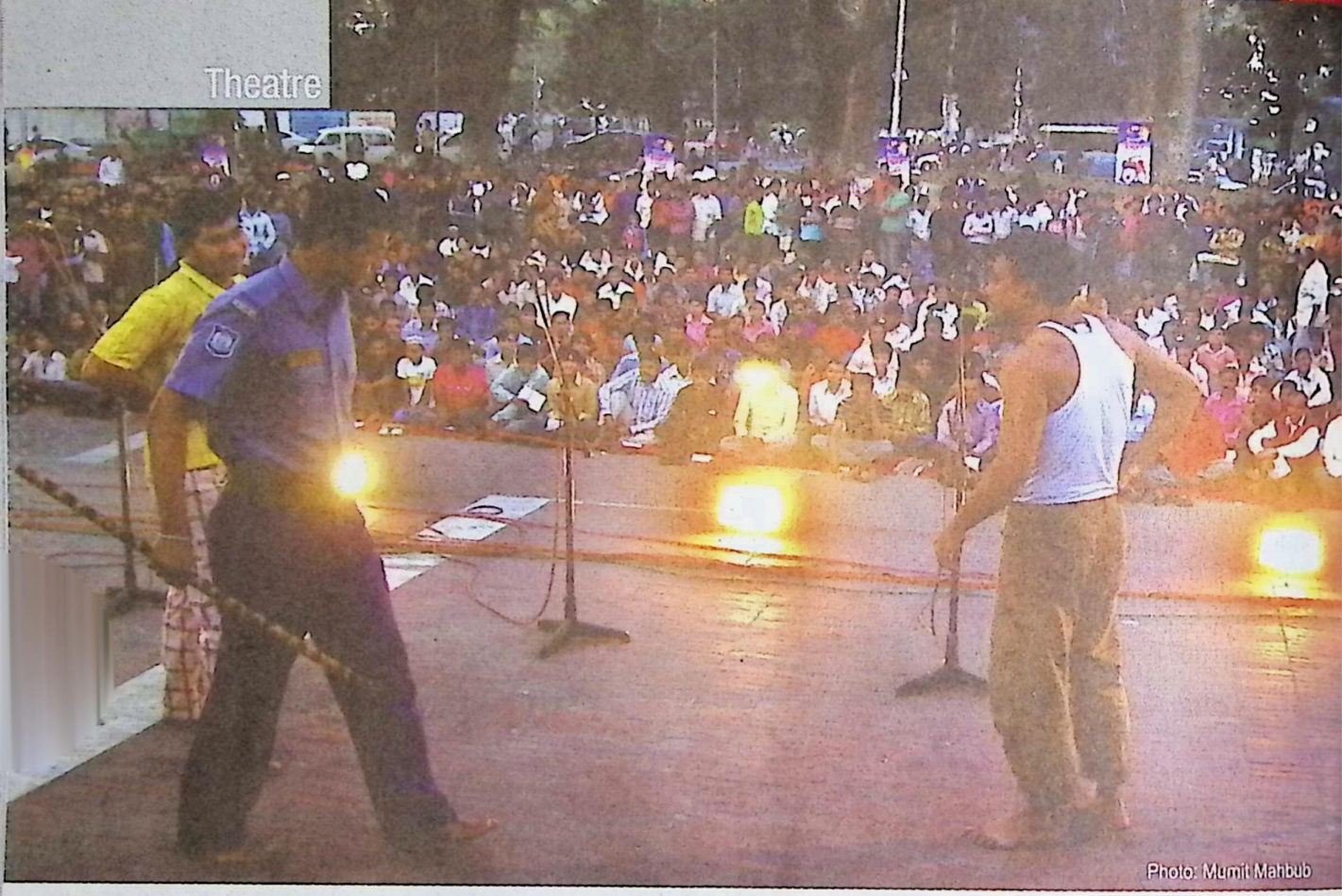


Photo: Mumit Mahbub

# Protest through Theatre

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The history of patha natok (street theatre) and political movement are interwoven in Bangladesh. Since the late 1960s cultural activists generated awareness amongst the masses through patha natok, a small piece of performance that present messages explicitly. Patha natok played important role in the historical political movements in 1969, 1971, late 1970s and 1980s growing awareness amongst the people about their rights as well as making them conscious about the ongoing socio-political crisis.

In the late 1960s renowned cultural activists like Kamal Lohani, Syed Hasan Imam and many others under the banner of Bikkhubdho Shilpi Samaj, used to perform patha natok as part of the cultural programmes usually arranged to generate the spirit of nationalism and patriotism during the Pakistani rule.

Even during the Liberation War in 1971, patha natok had been performed regularly in the Freedom Fighters' camps. Along with other cultural events, such plays used to be performed in the Freedom Fighters' camps to cheer up the Freedom Fighters as well as to strengthen their confidence in the battlefield. Biplobi Bangladesh, directed by Khairul Bashar, was one of such patha natok that was used perform regularly in the camps of sector nine. The four- character street theatre performance featured the courageous masses who revolted against the military and their ultimate success.

After the Liberation War, Jay Din Falguno Jay was the first street theatre performed in Chittagong. And street theatre performances played a remarkable role during the rule of military dictatorship even after the Liberation. Most of the leading theatre personalities in the country, who started the momentum of neo-theatre movement in 1970s, used to present street theatre performances featuring ongoing political turmoil. Those performances had such massive impact on the audience that the military dictators harassed the theatre practitioners.

For performing in Char Katrar Documentary, written by Selim Al Deen, all of the members of Dhaka Theatre were arrested by police. Director of the play Nasiruddin Yousuff says, "It was 1978. We were planning to stage the patha natok on Dhaka University Campus. The police officer told us not to perform the play, however, we were determined to perform. At one stage, they told us to get into the police van. Later, we were released."

Not only Dhaka Theatre, but also other troupes such as Aranyak Natya Dal, Theatre, Natyachaklra, Padatik Natya