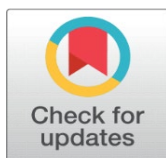
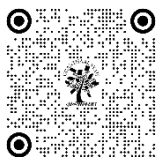


THE FORMATION OF BENGALI THEATRE PRODUCTION ON UTPAL DUTTA'S BENGALI DRAMA 'TINER TALWAR'/'টিনের তলোয়ার'('THE SWORD MADE OF TIN')

Dr. Antara Chowdhury ¹✉

¹Assistant Professor of Bengali Department



Corresponding Author

Dr. Antara Chowdhury,
chowantara@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i3.2024.4844](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i3.2024.4844)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The relationship between the director and the actor and actress in the theater, the relationship between the production and the performance of the play, the relationship between the audience outside the theater, the relationship between the theater and contemporary reality and specific politics - Utpal Dutta has advanced in the analysis of the existence of theater in the play 'Tiner Talwar' by taking these four relationships into account. Innovation had to be brought to the stage concept because the play 'Tiner Talwar' is a play within a play. There are seven scenes in this play. The first and sixth scenes are on the streets of Kolkata and the remaining five scenes are the rehearsals and stage performances of the play. We, the viewers or readers or listeners of 'Tiner Talwar', are fortunate enough to see three plays in the play. Just as we can learn how a theater group of the 19th century presented the play on stage, we can also learn what the audience was like at the time of writing. Again, this play was composed in the seventies of the 20th century. The social life of Bengal at that time was turbulent in the waves of the Naxalbari movement. Like in the 19th century, the native rulers of 1971 also wanted to suppress the rebellious nature of drama. Play writer Utpal Dutta paved the way for the creation of Bengali theatre in his play 'Tiner Talwar', written on the centenary of 'Sadharan Rangalayo'.

Keywords: Theater, Opera, Prostitute, Actor, Bet, Tin Sword, Dialogue, Song, Country

1. INTRODUCTION

On 9 April 1972 [first staged on 12 August 1971 at the Academy of Fine Arts], on the occasion of the centenary of the Bengali General Theatre, the play 'Tiner Talwar' written by Utpal Dutta was staged at Rabindra Sadan, produced by 'People's Little Theatre'. The play narrates the story of 1876. The promotional brochure of the play stated, 'Those who waved the tin sword in front of the mouths of the British beasts and gave the hearts of the oppressed people a rebel statue' [Dutta; 2000, p – 5] The play highlights their words. The position of the theatre is identified with the reality of 19th century Calcutta in various ways. Based on historical sources, the play shows the coexistence of 'Hutomi Bhasha' and the colloquial language of the city streets, the cultural revolution of the 'Young Bengal' educated at Hindu College and its failure, the implementation of the Theatre Control Ordinance of 1876, besides the Great National Theatre,

Ardhendu Shekhar, Sukumari Dutta, Upen Das and other historical characters, along with the roles of fictional character Benimadhav, Bashundhara, Maina, Priyanath and the acting of the plays 'Mayur Vahan' and 'Titumir', etc. The character of historical reality is acquired in the proximity and association with historical names and events. And to highlight all this, Utpal Dutta shows most of the play in the rehearsal room. However, not only the powerful foreign rulers of history, but also the domestic rulers of the time of writing of the play, i.e. in 1971, wanted to promote the rebellious character of the play. In fact, he wants to show the Politics of Theater, and in doing so, he has exposed a history that was previously unseen to us.

In the first scene of the play, Benimadhav alias Captain Babu tells a sweeper that he is going to see their upcoming play. Although the dialogue is quite humorous, it contains a jab at society. Benimadhav is trying to build a bridge. But to Mathur, it is useless, nothing more than playing a child with a tin sword. This man from under of Kolkata gets caught in the bluff of the popular play. Here Benimadhav finds Moyna singing in D-sharp. In the first scene, the playwright creates the exposition of the play by describing the context of the play of that time.

On 6 October 1935, 'Bidyasundar' was performed at Nabin Basu's house in Shyambazar. According to history, this was the first stage attempt at Bengali drama by a Bengali initiative. And until the National Theatre was established in 1872, the general public did not have the right to watch the dramas performed in the Babus' (wealthy and spoiled man of Bengal at 19th Century) building. When Benimadhav was putting up posters in the background of 1876, the price of a Second-Class ticket was 1/-, which was much more than that time. Although the drama was literally for the general public, it was not in reality. Even when the scavenger in the name of Mathur showed no interest in that drama, Ramlila and Baiji's Kham were better for him. Instead of making 'boyish' with tin swords, he challenged them to write stories about people like them, "Can you leave Yuvraj and cast a character like me? Oh, doing of this will the reason of fallen from the higher caste of Brambhin."

The second scene shows the rehearsal room of The Great Bengal Opera. Here, the characters of the play 'Tiner Talwar' are rehearsing for the play 'Mayurbahan'. That is, the characters of 'Tiner Talwar' are the actors of the play Mayurbahan. On the other hand, the actor who is staging the play 'Tinner Talwar' has to act as a character and an actor at the same time. In the third scene, when Moyna is going to act as Anuradha in front of the female lustful audience, she is the actor of the play 'Mayurbahan' but due to the vulgarization of the audience, she returns to the back stage as Moyna. In this way, Utpal Dutta shows us through Moyna how actors are made - Their inner conflict and their dreams. Although they are members of the same group, Benimadhav wants to become the owner of the play, Kamini wants to become the lead actress, and Bashundhara, who was educated by Ardhendusekhar, lives with the pride of old memories. Together, they all dream of their theatre group reaching the peak of popularity. This group is joined by playwright Priyanath, who dresses like a 'Babu' but hates the 'Babu' community. He left home in protest of his father's chaotic life. Now his dream is to lead the Bengali nation to the freedom movement through Reformation, and for that he has made his writing a tool. At the same time, the playwright talks about so many people who are alive through theatre. These people sometimes become characters in the plays Mayurvahan, sometimes 'Sadhbar Ekadashi' and sometimes 'Titumir'. Incidentally, we have to talk about Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet'. Hamlet acts out the murder of his father. Here too, it is a play within a play. But when Hamlet acts out the murder of his father, he remains Hamlet, that is, a character, not an actor. This acting is connected to the reality of Hamlet. This is what Shakespeare wanted to show. On the other hand, the characters in the play 'Tiner Talwar' sometimes become actors in the 'Mayurvahan' and sometimes 'Sadhbar Ekadashi' plays and do not remain characters. Although the acting in the roles of Anuradha and Kanchan is important in the transformation of Moyna into Shankari, it is not like in the play 'Hamlet'.

Western plays, which are proscenium theaters, do not have an active role for the audience. There is no relationship between the play performed on a three-sided enclosed stage and the audience. This level difference does not exist in oriental plays, where the stage is open on all sides, and sometimes the audience also has an active role. There is drama in the play 'Tiner Talwar'. There is the philosophy of the play 'Mayurbahan', and we who are watching the play 'Mayurbahan' in 'Tiner Talwar' are also there. In other words, the level of the stage and the audience can be said to be complex here. When the play 'Mayurbahan' is performed, the audience does not identify with it. They see the actresses as prostitutes. This means that the play fails to reach the audience. And none of us who are watching the play 'Mayurbahan' through 'Tiner Talwar' are able to identify with that audience. The playwright did this intentionally. But the audience has created a connection with the play 'Sadhbar Ekadashi'. So Birkrishna Dan is asking to close the play. And the audience of 'Tiner Talwar' can gradually understand the change in the position of the audience. In the last scene of the play 'Titumir', the audience becomes united. The audience of the play 'Tiner Talwar' also merged on that point.

In the final scene, Benimadhav is drunk on stage; the social structure has suppressed his voice before this scene. Benimadhav asks everyone to accept the situation outside, but he cannot do so from within. That is clear in his inner conflict. He cannot deny the protesting Priyanath. The dialogue of the play 'Titumir' 'enters his blood'. He first responds to the excitement of Virakrishna by breaking the curtain of the stage and the audience, and then responds to the excitement of the 'Saheb' i.e. British audience. Benimadhav has to 'take a step forward', that is, to speak out against such exploiters with courage. To speak out against them, 'Today's Play' written by Priyanath, 'Titumir' begins. Benimadhav says - "Harmad..Bandit... As long as our country is oppressed, no one has rest. I am talking like the Garrick of Bengal...". The character of Nimchand helped us to recognize the first-class exploiter, Benimadhav's personal experience gave us the courage to stand up against the exploiter, and Titumir's character gave us the language of struggle - Nimchand, Benimadhav, and Titumir have merged into one. This change in Benimadhav awakened the spirit of struggle in everyone at The Great Bengal Opera. Titumir's plays continued to be performed on stage. The dialogues of Titumir's plays caused applause and cheers in the theater. The audience also united. When Benimadhav knocked butcher like British ruler to the ground with a blow from a tin sword, it was understood that this blow had actually upset Lambert Saheb. The audience sang from the seats. The division of stage, actor, and audience disappeared at the end of this play. And at the end of the play, "The actors, despising Lambert's bloodshot eyes, shook the theater with their collective song." The audience of Titumir's play and the audience of Tiner Talwar's play merge at this point.

Utpal Dutta has brought drama into the play 'Tiner Talwar'. In the final scene, we get to know the fighting power of the play which can ignite the fire of revolution. This transition was possible in the play 'Bangla' in the seventies of the twentieth century. To silence their voices, the Drama Control Act was introduced in 1876. When this play was staged in the 'Bangla Rangalaya' Centenary in 1972, the situation of the nineteenth century somehow merged with the situation. Bengal was in turmoil during the Naxalbari movement in the seventies of the twentieth century. The government wanted to suppress everyone's right to free expression. Keeping all these perspectives in mind, the playwright has drawn the final scene with efficiency. Therefore, in discussing the final scene of the play, both the time depicted in the play and the period of its composition are relevant. And today, in the twenty-first century, we who are the readers, listeners or viewers of the play are overwhelmed by the dramatic quality of the final scene of the play.

Utpal Dutta brilliantly presents the problem of creating Bengali dramas in the context of the events in the play we are discussing. Another problem in the 19th century was who would be the actress in the play. In the patriarchal society, women from any decent family did not get the opportunity to act in plays. Therefore, boys played the roles of women. When the 'Bagbazar Amateur Theatre' was established in 1867, Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafi played both female and male roles there. In those days, prostitutes from Kolkata came forward to fill the shortage of actresses. Bengali drama has been enriched by their contribution. Many artists like Binodini and Sukumari Dutta are mentioned. Although Moyna was not a prostitute, she was a farmer's daughter. After becoming a refugee due to famine, she came to Kolkata and sold potato of Baidyabaty and eggplant of Hasnan in 'Chatubabu's market. Benimadhav suddenly heard her singing on early morning and chose her as the future actress of his group. Then, the drama education of the Great Bengal Opera master, drama teacher, like the god Vishwakarma Benimadhav began with her. This is also added to the history - "What kind of puppets did those who created theater in this country make; and how did the puppets made by their hands talk, walk and turn on the stage, and delight the audience." [Binodini, Tiner Talwar, p.-6] Maina did not come to the play just to give historical clues. She gradually transformed into a character. Maina became a Shankari, she began to hate poverty. But when this color of nobility broke and the terrible reality came to her, she could not return to her old life. She was bound by the structure of capitalism and started shouting - "Now you have made such a decent woman, Babu, she has no other way but prostitution."

Priyanath is a representative of Young Bengal. He is educated in both Eastern and Western education. He acted in the 'Saint Susi Theatre' established in 1839. This student of Hindu College is an aficionado of Derozio - "My Fallen Country! One Kind Wish from the". He wants to take the countrymen on the path of this Swadeshiism shown by Derozio. For that, he wants reformation. But their image in Bengal was not very good. Which we get to know in Benimadhav's sarcasm- "Tassel-shaped cap on the head, pineapple patties, petti, silk handkerchief, garyachen around the neck, father's big business, stealing food from aunt's house, listening to Jorasanko's Thakurbari, and the chatter at Sen's house." However, the playwright did not develop Priyanath in this way, Priyanath admits that he is not a 'babu'. He left home after being disrespected by his father's 'babuyani' (unethical activity of wealthy rich man of 19th Century). Such a rebellious character Priyanath was able to make his words enter everyone's blood.

Another crop of the 19th century is the 'Babu' community, their fathers and grandfathers once earned a huge amount of money. So, without earning money, they go to the 'barangana' i.e. prostitute and engage in bullfighting. Most of them are 'Mudsuddis' who follow the footsteps of the British. Their lives are depicted in various Bengali farces such as 'Sadhabar Ekadashi', 'BiyePagla Buro', 'Ekei Ki boleSabhyata', 'Buro Salik'er Ghanre Ro' etc. In 'Tiner Talwar', their representative character, Birkrishna Da, is a man with strong business acumen, who wants to buy 'literary knowledge' with the power of money. He becomes the owner of the 'Rangalaya' i.e. theatre hall to earn money and keep the actress as prostitute for luxury. So in the end, he buys Maina.

At that time, who came to see the play was also important. Even though those who sat in Reserved Seats (charge of the seat - 4/-) and First Class (charge of the seat - 2/-) seats had a lot of money, they came to see the actresses, not the play. To them, actresses are nothing more than prostitutes. So with the popularity of Moyna, a line of babus followed her. But in the meantime, there were also viewers who came only to see the play. Those who sat in the back rows - "Only the four rows in front were the drunkards. Behind the people, the audience, our gods. They clapped." (Scene 3)

The path of evolution of Bengali drama is revealed in 'Tiner Talwar'. How did Bengali drama reach from the play 'Mayurvahan' to the play 'Titumir'? This is the story of the growth of the power of their tin sword. At first, the tin sword was only a tool to portray the world of kings and queens (which does not exist in reality). The drama gradually started to set foot on the ground of reality. In 'Sadhabar Ekadashi', the words of Nimchand reached the heads of Babus like Birkrishna Dan. Then the struggle spirit came to the drama, plays like 'Sarat Sarojini' (1875), Surendra Binodini (1875) etc. lit the fire of rebellion. In 'Tiner Talwar', the play of 'Titumir' is also a symbol of that struggle spirit. They declared revolution with 'Unmukta Tarbari' i.e. open sword for protest. In this case, the observation of the communist playwright enriched the drama further. He brought a rebel who is neglected as a tribal in mainstream history. Through Titumir's declaration of rebellion, the fire of revolution was ignited in the minds of the entire audience. Therefore, 'Tiner Talwar' can also be read as an alternative text of the nationalist movement.

Nationalism refers to a nation's sense of pride in its own nation and the determination to protect that nation at all costs - because of this nationality, the entire Rajput nation tried to resist the Mughal Empire. But the meaning of modern nationalism is somewhat different. The concept of Nation or country is associated with it. We have learned all these concepts through Western education. So, when Priyanath wanted to express the words of the subjugated country in English or his anger in Amritbazar Patrika, it is understood that the language to express this feeling or anger in Bengali language was not yet developed. According to history, Siraj-ud-Daulah was a patriot; he resisted the British with all his might to protect Bengal. His defeat is an important event in the political history of Bengal and India, but the common people did not care much about it. For them, it was as natural as a change of ruler. So it cannot be said that the Indians started to grieve for the subjugation with the victory of the British. From the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis (1796), every person in Bengal was almost directly acquainted with the exploitative policies of foreign rulers. Then, from the beginning of the 19th century, a group of people educated in Western education emerged. People like Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Madhusudan Dutta, Bhudev Mukherjee and others imagined one country, one nation, some through social reforms, some through literature, some through essay writing. 'Reformation' is needed to awaken the sense of nationalism among the nation that is today plagued by the shame of subjugation. This is what Priyanath, a devotee of Derozio, the great figure of Young Bengal, also wanted to say, "I thought I would draw you into the light of the Reformation. I thought I would initiate you into the mantra of India's independence." (Second scene) These words are inextricably linked with the mainstream nationalism of history. But then Priyanath's words come to a point that can be called an alternative reading of history. Priyanath's anger "... But how can I show those who don't want to see? Why can the creatures of darkness tolerate light?" (Scene 2) Or "My fallen country! One kind wish from it! This poem was written by Derozio. Fifty years have passed since then, and one has awakened." Again, are these reform-mongers also above criticism? Tasseled hats, pineapple-shaped scarves, petti-silk handkerchiefs, hair chains around their necks, fathers' big businesses, stealing food from aunts' houses, listening to the old man's house in Jorasanko, and hanging out at the senate's house are the daily activities of the "gentlemen's babus", their "pockets full of money, yet their souls cry for the poor." Also, in the song of Jadu ("What a strange wave...") and the song of 'Jalanta Drishti Yuvak' ("All the country-loving babus are in their heads..."), the poor and the speechless babus have been separated. These revivalists never talk about the poor. They talk about darkness under the light but criticize the light.

In addition to highlighting the milestones of nationalism that we know, Utpal Dutta has seen them in a different light. The play 'Tiner Talwar' contains the context of three plays - 'Mayurvahan', 'Sadhabar Ekadashi', and 'Titumir'.

In the play 'Mayurvahan', an unreal world is presented with the combination of kings, queens, ghosts. The play becomes a symbol of class politics. All such symbols are used in the play that are different from everyday life. Utpal Dutta's special plan is also at work behind making the play Mayurvahan unreal in this way. He has tried to explain the path from 'Mayurvahan' to 'Titumir' in the Bengali play in a clearer way. 'Sadhavar Ekadashi' is Nimchand educated in Western education. He understands the corruption and incoherence of society, he attacks them with satire, but he cannot protest strongly until the end. Nimchand's helplessness in the net of the nineteenth century capitalism is a natural consequence. Therefore, 'Sadhavar Ekadashi' is held as a history of a burning truth. The torch of truth that touches Birkrishna's feet. The same kind of mind that Western education had developed in Nimchand was needed to fight against the British. So Titumir started from where Nimchand left off.

The author of the play 'Titumir', Priyanath, is a 'no-babu' even in his western clothes. According to him, "As long as my country is in ruins, no one has a moment's relief or rest. If the blood of a Bengali farmer is shed on the roads of Calcutta, it is my blood. Any rebel sepoy killed on the outskirts of the distant city of Delhi is my crushed chest." (Chapter 6) Historically, Priyanath's awakening by 1876 may not be true, but this awakened Priyanath is the playwright's desired truth. For the so-called Calcutta-based intellectuals of the 19th century, the years 1855 (Santal Rebellion) and 1857 (Sepoy Mutiny) are neglected, for them the Battle of Palasi in 1757 is much more glorious. But Priyanath moves from the Battle of Palasi to the narrative of 'Titumir'. This is an example of a paradigm shift in the emphasis of Indian history writing. Instead of Ruler transfer, here comes the resistance of subaltern. The imagination of a greater India, where the people of the lower classes of Calcutta, the so-called or imposed tribes, the farmers, the workers all have a unified position - this truth is acknowledged by Priyanath, Benimadhav and others.

Titumir says "Bountiful field of crops is the face of Bengal " but Titumir of history has not seen the political geography of the nation called Bengal. In this case, it can be said that Western education has given us the idea of a nation and based on this idea, we have reached resistance. Homeland and mother are again being equated here keeping in mind the imagination of the 19th century geography. In the play 'Titumir', Bashundhara says "They are bandits, pirates, they have come to plunder. They will destroy the chastity of women and leave behind the golden India and go back to their country on glorious war ship." Various theorists have said that in 19th century the idea of defeated golden India, our homeland and its reformation was made as the female identity of a raped India that is being created by sitting in the same row with the chastity of women.

2. CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be said that in the play 'Tiner Talwar', resistance is built using tin swords as a tool. Here, the history of 1876 is highlighted when the British, who wielded immense power, were afraid of the tin swordsmen and were introducing the Theatre Control Act. When the communist playwright Utpal Dutta highlighted the issue in 1972, we get a new interpretation of history. Therefore, the play begins with the sweeper Mathur ("The man from the bottom of Kolkata...") and ends with Titumir (the leader of the temporary rebellion of the tribes in the so-called nationalist history). Utpal Dutta has redrawn the map of our nationalist movement. Therefore, 'Tiner Talwar' can be called an alternative reading of the nationalist movement in India in a sense. And to highlight these things, the playwright has chosen the rehearsal room of play, where construction work is organized. Therefore, he has chosen this as the setting for reconstructing history. The materials used in the play come to another level. That is why the sword becomes an element of the protesting character in the play. Utpal Dutta has symbolized the immense power of the tin sword through the naming. At the same time, he describes the way of Bengali drama to reach all section of people. Therefore, the tin sword that is shown as element of boyish in the first scene becomes a symbol of rebellion in the last scene. The naming 'tin sword' is significant from all aspects.

3. REFERENCES

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 'The First War of Indian Independence; Moscow, 1968, pp. 31-34 - This is the Bengali translation of Utpal Dutta -

"The British have destroyed (Hindu civilization) - broken up the rural communities, uprooted the native handicrafts, and demolished all things which were great and advanced in the native society. There is nothing special in the history of their rule in India except this destruction.... The British ruling classes' enthusiasm for the progress of India has hitherto been sudden and rare. The aristocracy wanted to demoralize the country, the capitalists wanted to oppress it, and the factory owners wanted to sell goods

at low prices and in the country. But now the wheel has turned. The British factory owners have realized that it is in their own interests to make India a productive country, and that for this reason irrigation and communication systems need to be built in India.... I know that the English factory owners want to build railways in India only to collect cotton and other raw materials at low cost. Intentionally.... Has the bourgeoisie ever done more than this? Have they ever achieved any social progress without dragging individuals and nations through the way of blood and pain and humiliation?"

With that, Karl Marx's correct and profound conclusion:

"The Indians will not get any benefit from these new social elements... until the Hindus gather strength and throw off the British yoke." [Pramod Sengupta; 1960; Nilbidroh and Bengali Society; Kolkata.]

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar says about Titumir's rebellion, "But the masses must be understood to comprise Muslim only, and though the fury of the Wahabis was directed against the Indigo factories and the salt Agency at Bagundi managed by English man, the communal character of the movement cannot be denied in view of the outrages against the Hindu religion." (History of the Freedom Movement in India, vol-1, 1971, p-121)

Utpal Dutta said in his article 'Drishya Sajja', - Just as the symbols of painting come through painting; the hints of theatre will also be strong theatrical gestures. Making a bare tree a symbol of war is a method of painting; showing the wings of a vulture in a flash can be a method of cinema; the main words of the song 'Pavan Chalat Shannan' can be clarified in a gamak tune. Just as over use of a painted scene or a flat or revolving stage have been stopped, then the scenery of theatre will also speak with its own theatrical hints.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Aparesh Chandra Mudhopadhyay, 1972 (Song), Rangalaya Trish Bhashar', Kolkata
Aparba De (Editor); 2007; Tiner Talwar Ispater Talwar; Bengali Literature Parliament; Kolkata – 700009
Utpal Dutta, 1994, Girish-Manas; M. C. Sarkar & Sons Private Limited; Kolkata – 73
Utpal Dutta, Baishakh 1407 Bangabdo (2000); Tiner Talwar; Jatiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata – 700009
Shamik Bandyopadhyay (ed.); 2004; 'Utpal Dutta – Prose Collection' – Natyachinta (Part One); De'z Publishing; Kolkata – 700073
Pramod Sengupta; 1960; Nilbidroh and Bengali Society; Kolkata.