

# MUSICAL VERSUS DANCE-DRAMA

WHAT'S  
IN THE  
THEATER  
**ABDUS SELIM**



More than once I have written in this column that Bangla theatre lacks musicals though we have a reasonably long tradition of dance-drama introduced by Rabindranath Thakur. As Wiki defines it, 'Musical theatre is a form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogues, acting and dance,' while dance-drama, as defined by Merriam Webster, is a 'Drama conveyed by dance movements sometimes accompanied by dialogue.' Rabindranath happens to be the pioneer in composing dance-drama for our stage—which is popularly known to us as Nritya Natya. Although he often included dance in many of his plays, in the real sense of the term he wrote only three dance-dramas of tremendous aesthetic value: Chitrangada, Chandalika, and Shayama. Rabindra Nritya Natya is much of a dance performance than spoken dialogues or narratives where expressive dancing dominates albeit many modern-day performing gurus take the liberty of infusing Odissi, Kathak and Kuchipud in his dance-dramas.

So what makes musical drama different from dance-drama or vice-versa? In musicals we find songs, spoken dialogues and acting and dancing. In contrast, in Nritya Natya (dance-drama) the prime accompaniment in the performance is dance movements, and occasionally dialogues. So, in the first the plot or storyline is unfolded through four performing devices—songs, spoken dialogues, acting and dancing—but in the latter narration entirely depends on

dance, and rarely on dialogues. This comparison of mine does in no way mean that I am trying to undermine one of them—it is in fact intended to find out the differences between those two genres, if there are any. Frankly, on several occasions I have sought to figure out the aesthetic differences between the two and to my utter confusion I have become aware that there exist disagreements regarding the matter among the persons au fait with performing arts in our country. However, my personal belief is, there are considerable differences between musical and dance-drama, and that particular belief of mine has impelled me to draw the conclusion that the concept of musical theatre is somehow remains disused in our performing genres.

We in Bangladesh have a very fertile folktale tradition, a folklore genre that typically consists of a story passed down

from generation to generation orally, and it includes ballads, fairy tales, myths, legends, traditional song and dance, folk plays, jatra, seasonal events and child-lore. So it encompasses a wide range of narrative performances dominating songs and dances. Perhaps one particular performing genre closely links with musical is jatra, where we find songs, spoken dialogues, acting and dancing combine.

Recently Nagorik Nattyanon compiled a folktale, Gahor Badshah and Banesa Pori, for the stage and they have had several successful performances so far. The story is collected from our folk tradition and transformed into a musical by Hridi Huq — I say musical because it has almost all the requisites of a musical that I discussed above—songs, dialogues, acting and dancing. The storyline is more like jatra but it has a covertly non-linear narrative in the

sense that there exists—as is the tradition with such folk stories—a lot of departures and treatments of magic realism. The most striking components the play contains are, songs, sets and props fittingly accompanied by lights. Using loud colours in all of them, in keeping with the disposition of the folk narrative, the director—once again it is Hridi Huq — has displayed her refined understanding of the aesthetics. The other approving count of the work happens to be synchronization of a huge cast. My experience of plays with huge casts is so far very disappointing—I have seen most of the times such plays wither away within no time mainly because of lack of harmonization, both on the stage and outside. Though I do not know how many shows Gahor Badshah and Banesa Pori has done so far, the group is going steady with their performance until now, and I am sure it has the inbuilt potential to carry on a long way.

Going back to my basic premise that we in Bangladesh have a big vacuity of musical theatre I wish to give a supporting welcome to the Nagorik Nattyanon for their genuine as well as efficacious effort in initiating the practice of musical theatre in this country.

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LIFE'S  
LYRICS  
**NASHID KAMAL**

## Italy beckons Bangladeshis

Ten years' back my two daughters and I took a vacation to Venice, Italy. I was the only earning member, both girls were students. I found them planning about what to eat and which restaurants to frequent. I warned them, 'Ma, we shall have budget meals like burgers and pizza slices from corner stores but one evening will be an evening of celebrations. You can choose your restaurant'.

Lovely as they are, my two daughters followed their Mom's dictate, we took the water boats, getting off here, walking there, and enjoying the ambience of Venice. We looked at the special Murano pieces on display and had to satisfy ourselves with window shopping, as the credit card did not have much to its credit. We saved all our funds for the grand meal. We took the ride on the gondolas and on the last day arrived at a very fancy Italian restaurant. My daughters had researched the menu, they had looked at other restaurants and recommendations, read reviews and finally we were set on this particular one. All their favourite dishes, including prawns were ordered and we had a wonderful time chatting and unwinding. The head waiter brought us the bill and we had paid the fancy bill, when he humbly asked, 'Are you from India?'

I said, 'No, we are from Bangladesh'.

'Oh Bangladesh! We have never had any

clients from Bangladesh! You will be happy to know that our chef, who made all your dishes, is from Bangladesh.' We said, ok to that and were about to leave. The head waiter made an apologetic face and said, 'Can you wait one moment the chef wants to meet you because this is the first time any Bangladeshi client has had food here'.

Of course, we waited; the young man came and met us. He had been working in Italy for more than six years and had trained in Italian cooking etc.

I had been writing academic articles on Bangladeshi migrants to Italy, I knew about the huge population that has migrated, the legalization received in 1994 which has resulted in a great exodus of Bangladeshis from other parts of Europe, especially Germany.

Now in 2018, again ten years later, my daughters and I decided to have a family outing in Florence, Italy. More for me, because I have been dying to see the famous David by Michelangelo housed in the Galleria dell' Academia. This time, both daughters are working and I am the sole dependent. They are carrying mobile phones, with the google maps and directing me everywhere. After reaching Florence on the evening of the tenth of December, our first destination was the food court. It was freezing as we walked past shops on

two sides. Vendors selling their wares, mostly cheap leather bags, shoes and other touristic items situated on two sides of the road. With my ears all covered up in a heavy woolen cap, I heard the sound of Barisal dialect chatter. One of the salesmen shouted to another about the price of something. Another man was speaking loudly on his mobile, most probably to someone in Bangladesh. It took me back to my Purana Paltan days, where I lived during my childhood in Dhaka. As I walked around my house, it took me five minutes to reach Jinnah Avenue (now Bangabandhu Av.). Men had their wares on two sides of the footpath, people were viewing objects with an intention to buy or just haggle and in the midst of that the vendors, sellers were chatting amongst themselves. I felt the same way, I looked at my daughters, 'Ma where have you brought me, is this Baitul Mukarram market?' 'Oh Mummy', says my younger one, 'everything interesting you always go back to your Purana Paltan days'. The thought flickered in my mind; I thought of my Dad, he always spoke of Cooch Bihar where he grew up in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. Life must be the same for everyone, always going in circles, always going back to your childhood associations, it made me so nostalgic. Seeing

my Bangladeshi brothers selling wares and speaking in Bangla, I could not help myself, defying the cold, I spoke to them at length.

When I went to the piazza of Michelangelo, I was buying things by conversing in Bangla, same near the Duomo and I found out a paratha /bhaji shop in Rome where we stopped one night. One of my friends remarked in facebook, 'Did you have to go to Rome to have paratha-bhaji?' It isn't that! I had spoken to the brothers; they are doing much better than before. They were selling roses earlier and frequenting the sea beaches selling ear rings and toffees. They had looked dissipated! Now there was a smile on their faces, I asked someone in Florence, 'So how are you doing?' The young man replied back, 'Oh we are doing well, we have families here and also our parents'. My happiness knew no bounds, only a year ago I had read an article, 'Bangladeshi flower seller saves woman from 25 man gang rape attempts in Italy'. ([http://www.dhakatribune.com/19 October 2017](http://www.dhakatribune.com/19%20October%202017)). The place was Florence and the name of the lady was Guarnotta who twittered 'Thank You to this world for there is people like Hossein, who help without wanting anything in return'.

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