Popular Theater: Social Awareness through Entertainment

THE BRAC University Drama and Theater Forum (BUDTF) recently organized a workshop on 'Popular Theater' in Shangkarpur Village, Pabna. BUDTF has been, so far, one of the most active clubs of BU that has already staged five productions in different places and has tried to come up with innovative ideas to keep the club active. This winter, the plan was to go to a village to watch 'popular theater' of Bangladesh and observe, what makes this popular theater 'popular'.





What struck the students at the first place about the theater is that there was no written script for the plays. Folk literature and culture have always been carried on orally; but it was amazing to know that they still continue to be so. The popular theater BUDTF visited, falls under the Social Development Program of BRAC and is one of the most effective wings of it. BRAC has 400 teams to perform these social drama in 400 thanas, which try to solve the social problems that rise in a particular area.

All the dramas are based on true stories of the locality. Research is done to find out the most burning problem there and then investigation is done to find out a proper story. People are interviewed and observed to make characters out of them. Specified information is taken to build the whole drama.

Visiting the place where the play was to be staged and meeting the performers was a different experience all together. The way they welcomed the guests, with extreme enthusiasm and exceptional hospitality, the BUDTF members remained spell bound. The people that perform are so prepared and confident, that their talent and determination surprised the students. They were setting up the stage, getting dressed for the roles and talking to the visitors at the same time. What makes their job easier and harder at the same time in this case is the fact that they use minimum ingredients while performing.

Speaking to the members of the group called "Shandhani Gononatok Dol", who were to perform, was another wonderful experience. Their simplicity and naivety reflects not only in their speeches, but also in their performances. They discussed with the students, what their motivations and passions are. They act to make a difference in the society. They work to reform their society by giving them proper information about how to lead a good life.

While the performers were getting ready to perform, there were songs going on in the stage. The people, who were already dressed up, sang. Some of them played different instruments wonderfully, and they are not even professional music players. It only showed, how they love what they do and how to find pleasure in whatever we do.

A speaker then took over the stage and introduced the drama- "Bhoyonkor Nesha" (Scary Addiction, so to say) and the motive of it. Then he left leaving the stage to the actors, who began the play with a group song. They also introduced their message through a broader frame, in the song, before narrowing it down to the play.

By the end of the drama, the BUDTF members became speechless. They were feeling very lucky to have watched such a treat for the eyes and the mind that they couldn't express in words, how they were feeling. They expressed their feelings saying that it motivated them highly and this whole trip has been one of their best experiences in life. The people, the art, the messages, everything influenced them so much that they want to recreate the play in their own campus, or want to bring those people here to perform. All of them had to confess that it has been a pleasure to be a part of the spectators.

The reactions of the students led to their incorporation of the art in their own dramas. They found out that the core elements of a successful drama are team spirit, addressing the target audience, having a message to establish and natural performances through observations. If all these can be merged into a drama, it is bound to become a pleasure to watch and a mode of proper education on life. Thus the rural people showed this modern and effective way of civilization to the urban youths.