

Rangamancha and Bengal Theatre

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Abstract: 'Bengal Theatre' is particularly important in the world of Bengali theatre. After the 'National Theatre', Sarat Chandra Ghosh established the 'Bengal Theatre' in Calcutta in 1873. It is a permanent stage. 18 partners are said to have paid thousands of rupees. An advisory committee was formed including Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Madhusudan Dutta, Umesh Chandra Dutta. The lead actors included Biharilal Chattopadhyay, Priyanath Bose, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Haridas Das and others. On the advice of Madhusudan, actresses named Shyama, Jagatarini, Elokeshi, Sukumari Dutta were engaged in Bengal theatre. This theater was inaugurated on 16 August 1873 with Madhusudan's play 'Sharmishtha'. Later Madhusudan's 'Mayakanan', 'Krishnakumari' play, Ramnarayan Tarka's 'Ratnavali' play were performed. Some of Bankimchandra's novels were dramatized here. Saratchandra Ghosh entered the stage on a horse in the role of Jagat Singh in the play 'Durgeshanandini' and entertained the audience. 'Bengal Theatre' performed a one-night 'Meghnadvadh' for women only. Instead of just Saturday, the theater arranged performances three days a week on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Binodini joined the Bengal Theater in 1876. She became known as the 'Flower of the Native Theater' by playing the role of 'Ayesha' in the play 'Durgeshanandini'. Biharilal Chattopadhyay gave the best performance of his life in the role of Bhishma in the play 'Bhishmer Sarasja'. For almost 30 years, the 'Bengal Theatre' continued to act through various ups and downs. The decline of this theater started around 1894 AD. In the world of Bengali theatre, this theater has given new plays to the audience. 'Bengal Theatre' is still remembered for its uniqueness in the Bengali stage.

Keynote: Bengal Theatre, Advisory Committee, Sharmishtha, Mayakanan, Ratnavali, Meghnadvadh, Sarasja, Ups and Down

After the establishment of the National Theatre, Sarat Chandra Ghosh established a permanent stage in Calcutta at a cost of more than 5 thousand rupees in front of the house of the famous rich man Satubabu No. 9. It is known as 'Bengal Theatre' in the history of theatre. It is a permanent theater in Kolkata. This theater was modeled after Lewis's 'Lyceum' theater in Calcutta at that time. The walls of this theater were mud. Platforms are made of mud with cement plaster. Later

tin walls and roofs were constructed of corrugated tin.

From the advertisement in Madhyastha newspaper (12/02/1873) it is known that 18 partners established the stage by paying one thousand rupees each. Saratchandra Ghosh was the chief. Madhusudan Dutt and Umesh Chandra Dutt were the main consultants in establishing the theatre. An advisory committee comprising Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Umeshchandra Dutta, Madhusudan Dutta etc. was formed for the proper management of the theatre. However, on the advice of Madhusudan, following the opinion of others, Vidyasagar resigned from the management committee focusing on the recruitment of theater actresses.

Saratchandra Ghosh was the founder and director of the theatre. He is the son-in-law of Satubabu. Parimohan Roy was the unpaid editor. The main actors here were Biharilal Chattopadhyay, Haridas Das, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Devendranath Mitra, Umesh Chandra Banerjee, Priyanath Basu, Akshay Kumar Majumdar. and Saratchandra Ghosh himself. The four actresses who were hired on Madhusudan's advice were Shyama, Jagattarini, Elokeshi and Golap, who was known as Sukumari Dutta.

On the advice of Madhusudan, he wrote the play 'Mayakanan' to be performed in Bengal Theatre, as promised to recruit actresses. The theater was supposed to be inaugurated with this play. But Madhusudan Dutta wanted to refine the play once again, but due to his death before that, instead of Mayakanan, on 16 August 1873, Madhusudan's play 'Sharmishtha' opened the doors of this theater. Ticket sales are donated to help the needy sons and daughters of Madhusudan. Although the performance of the play 'Sharmishtha' was not much appreciated, the contemporary society did not look favorably on the combination of the highly educated boys of the noble families and the ignorant forbidden village actresses on the stage. There was a mixed reaction to this in the society. Notable in this drama are Saratchandra as Yayati, Biharilal as Shukracharya, Elokeshi and Jagattarini as Devyani and Devika respectively. However, it is not known who played the role of Sharmistha on the first night.

In 1873 AD, after the play 'Sharmishtha' was performed twice in a row, Madhusudan's 'Mayakanan' was performed here. However, the performance of this drama did not arouse much response in the minds of the audience. At that time, Lakshinarayan Das wrote a play called 'Mohanter Aei Ki Kaj' on the subject of the social upheaval that was going on about the relationship between Mohant of Tarakeshwar and Elokeshi. The popularity of Bengal Theater started to grow with the performance here on 6 September 1873. Biharilal Chatterjee's performance as Mohant was highly appreciated. The success of Bengal Theater started from here. 1874 A.D. Ramnarayan Tarkaratner's successive performances in Bengal theatre 'Chakshudan', 'Ratnavali' drama and Madhusudan's 'Krishna Kumari' drama. The Maharaja of Burdwan was delighted to see the performance of the dramatists of the Bengal Theater and in December 1874 he became the patron of the Bengal Theatre. On this occasion, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel 'Durgeshanandini' was staged on December 12. It was very successful. The notable event of this performance is the entry of Saratchandra Ghosh on the horse's back in the role of Jagat Singh.

Also, plays like 'Kapalkundala', 'Puruvikram' by Jyotirindranath, 'Banger Sukhabasan' , by Harlal Ray, 'Surendra Binodini'by Upendanath Das etc. were performed with success.

The notable news of 1875 AD is that Amritlal Basu, Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay, Kiranchandra Bandyopadhyay, Yadumani, Kadambini etc. left the Great National and formed a new troupe and acted together with Bengal Theater for a few days. The dramatization of 'Meghnadbadh Kabyo' was performed. Dramatized by Girishchandra Ghosh. It was here that Girishchandra first used the broken Amtrakshara rhyme. Both Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sureshchandra Mitra composed the play 'Guikoar' and Bengal Theater again performed with success.

As early as 1876, the Bengal Theater started building a new home. As a result, acting stopped for some time. The infamous 'Theatrical Control Act' of 1876 regulated the free development of theater and the right to act. Due to which the historical and patriotic drama is stopped. Binodini joined the Bengal Theater this year. It was during this time that they staged a one-night play 'Meghnadbadh Kabya' for a female audience only.

In 1877 AD, Bengal Theater arranged performances on three days i.e. Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday instead of one day i.e. Saturday. Bankimchandra's plays 'Mrinalini' and 'Durgeshanandini' were performed consecutively during this time. 'Mrinalini' was performed only for women. Impressed by Binodini's performance in the role of 'Ayesha', English newspapers hailed her as 'Signora', the 'Flower of the Native Theatre'.

In 1878 AD, old plays and two new plays were performed in Bengal Theatre. Baralat Liton and his wife were present during the play 'Shakuntala'. This is the first time that a high-ranking person from the British government appeared on the Bengali stage after the Acts of Control of Acts.

On October 8, 1880 AD, when Saratchandra Ghosh, the progenitor of Bengal Theatre, died, Biharilal Chattopadhyay, the director of the theater and drama teacher of Bengal Theatre, took over the management of the theatre. From here the second phase of Bengal Theater begins.

1881 to 1890 AD is the second phase or founding phase of Bengal Theatre. However, during this period, there were hardly any significant performances of such new dramas. Amritlal Bose joined the Bengal Theater in 1882 AD. His farce 'Dismiss' and play 'Harishchandra' became popular.

'Brajlila' was staged in 1883 AD. In 1884 AD, Rajakrishna Ray's 'Pralhadcharit' was performed which created a response in the acting world. A large audience watched this play. The reason for the immense popularity of this play is the effective performance of the role of Pralhad and the impeccable performance of Kusumkumari in the title role. Biharilal's performance as Bhishma in the play 'Bhishmer Sharashayya' is the best achievement of his life.

On January 7, 1890, Bengal Theater received the title of 'Royal' by acting a few selected scenes from the play 'Shakuntala' at the 'Swayam Samity' held at Garer Math in Calcutta for the reception of Prince Albert Victor, Prince of England. From January 11, the name became 'Royal Bengal Theatre'.

The Third Phase of Bengal Theater from 1890 to 1901 AD. By this time the name Royal Bengal Theater was established. But in this episode of theater Acting fame gradually faded. In most cases, old plays were reenacted. In 1894, Mahendralal Bose, Kusumkumari, Pramadasundari and others joined the Bengal Theatre. They continued to act as dramatizations of Bankim's novels. Finally, on April 20, 1901, Biharilal, the second progenitor of Bengal Theatre, died. On April 21, 1901, a social play called 'Nihar' and 'Dawai' a social design were performed. This is the last performance in Bengal Theatre. Eventually the Bengal Theater was closed down.

For almost 30 years, Bengal Theater continued its performance with glory through various ups and downs. Bengal Theater under the leadership of Saratchandra Ghosh in the first part and Biharilal Chattopadhyay in the second part has left a bright mark in the history of Bengali Natyavinaya.

However, it is necessary to discuss the reasons for its degradation in the field of acting. From around 1894 AD, Bengal Theater performance started to decline. At this time, the new play of the new playwright was not performed on the stage. Replays have occurred in most cases. As a result, the performance of the theater could not fully awaken the audience. Some of the main reasons for this decline in theater are Biharilal's dramatic talent and acting skills waned as he grew older.

Secondly, the variety of acting that can be seen in theaters like 'Star', 'Minerva', 'Classic' etc. established at the same time was being noticed in Bengal Theatre. As a result, the competition fell behind a lot.

Thirdly, regular performances in these theaters were becoming almost impossible as first-rate artists defected to the attractions of other theatres.

Fourth: Disputes and lawsuits started between the theater authorities and Saratchandra's widow.

The importance of Bengal Theater in Bengali theater cannot be denied. Firstly, the first independent permanent theaters and theaters in the case of Bengali common Rangalayas started from the Bengal Theatre, which influenced later theatres.

Secondly, the theater is credited with hiring the first actress on the stage, which served as an inspiration for later theatres.

Thirdly, through the dramatization of various novels of Bankim, this theater made Bankim's identity more known to the general public. Although Bankimchandra's novel was widely read.

Fourthly, Bengal Theater was the first long lasting theatre. Because this theater lasted for 28 years from 1873 AD to 1901 AD.

Fifth: Apart from Biharilal Chattopadhyay, Bengal Theater could not give any famous actor, but this theater gave some best actresses like Sukumari Dutta, Vinodini etc

Sixthly: Those who were hired as actresses were all from a special class of society. Later this ideal was followed, and women of that class found a new way of living depending on this theatre.

Seventh: For the entertainment of the audience, this Bengal Theater continued to play reality in its ultimate form which was evident in the case of the play 'Durgeshanandini'. So it can be said that creating a stage and maintaining that stage for 28 long years is no small thing. Bengal Theater

is one such theater in Bengali theater that made the impossible possible. Over the years, a theater has faced many hurdles in progressing this way, ignoring them and gifting the audience with many new experiences drama. Due to lack of suitable management and various problems, the Bengal Theater also closed naturally.

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