



Irene Parvin Lopa



Yusuf Hasan Arko



Masum Reza

playwrights is an asset for the nation today, and I think that it is a decent number. While talking about good stories, I feel that we lack in presenting a good story to the audience in a new style. For example, Selim Al Deen's scripts were always written in a different style. He had his individuality in his writings, and that is what we lack today. In Bangladesh, with the way we are making theatre plays, I think that there is no hope for outstanding work. We need at least twenty people working behind the scene to make a stage play outstanding. Just because we lack dedicated and a sufficient number of people working for dramas, we are not improving. When we experience a structural change in the theatre scene, we will get better. Further, we also need to evaluate what kind of stories the audience wants to see."

YUSUF HASAN ARKO

Stage play director and Professor, Department of Drama & Dramatics, Jahangirnagar University
"To be well known, a person needs time, and I think that one decade is not enough for one to do so. To reach the calibre of Selim Al Deen or Masum Reza, one needs ample amount of time and

dedication. However, one decade is enough time for a person to make a stand. From 1971 to 2010, besides Selim Al Deen, we got other legendary playwrights, like Abdullah Al Mamun, Mamunur Rashid, Momtazuddin Ahmed and Syed Shamsul Haq. In the past forty years, if we had only these few names running the theatre scene strongly, then the names that came in the last ten years are not inadequate. So, to summarise, in the last decade, we have seen eight to ten playwrights among which three to four dramatists made a name for themselves. I am hopeful and I believe that those playwrights who rose to fame in the last decade is sufficient. Even from the directorial angle, we had some outstanding works. I agree that we are going through a difficult phase right now, but that doesn't mean artists are not writing good works. So, I do not want to demotivate those who are still writing and are passionate about it by saying that we are not seeing any great work."

IRENE PARVIN LOPA

Stage play director
"There are many good playwrights; we only get to know them when we see their works on stage. I

believe that in the next decade, we will have many more dramatists who are trying to make a name through constantly writing stories. In the last decade, we have had many dramatists. However, nobody could maintain their continuation in their writing style, which happened because they were not able to set a proper vision. Even though people from the field of theatre do not give the required time for a production, the only way a theatre play comes to life is with rehearsals. And their hard-work deserves praise. Moreover, I believe that if dramatics students could give more time, we would have more outstanding works. However, in the midst of all the adversity, we did have outstanding works in the last ten years, and I dream that maybe one day, Dhaka will become a cultural hub. I believe that the young generation will work for this dream, and my request to the readers is to support theatre."

SUDIP CHAKRABORTY

Teacher at the Department of Theatre, Dhaka University and stage play director
"Nowadays, we are not finding any new playwright or dramatist whose works have been

remarkably noteworthy. After our liberation, stories written by Masum Bhai and Mannan Hira Bhai were based on the Bangladesh they saw. Today, Bangladesh has changed both politically and socially, and the lack of bringing forth the essence of current times in the scripts is what is making us lose the depth of a story. We live in the 21st century where everything is changing rapidly. With all the changes occurring in political, cultural and development sectors, it is hard for a person to focus on one direction for their work. We have no hope for outstanding work in theatre until the government, our educational system and society understands the significance of art and culture in Bangladesh. However, I request the readers to have faith in the young generation, and my request to the youth is that they explore. They should not be stuck to only one form of art, but discover themselves in other cultural arenas. I request everyone to not follow the conventional boundary of academics and theatre, but go out and practise different art forms."

SAMSI ARA SAIKA

Stage play director and theatre actor
"In Bangladesh, we have around four hundred theatre troupes, but sadly, for those troupes, we only have around twelve playwrights, and I do not think that it is sufficient enough. Due to this crisis, people are making dramas based on novels. There are also many playwrights who only write for their own theatre troupes. We are somehow chained to this system, and that is the main reason for the decline of theatre. Now, people are busy doing many different things and get entertainment from many different platforms. So, from the little amount of time people give to theatre, we cannot expect outstanding work. But, I ask for the youths to get involved in not only theatre work, but other cultural activities to enrich our art forms."

MOHSINA AKHTER

Stage play director and theatre actor
"Regarding art movements, I do not believe that a writer should follow one single style of writing to create a story. Presently, I have seen many different styles of work. Why aren't we giving the same chance to those dramatists who have something new to offer in the way we receive international theatre works? I feel that we should be more liberal and support the young writers with their individuality. However, it is not necessary that everyone will appreciate all the works of a person. It is inspiring to receive criticism; it motivates one to do better. I feel that theatre is important for a nation's cultural enrichment. We should try to bring audiences by making different kind of works. I do feel that people have time to watch theatre plays, so we need to reach out to them. Aside from that, we should also respect everyone working in this field and help one another nurture our skills."

Joana Nomrata Mazumder



Past decade of THEATRE

COVER STORY

Looking back to a decade of Bangladeshi theatre (2009-2019), Rafi Hossain sat down for a special discussion with a pool of talented thespians: Masum Reza, Mohammad Ali Haider, Yusuf Hasan Arko, Irene Parvin Lopa, Sudip Chakraborty, Samsi Ara Saika and Mohsina Akhter. In the discussion, they talked about the past, present and future of theatre.

MASUM REZA

Playwright, television drama and stage play director

"I am conflicted on whether or not we lack playwrights in Bangladesh. We have three categories of dramatists today: pure, filtered and unfiltered. Pure are the ones whose only focus is plays. Filtered playwrights are those who also act in stage plays aside from writing plays. Finally, unfiltered dramatists write, act and produce their plays. I feel that we lack dedicated playwrights who have gained recognition just as dramatists. For instance, eminent personalities like Selim Al Deen, Momtazuddin Ahmed and Abdullah Al Mamun are known as playwrights first. Based on this scenario, in the last decade, Bangladeshi theatre did earn many young playwrights, but we still lack people who are focused in only writing dramas. I won't say outstanding plays are not being made, but when we say outstanding, we need a standard to compare it with, and I feel that we have not seen any remarkable play during the recent times to actually set the bar high. Back then, Dhaka

Theatre presented its audience with the outstanding play, *Kirtankhola*. The decline of the troupe came when artists like Afzal Hossain, Suborna Mustafa and Humayun Faridi, among others went on to do television. I also blame the education system for young students not being able to give time to theatre as academic pressures are a barrier to students who opt for doing theatre. It is only possible to bring an outstanding drama on stage when a group of artists dedicate a month or more to rehearse for a play. We are all looking forward to see the change in the theatre scene of Bangladesh, while we should be finding ways to make a difference and bring forth the positive change."

MOHAMMAD ALI HAIDER

Stage play director

"We do have artists who write regularly, like Masum Bhai, Ruma Modok and Shahman Moishan. Recently, I like the works of Muktonil. There was once a time when Abdullah Al Mamun and Mamunur Rashid were the playwrights who ran the theatre powerhouse in Bangladesh. Comparatively, having a pool of ten good



Mohsina Akter



Mohammad Ali Haider



Samsi Ara Saika



Sudip Chakraborty