Portraying a Visionary

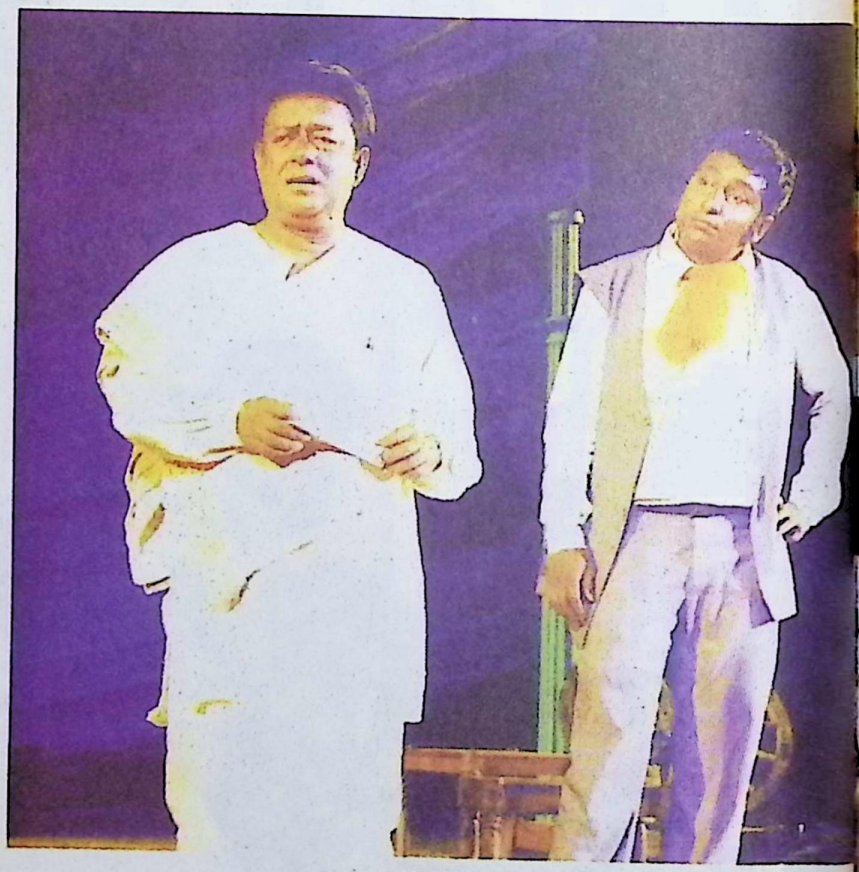
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Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's contribution to encourage women's education and remarriage of widows has been brought under the spotlight in Aranyak Natya Dal's latest production titled *Ebong Vidyasagar.* Mannan Heera's play features Vidyasagar (1820-1891) as a social reformer in terms of his raising voice against many ills stifling social developments such as the practice of polygyny and oppression of women in the 19th century when women were treated as commodities in conservative Indian society.

Through interactions with historical and imaginary characters in *Ebong Vidyasagar,* the latter's fragmented biography has been presented. In fact, besides his contribution to women empowerment, the legendary Sanskrit pundit is considered to be one of the greatest intellectuals of his age. In his hands, Bangla prose style took a new turn. According to the critics, Vidyasagar inaugurated a new era for Bangla prose literature.

Undoubtedly, it is really difficult to portray the biography of a historical character artistically in a theatre production. Mannan Heera's play *Ebong Vidyasagar* is no exception. He has basically illustrated some historical facts in the life of the legend such as his initiatives to setup a dozens of schools, several of which were for girls in Hughli, Burdwan, Midnapore and Nadia.

But the problem is that the Vidyasagar character has been developed as a humanist not as a reformist. Because of weak dialogue, diction and poor construction, Vidyasagar has been presented as a noble soul who arranges marriage for the widows and protests the practice of polygyny. But the way the protagonist's character has been developed, it can never be labeled as that of a social reformist. Many scenes appear abruptly and the major drawback of Heera's play is that Vidyasagar seems to be a frustrated man in a conservative society, at least at the end of the play. But Vidyasagar is regarded as the greatest man of the century for his fight against the darkness of the society. After his death many great poets and writers including Rabindranath Tagore wrote obituaries and features applauding his deeds and achievements.



Mamunur Rashid as the protagonist in the play

