of stories fail, they settle for a dream that Nayan had once dreamt — about a strange man coming into his room and claiming to be his father. The man presented such incontrovertible arguments in his favour that Nayan was simply flabbergasted. On the verge of accepting the intruder as his father, Nayan had woken up to find it all a dream.

They improvise on this story, building arguments and probing the concept of identity, with Kabir impersonating Nayan, and Nayan the interloper in his dream. The story develops, is interrupted, is begun anew, and is carried to its dramatic climax to be suddenly dissolved because the dream had ended here. But the two continue improvising an end in which the dream-father and dream-son murder the other in alternate versions of the story, thereby demonstrating their skills in diverse types of formal acting.

However, all their versions of the ending remain undecided as Kabir, in the process of searching the son's dead body, discovers a copy of a letter that Kabir himself had written to his fiancée Manidipa. Furious at this, he kills Nayan with a single blow. Terrified at the thought of the consequences, Kabir breaks down weeping, when Nayan, who was merely 'acting' dead suddenly speaks. Now they are friends again, as they acknowledge that Manidipa had never existed in reality, and that both had been in love with the same *imaginary* woman. In their happiness, they enter into kind of trance. Suddenly the lights fail on the stage. In the semi-darkness, they begin to talk in a strange rhythmical poetry:

- কবির : মণির লেখা যে সব চিঠি আমার কাছে, সেসব কিন্তু
নয়ন : আপনারই লেখা।
কবির : কী আশ্চর্য! কী করে জানলে?
নয়ন : আমার কাছেও মণির অনেক চিঠি আছে কিনা, সেসব আমার নিজেরই লেখা।
কবির : কী আশ্চর্য!
নয়ন : আসলে একটা কথা বলি স্যার, আমাদের এই সবার ভিতরে এক একটা করে নরম সরম মেয়েছেলে আছে।
কবির : মেয়েছেলের মধ্যে তাহলে শক্তপোক্ত পুরুষ মানুষ?
নয়ন : সত্যি, সত্যি, আসলে কিন্তু সেই চিঠি লেখে, মণি তার নাম।
কবির : অথবা রমলা?
নয়ন : ঠিক বলেছেন। যে কোনো নামেই তাকে ডাকা যায়।
কবির : নিদাঘ দুপুরে অথবা রাত্রে কাঁটায় কাঁটায় বারোটা বাজলে কে যেন চ্যাঁচায়
নীলাম! নীলাম! দারুণ শব্দে হাতুড়ি বাজায়, নীলাম! নীলাম!
নয়ন : ভালোবাসা এক, ভালোবাসা দুই, প্রতারণা তারও দ্বিগুণ হাঁকে
কবির : প্রতারণা এক, প্রতারণা দুই . . . কে যেন ডাকে, হাতুড়ি বাজে
নয়ন : কারা সারি সারি দাঁড়িয়ে ডাকছে, মূল্য বাড়ছে দ্বিগুণ, ত্রিগুণ . . .
কবির : নীলাম! নীলাম! নিদাঘ দুপুরে, অথবা রাত্রে, প্রায় প্রতিদিনই . . .
নয়ন : অথচ কিন্তু কী নিলাম হয়, কারা যে কেনে, কিছুই বুঝি না
কবির : শূন্যতা এক, শূন্যতা দুই . . . ডাক বেড়ে চলে, কেউ তো কেনে না ...
নয়ন : শুধু ধর্মনীতে ভীষণ শব্দে হাতুড়ি শুন। আমরা তবে কি নিজেকেই বেচি,
নিজেকে কিনি?
কবির : আমরা তবে কি নিজের মূল্য নিজেরাই গুনি?
দুজনে : আমরা তবে কি নিজেকেই বেচি, নিজেকে কিনি? নিজের মূল্য নিজেরাই
গুনি? আমরা তবে কি কেবলই ফাঁকি?

- Kabir : Those letters from Mani I have, are actually—
Nayan : —Written by you.
Kabir : Strange! How could you know it?
Nayan : I too too have lots of letters from Mani. I have written those myself.
Kabir : How strange!
Nayan : Let me say something, sir, inside every one of us there lives a tender, cuddly girl.
Kabir : Then tough guys too inside the girls?
Nayan : True indeed. In fact it is she who writes the letters. Her name is Mani.
Kabir : Or else Ramala?
Nayan : Right again. You may call her by any name.
Kabir : In the summer noontide or at night, exactly at twelve by the clock, someone shouts: Auction! Auction! With terrible bang he hits the hammer: Auction! Auction!
Nayan : Love One ! Love Two ! Now Perfidy doubles the bid.
Kabir : Perfidy One! Perfidy Two ... Someone bids, the hammer hits.
Nayan : Queued up strangers stand and bid, the price goes up by doubles and triples ...
Kabir : In the summer noontide or at night, nearly everyday.
Nayan : Yet, and But, we know nothing: what is bid for, who are the buyers.
Kabir : Void One! Void Two! The bid goes up, yet no one buys ...
Nayan : Only in the veins we hear the hammer with terrible noise. Do we then only sell ourselves and buy again?
Kabir : Do we ourselves then pay the price for our own selves?
Together: Do we then sell ourselves and buy again? Do we ourselves then pay the price for our own selves? Are we mere deceptions then?

They break out of their trance as the lights suddenly come on, and as they try hastily to finish their play, the transport van arrives. As they break off to load the van, the play remains unfinished.

What strikes one most in all these instances is the dramatist's unspoken acknowledgment that the neatly turned out realistic, logical, single story is inadequate to represent the multi-level reality that theatre ideally embodies. In other words, if a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy was at all formulated here in Bengal, it was not inspired by Brecht's linear treatment

of single stories, but independently by these Bengali playwrights who used alternate versions of a single story, or snatches of several stories, to construct the action of their plays. International influences need not be denied here; but the typical Bengali voice speaks out in the playwrights' concern with interpersonal relationships: in the love theme, for example, from *Evam Indrajit* to *Nayan Kabir Pala*. It is hard to imagine any modern western playwright writing a *Pagla Ghora*, that classic statement of love, life, and death. And as far as the so-called 'V-Effekte', 'estrangement', or 'distanced acting' is concerned, it must be acknowledged that both *Nayan Kabir* and *Kinu Kahaar* are far greater texts in this respect than any Brechtian play by virtue of their saddling together of multiple realities and their constant shifting of the actors from one level of reality to another.

Evidently, without these experiments the last major innovative wave in Bengali theatre known as the 'Third Theatre' movement initiated by Badal Sircar could not have produced successful plays with their typical patchwork of scenes and sequences — which we may safely consider as a more mature version of Badal Sircar's developing non-Aristotelian dramaturgy. It is possible to demonstrate the structural similarities between *Evam Indrajit* and typical Third Theatre plays like *Michhil* and *Bhoma*, but such a demonstration, demanding in-depth analysis and comparison, needs be a subject for a separate discussion. For the present, we may say that the movement away from the proscenium in Bengali theatre had its dramaturgical roots in the proscenium, and that we need not necessarily consider our new wave something entirely imported from the west. It has its roots in the tradition— if such path breaking plays discussed above are accepted part of our theatre tradition now.

The fragmentation of the story-line as a technique was embraced by the dramatists as they came to realize that what happens on the stage is not just a story, but rather a theatrical event with story element/s thrown in merely as an adhesive to secure our attention. *Nayan Kabir* best demonstrates this, as the very process of fragmentation, rather than the story itself, becomes the focus of our theatrical interest. The technique of fragmentation, moreover, has been used to convey several ideas to us: the fragility of man's identity, the rationality of the absurd, the melodramatic nature of realism, and the fictional — in effect fictitious — nature of identity, love and death. One could find many other meanings in the play too if one looks for them, but the power of the play lies in the fact that it never lets us forget that life and theatre are mere games that we play— an idea introduced at the opening of *Nayan Kabir* through Nayan's hesitant request:

নয়ন : স্যার, একটু খেললে হত না?

Nayan: Couldn't we have a bit of play, Sir ?

And the play starts. What better way to make us feel that life and reality are after all games that we play out on a stage which we call the world?

Note: Translations from Bengali texts are by Professor Dattatreya Dutt. I am also indebted to Professor Dutt's exposition of playwriting in his book নাটক এবং নাটক লেখা.

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3. Nayan Kabirer Pala, p. 207.
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2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

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400	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

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165	International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View
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