

THEATRE THERAPY IN PRISON

Final Report

2 years Project of Senior Fellowship

1st January 2016 to 31st December 2017

From

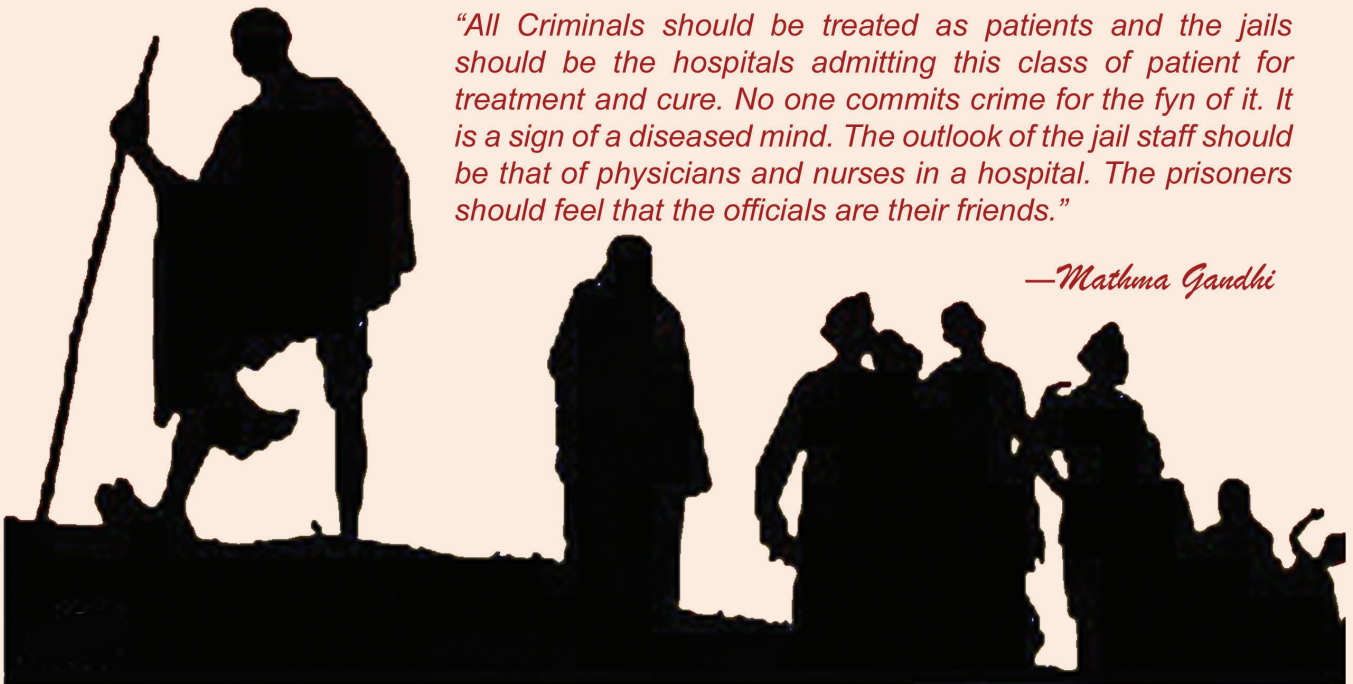
PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

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“All Criminals should be treated as patients and the jails should be the hospitals admitting this class of patient for treatment and cure. No one commits crime for the fun of it. It is a sign of a diseased mind. The outlook of the jail staff should be that of physicians and nurses in a hospital. The prisoners should feel that the officials are their friends.”

—Mahatma Gandhi



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GREEN ROOM

THURSDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2005

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Date of Birth

9th July, 1953

Educational Qualification

B.Sc. M.A. (Drama) from Rabindra Bharati University
wonted National Scholarship in the year 1982-1985,
Senior Fellowship on Theatre for the Period of
1st January 2016 to 31st December 2017 given
by CCRT Department of Culture Govt. of India.
Theatre Founder director and Guru of
Berhampore Repertory Theatre

My Teacher's

Kumar Roy, Amar Ghosh, Rabi Chattopadhyay,
Rudraprasad Sengupta, Monoj Mitra
(all from Rabindra Bharati University)
Utpal Dutta, Khaled Chowdhury, Kanaihalal. Anuradha Kapoor,
Bijaya Mehta, Suresh Dutta
Rozer Simon, Anita Khanzadian, John Martin, Peter Brook
10 full length plays and 6 short plays and 10 plays for
children (Published in Bengali Theatre Journal of West Bengal)

As a Playwright

As a Director

40 Plays directed in last 48 Years
(4 plays woned best Production of the year 1988, 1990,
1998 & 2006 given by Paschimbanga Natya Akademy,
Govt. of West Bengal)

Attached Theatre Therapy in Prison for the last 12 years
at Berhampore Central Correctional Home (Jail)
Govt. of West Bengal and Directed three Plays

'Tasher Desh, Tota Kahini, &
Jakshyapuri' (Rakta Karabi) by Tagore.

As an Actor

Acted near about 45 to 50 Plays.

The memorable charectors were Socrates, Arturo Ui, etc.
Acted in Television serial regularly from the year 1994.

Acted in 58 Fiture Films including a foreign Film
namely Shadows of Time. Aced in 12 Tele Films.

As Organizer

Organised several Theatre Workshop with Nandikar,
National School of Drama (Delhi), Max Muller Bhavan,
Children Theatre Workshop with local Schools, Orphan Boys,
Theatre Therapy in Prison, Govt of West Bengal.

Organised sevaral seminars on Theatre,
Organised National Theatre Festival from 1983 on words.

As Documentry Film maker

Two documentary films (Diaha & Prisoner's Dayout)



Pradip
Bhattacharya



Rabindra Nath Tagore's Play

রক্তাক্ষরী

Yakshyapuri (RAKTAKARABI)

Design & Direction : Pradip Bhattacharya

Synopsis of the play :

Land refugees, have turned into labourers of gold mine of Yakshpuri. The way to get rid of such agony of life is the main theme of the play.

Their main job is to dig up only number, nameless, identityless number. They have to live a rigid and restricted life in Yakshpuri. Village chiefs and village leaders rush angrily with ruling sticks in their hands to the spot if a little undisciplined. There is a preacher who is there to preach. Originally they are the main rulers in this Yakshpur.

The labourers sang the sad songs to express the grief. In the meantime Nandini appears before them as an embodiment of freedom of love before the life of the labourers who are now accustomed to slavery, accustomed to the humiliation in their mechanical life. The labourers leap in joy to get encouragement by Nandini's Lover Ranjan. They become inspired by the song of Bisupagol.

Unfortunately young Ranjan is lashed to death by the angry village leader. The 'King' of Yakshapuri comes out to be the partner of Nandini. The revolt of the labourers spread throughout Yakshapuri by the revolutionary Nandini. At last Humanity wins.

Director's Note :

When the expression of the life to the illiterate rural prisoners behind the bars echoes the play Jakshapuri, jest then is it possible to give directions of the picture of the prisons through Tagore's play Yakshapuri. In is humanity. human feeling, and full of loving care that helps prison to give way to correctional home.

YAKSHYAPURI (Raktakarabi)

Playwright :

Rabindra Nath Tagore

Design & Direction :

Pradip Bhattacharya

Asst. : Tuhin Kanti Dey

Light : Sroban Saha

Music Execution :

Premankur Bhattacharya



বহরমপুর কেন্দ্রীয় সংশোধনাগার



বহরমপুর রিপোর্টারী থিয়েটার

নিবেদন

বহরমপুরী নাট্যোৎসবে

২রা মে, ২০১৪

আকাদেমি অফ ফাইন আর্টস

সম্মান ৬-৩০মি.

নাটক :

রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর

নির্দেশনা :

প্রদীপ ভট্টাচার্য

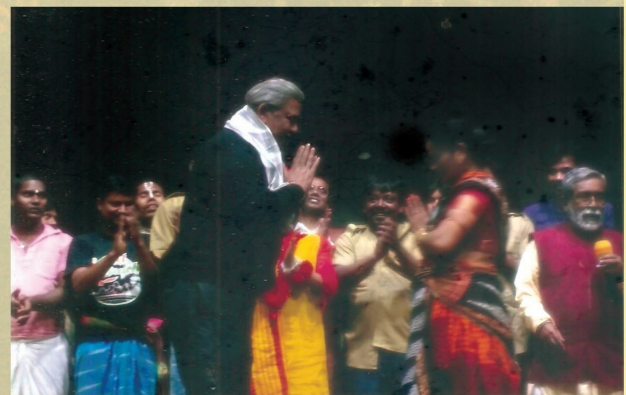


Cast

Sardar	Sudarshan Bera / Nitai Saha
Bishu Pagol	Buddhadev Mete
Adhyapak	Uttam Das
Fagulal	Nakul Nandi
Gokul	Bidhan Das/Nripan Halder
Kishor	Nimai Halder/Sariful Sk.
Morol	Subodh Mandal
Paloan	Kashinath Mal/Azad Sk.
Prahari	Subodh Das
Prahari	Abhai Mandal
Ranjan /Jharudar	Tapas Das

Gosai	Swaminath Roy
Workers	Maharaj Pramanik
Workers	Shariful Sk.
Workers	Dilip Sk.
Workers	Firdosh Alam
Workers	Rajesh Das
Workers	Sabu Sk.
Nandini - 1	Helama Bibi
Nandini - 2	Runa Bibi
Nandini-3/Workers Wife	Uma Dey / Tultuli Bibi
Chandra	Sabita Burman/Chandana Mandal
Raja	Tuhin Kanti Dey / Shyamal Das

Duration : 1 Hr. 30 Mins.



SHOW INFORMATION : "JAKSHYAPURI (RAKTAKARABI)"

1.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	DICO-Murshidabad, Govt. of West Bengal	10.05.2013
2.	G.T.I. School, Berhampore	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	11.08.2013
3.	Rabindrasadan Kolkata	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	07.12.2013
4.	Rabindrasadan Kolkata	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	07.03.2014
5.	Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata	Bhahurupee Kolkata, Festival	02.05.2014
6.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	04.01.2015
7.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	04.01.2016
8.	Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	11.09.2016
9.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	01.01.2017
10.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	Murshidabad Zila Parishad	15.04.2017



Rabindra Nath Tagore's Play

TOTA KAHINI

Script : Amar Ghosh

Design & Direction : Pradip Bhattacharya

ততা কাহিনী

Why "TOTA KAHINI" ?

The basic tenets of education according to Tagore, are freedom and restraint. Education is the means by which different people with different strengths are able to grow their full potential. he felt that a certain amount of restraint existed in every aspect of life. be it in giving vent to our freedom. Our joy. Our thoughts. Without a sense of balance, a certain self discipline, things become discordant. But one had to have the freedom of choice. That was the keynote of proper education.

In today's education the system is a set format. Teachers are happy to follow established specifications. Education is confined to the learning of texts. You are not free to think beyond.

We began a workshop based on these very thoughts. Through the use of musical therapy, movements, improvisations and so on. This brought about a bonding in the team. We thought them songs. Rehearsals began. The restless souls in the jails which have now become correctional home, caught behind bars, were eager to fly. 'Tata Kahini' talks of a bird which danced and sang freely, not bound by anything. On the king's orders it was caught and put into a cage. The bird was to be 'taught'. Caught in a cage of rules and regulations with forced learning. Tota stopped singing and dancing, and slowly faded away. The king was gleeful about the enforcement of education, but Tota's free spirit was broken. It died. With it died nature and Civilization.

West Bengal's Prisons are now called correctional homes, where the focus has shifted from being centers of punishment to being the loci of 'correction'. That is, places where prison inmates would be helped to rectify or 'correct' the aberration which caused them to commit crimes in the first place. One of our most successful methods for the achievement of this correction has been the Culture Therapy Programme, which through the use of art, dance, music, poetry and theatre, has brought about unimaginable psychological and physiological uplift in our inmates. And public performances of these programmes are helping impart the inmates with a sense of dignity apart from sensitizing the community about the so far neglected prisons and prisoners.

If we were to sum up in one sentence the effect that Culture Therapy has had on our inmates, it would be to say that it has led them on a journey from the pit of darkness and ignorance to the pinnacle of light and knowledge. The phenomenal success of our other productions under the Culture Therapy Programme encourage us to come up with this production by the prisoners.

Director's Note :

When I was asked to put up a new play, I wondered what to do. Our 'Taser Desh' had got much appreciation, but since our jail inmates are not professional actors, the task produce a full-fledged play is not that easy. We decided to present a short story of Tagore's 'Tota Kahini'.

TOTA KAHINI

Story : Rabindra Nath Tagore

Design & Direction :

Pradip Bhattacharya

Asst. : Tuhin Kanti Dey

Credits

Music : Anirudha Singha

Light : Sroban Saha

Mask : Pradip Bhattacharjee

Costume : Lalmuddin Mia

Props : Bablu Sarma



Cast

Raja	Sudarshan Bera
Maternal nephew (Bhagne)	Tarit Kundu
Minister	Uttam Das
Dadu (Grandfather)	Budhydeb Mete
Tota	Runa Bibi
Tree	Rupsona Khatun
Leaf	Halema Bibi
Flower	Archana Mondal
Scholar (No.1)	Gopal Murmu
Scholar (No.II)	Subhas Bholla

Chorus:

Dipak Mondal, Anath Maghi, Asish Chowdhury, Nrepen Halder, Atul Mahali, Anil Mondal, Nakul Nandi, Basudave Kunai, D. Ram Munda, Biswajit Roy, Bhadu Baski, Chandana Mondal, Tultuli Bibi.

Duration 1 Hr. 30 Mins.



SHOW INFORMATION : "TOTAKAHINI"

1.	Presidency Correctional Home	Govt. of West Bengal	10.08.2010
2.	Kalkata Acadimy of FineArts	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	11.08.2010
3.	Durgapore C.T.Centar	Govt. of West Bengal	13.08.2010
4.	Durgapore S.C.Home	Govt. of West Bengal	14.08.2010
5.	Berhampore Rabindrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	21.01.2011
6.	Kolkata Acadimy of FineArts	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	05.02.2011
7.	Kolkata Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	12.03.2011
8.	Berhampore Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	08.05.2012
9.	Berhampore Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	01.01.2013
10.	Soltlek Sabala Mela	Govt. of West Bengal	22.02.2013
11.	Berhampor G.T.I.School	Berhampore Repertory Theatre Festival	10.08.2013
12.	Kolkata Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	07.12.2013
13.	Soltlek Sabala Mela	Govt. of West Bengal	15.12.2013
14.	Berhampore Rabiadrasadan	DICO-Murshidabad, Govt. of West Bengal	04.02.2014
15.	Berhampor G.T.I.School	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	17.11.2014
16.	Berhampore Rabiadrasadan	Yugagni-Berhampore, Festival	04.07.2015
17.	Lalbagh Kath Gola Bagan	Tourism Festival-Murshidabad	24.11.2016



Rabindra Nath Tagore's Play

TASER DESH

Design & Direction : Pradip Bhattacharya

Synopsis of the play :

The tiny fledgling nesting inside the bird's eggit too has, I can see , Wings.. if only the possibility of wings ...if only the potential for flight. This potential is screaming out for expression. For fulfilment. Not until the little fledgling breaks out of its shell and spreads its wings in the vast blue sky, can this potential find expression.

Similarly, the possibilities latent in man and, of course woman, yearn for expression. , where I see that seeds of potential, I see the source of infinite expression. And from this need for expression is the self... to break out of the shell and take flights... towards.the.infinite.

but breaking free and talking flights is not about escaping.... No freedom is not abandoning your home and fleeing. It is about opening the doors and windows and letting the light in. And then..... looking at all that is around you in this light, anew is the true meaning of enlightenment.

--Rabindranath Tagore

তাসার দেশ

TASER DESH

Drama : **Rabindra Nath Tagore**

Design & Direction : **Pradip Bhattacharya**

Asst. : Tuhin Kanti Dey



Teacher in the Work-shop

Partha Banerjee (NSD)

Anirudhya Mukherjee

Sandip Bhattacharya (NSD)

Saktipada Dalui

Credits

Music : Pandit Dipak Chowdhury

Mask : Sudip Gupta, Pradip Bhattacharya

Costume & Light : Sandip Bhattacharya (NSD)

Asstt. Director : Tuhinkanti Dey

Stage : Aniruddha Mukherjee

Light Execution : Sroban Saha

Sound : Partha saha



Cast

Raja	Swarnendu Chowdhury
Dhahala	Mohit Biswas
Golam	Sudarshan Bera
	Raghunath Mondal
Ruitan	Chanchal Mondal
Chakka	Gopal Murmu
Panja	Ananda Bagdi
Rajputra	Buddhadev Mete
Sawadagarputra	Tarit Kundu
Rani	Chandana Mondal
	Chandana Khan
Iskabani	Runa Bibi
Cheretani	Tultuli Bibi
Haratani	Halema Bibi
Tekkani	Rupsana Khatun
Dhalani	Archana Mondal



On Ranpa Gurdy & Cards :

Chandam Hazra, Dhulu Sekh , Kanu Burman
Babu Roy, Sabul Sekh , Ehesan Ali, Netai Halder
Rabi Sarkar , Subodh Let, Ananda Shil, Deam Munda

Duration 1 Hr. 30 Mins.



SHOW INFORMATION : "TASHER DESH"

1.	Berhampore Central Correctional Home	Govt. of West Bengal	26.11.2006
2.	Kalkata Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	17.05.2006
3.	Presidency C.Home	Govt. of West Bengal	18.05.2006
4.	Alipore C.C Home	Govt. of West Bengal	19.05.2006
5.	Berhampore Rabiadrasadan	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	05.08.2007
6.	Balurghat Satyajit Moncha	Berhampore Repertory Theatre	03.10.2007
7.	Malda Oditorium	Govt. of West Bengal	05.10.2007
8.	Delhi Sreefort Oditorium	Govt. of West Bengal	18.11.2007
9.	Delhi Progoti Maidan	Govt. of West Bengal	19.11.2007
10.	Delhi National School of Drama	Govt. of West Bengal	20.11.2007
11.	Biswa Bharati University, Santiniketan	Govt. of West Bengal	09.03.2009
12.	Berhampore G.T.I.School	Berhampore Repertory Theatre Festival	09.08.2013
13.	Kalkata Rabiadrasadan	Govt. of West Bengal	07.12.2013





THE HISTORY OF BERHAMPORE JAIL

A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. IX - W.W.Hunter (1876) :

At Maidapur, three miles to the east, the site of the civil station after the removal from Mutijhil in 1786, were situated the old jail and the old Government lunatic asylum. The jail has now (1875) been removed to the former hospital for European troops within the Berhampore Barracks, and the barracks have also been utilized for the construction of a new lunatic asylum, subsidiary to the old building at Maidepur.

(page - 76)

W.B. District Gazetteers : Murshidabad-1979

B.K. Bhattacharya

The district has a central jail, a special jail and a Borstal School at Berhampore and three sub-jails, one each of the aforementioned jails (excluding the special Jail) in 1960 was as follows : Berhampore Central Jail 1,262 (male 40 and female 10) and borstal school 486 (male).

(page-286-287)

Bengal District Gazetteers Murshidabad - 1914

L.S.S.O' Malley

There is a District Jail at Berhampore and subsidiary Jails at each of the outlying subdivisional head quarters. The accommodation in each, according to the returns for 1911, is shown in the margin. The chief industries in the District Jail are oil-pressing, surki-pounding, carpentry, sharee-weaving and care and bamboo work. The District Jail used to be located at Maidapur, about 4 miles distant from Berhampore, but the buildings, being on a damp, low lying site, were unhealthy. In 1871-72 it was decided to transfer the jail to the former hospital of the European troops within the cantonments at Berhampore and on the bank of the Bhagirathi. This change was effected in 1873 and 1874, the majority of the prisoners being removed in the former and the remainder in the latter years.

<i>Jail</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Berhampore	360	9	369
Jangipur	23	3	26
Kandi	17	2	19
Lalbagh	10	2	12



‘REJUVENATION’

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

A documentary Film --- Journey with Prison Theatre

A Journey of Pradip Bhattacharya, Director Berhampore Repertory Theatre, with theatre therapy in Prison, Pradip worked with lifer inmates (male female both) at berhampore Central Correctional Home, West Bengal last 12 years and directed 3 Tagore's Plays Taser Desh, Tota Kahini, Jakshapuri (Raktakarabi) to reveal the truth of the prison life, to source out Light from the womb of Darkness --- Tagore is our torch bearer, with a view to reroute the prisoners to exchange and interaction of cultural thoughts of human rights and reformation and to rehabilitate them in mainstream society.

Synopsis of the film ‘Rejuvenation’ :

Murshidabad which was the capital of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa before 1957 Paltan war. Berhampore was the cantonment of British Rulers.

Pradip Bhattacharya, director of Berhampore Repertory (established 1986) works in the field of culture to change the thoughts of the people behind the bars to exercise the psycho process and using different and from to bringing the best from them.

In the year 2006 October on request from Sri Banshi Dhar Sharma, IPS. Inspector General of Correctional service, Govt. of W.B. Pradip was started to work with prisoners (26 Male & Female) in Berhampore correctional Home to initiate the concept of ‘cultural Therapy’ for transformation of inmates by exploring their hidden talents and imparting them with human dignity through public performances and exhibitions.

Last 12 years journey of ‘Theatre Therapy’ concept, Pradip directed three Tagore's play Taser Desh, Tota Kahini and Jakshapuri (Raktakarabi) with a view to reroute the prisoners to exchange and interaction of cultural thoughts of human rights and reformation to rehabilitate them in mainstream society to reveal the truth of prison life, to source out light from the womb of darkness --- Tagore is the torch bearer.

‘Theatre Therapy’ can-completely transform a person which is proved through this project.

Director's Note :

This Film is not meant to be a documentary Film one. It seems to be a rare experience while working with theatre in Jail. Use of cameras is extremely prohibited over there. So, after special permission we attempted to document the actions and even the personal reactions of the Jail convicts (in steel or sometimes in movie mode). Life style of the convicts, the reactions of the authority, laws of prison system were all documented in detail as the theatre demands it-heavily.

After the Jail production is over, it creates a heavy wave among the public domain. When it becomes worthy enough to be accepted by Various popular medias, I thought to give it a full-length form so that we can deliver a good message to the Government as well as to the society. We keep in mind that such process of ‘Cultural Therapy’ is always good enough to put a new life among those who are marginalised. Accordingly, we started off. Philosophies of Tagore's Theatre create reactions in the mind of the inmates. Let it be the theme of the Film. And yes, the picture is, truthfully speaking, a symbolic representation of my own personal Journey.

Central Argument of the Project

Theatre Therapy in Prison



At the time of the transformation of the prison houses into reformatories the need of the mental rehabilitation of the captives through their participation in cultural programmes was urgently felt. There is no impugning the fact that the white light of culture removes the thick pallor of despair and pain from human mind and subsequently enkindles the urge of 'creative and constructive' thinking in those people whose minds are filled with sickly thoughts. It has been observed that the unleashing of the dormant creative energy through standardized cultural activities becomes instrumental in bringing about positive changes even in prisoners to the direction of self-confidence, love and fellow-feeling. The change of the prison houses into reformatories or purgatories in just black and white is not as important as the mental reorientation of the prisoners. Through regular participation in cultural activities they come in close spiritual contact with the great minds and thus in a gradual process of the reconfiguration of their mind-sets the criminal instincts die in them. They begin to believe that they are by no means despicably marginalized and condemned people deserving no love and compassion from anybody. When they rehearse together day after day, move on the practice stage, sing in chorus and throw their dialogues before the final staging of a drama, the cherished memories of socio-familial life adumbrate in them. They start identifying themselves with the dramatis personae and by sharing with them their own pains, sufferings, predicaments and joy they get mentally rehabilitated. Continuous evaluation of their mental

progress through cultural activities reveals the fact that even the illiterate lifers gradually but inevitably feel an inner urge to re-interpret life de novo in the light of new experiences. Herein lies the importance of engaging the prisoners in various cultural activities.

Keeping these phenomena in mind The Repertory Theatre of Berhampore has been organizing "Theatre Workshops" since 2006 for the inmates of Berhampore Central Reformatory getting over the myriad of legal hurdles. Tagore's "Tasher Desh" (The Empire of Cards), "Tota Kahini" (The Parrot's Story) and "Yakshyapuri (Rakta Karabi)" (The Red Oleanders) were staged by the inmates of Berhampore Central Reformatory with astounding success. Thus, Tagore was introduced to the illiterate prisoners in the form of dramatic performances. What is interesting to note is that participants and the other prisoners assimilated the central messages of Tagore's plays by making a spiritual bond with the characters. They have perceived the truth that misfortune does not only visit upon them but there are so many people in the society.



whose trials of life beggar description. The effect of this kind of perception is reflected in course of time in the reshaping of their gestures of life. To conclude, the single-point purpose of this cultural therapy is to re-humanize the prisoners and thereby rehabilitate them in the mainstream of the society.



A Brief Outline of the Works Productions and the Motivation

The first production by the inmates of Berhampore Central Correctional Home (Jail) was Tagore's 'Tasher Desh.' Six female prisoners took part in staging the play in staging the play. The freedom-craving participants who were almost crushed under the heavy yokes of strict vigilance and rules found their symbolic / virtual liberation by being identified with the Dramatis Personae. Discarding consciously the nearly flawless pronunciation-method which is generally associated with the production of Tagore's plays, they delivered their dialogues with regional or local accents. When the preparation for the production "Tota Kahini" was going on, the allegorical appeal of the plot of the play profoundly touched the participants. Childlike simplicity and humanity are confined in the narrow space of the cage of insurmountable rules. This tragic confinement comes to an end only in death. The lifers got themselves identified with the parrot. The third production was Tagore's "Yakshapuri (Rakta Karabi)", The dramatization of the confinement of the poor labourers in the network of slave-work moistened the eyes of the prisoners. At the time of the first production it was noticed with great

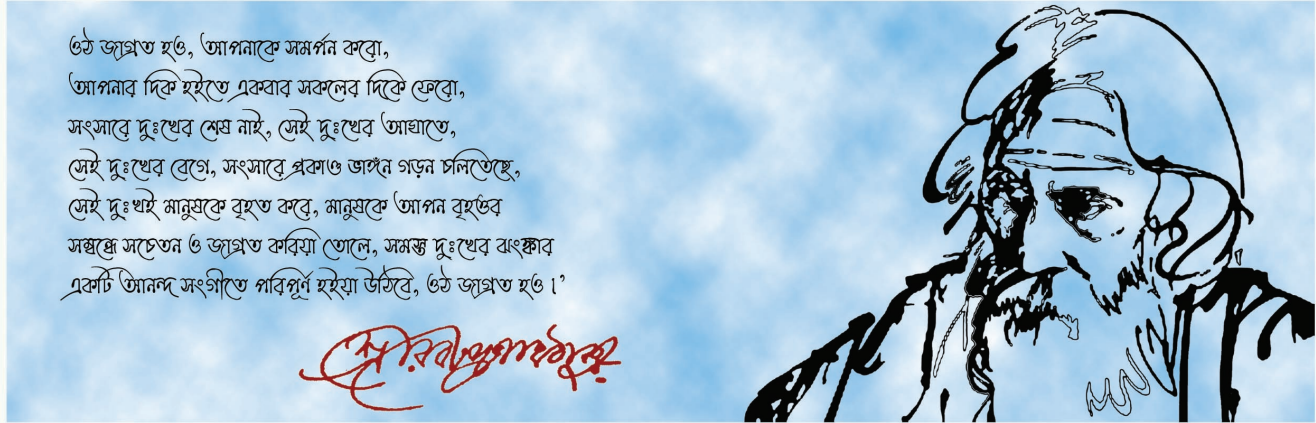
interest that by working together day after day some of the male participants fell in love with their female co-actors. It was asexual love binding two hearts together. According to the news sources, one of these men married one of his co-prisoners with the full consent of their families despite religious difference. Another remarkable phenomenon which deserves special mention here is that to the participants some sort of reciprocal trust was restored. And subsequently they emerged as trust-worthy prisoners. These interesting phenomena were the chief motivating force behind the production of other two plays of Tagore, besides the urge for their social as well as mental rehabilitation of the prison inmates.



Introduce 'Rabindra Nath Tagore' in Prison

THEATRE AS A THERAPY FOR THE INMATES OF THE CORRECTIONAL HOME (JAIL) 2006

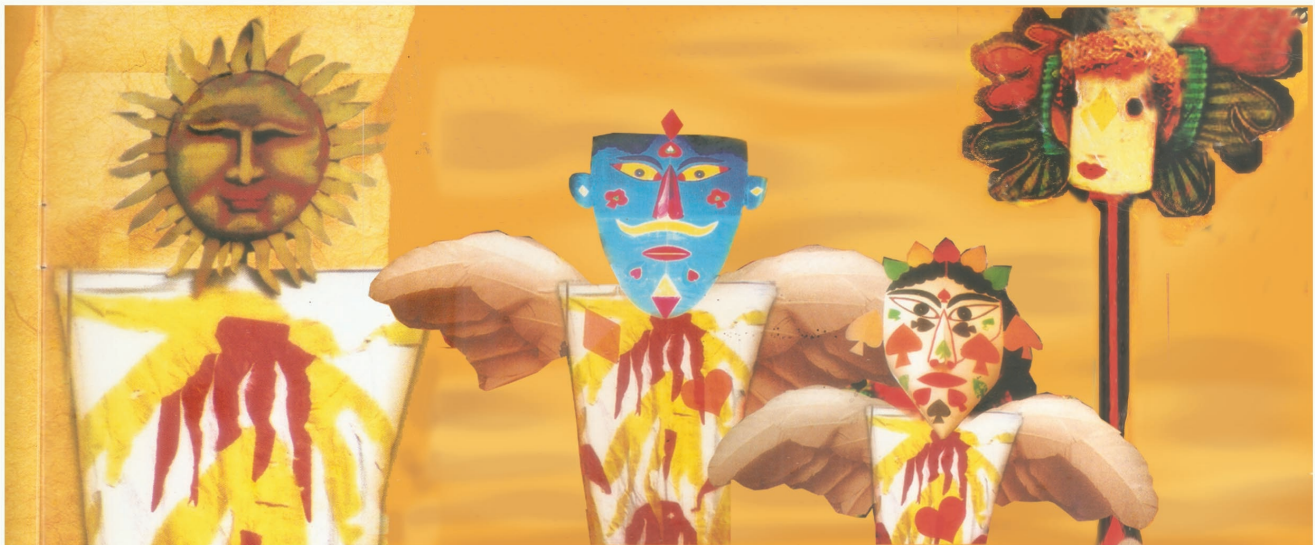
Pradip Bhattacharya



A handful of sky within the prison walls

How can a prison be transformed into a reformatory? I.G. (Prisons) Banshi Dhar Sharma with the help and cooperation of a few others has been trying his best to bring about this change in more ways than one. Sree Pradip Bhattacharya, the Director of Berhampore Repertory Theatre came forward to make this venture a success. He conducted a theatre workshop there for three months. The inmates, whose life otherwise is controlled by the stringent jail Code Rules are getting a New Taste of Life. Through their participation in the theatre- activity they are expecting it's vastness. By the stoke of a pen jails have already been notified as correctional homes. But change of rrlindset of both the prisoners and prison officials is practically quite a difficult task. The Hon'ble

Minister-in-Charge, Sri Biswanath Chowdhury, the I.G. and other officials of the department, in right earnest have undertaken some programmes. I.G. Sharma calls it 'Culture Therapy'. Creation of an ambience of culture within the prison walls has uplifted the spirit of the inmates. Recitation, drawing, singing, dancing and many other cultural activities have already brought about a change, which one has to see in order to believe. They now live with dignity, not in disgrace. With self respect, not humiliation. After long and open deliberations with the inmates Pradip discovered a new and significant interpretation of Rabindranath's 'Taser Desh' - the significance coming from their own life's experience- the desire of the moth for the star.





How was it rendered Possible

Many eyebrows were raised when they heard that Tagore's play would be enacted by the prisoners. On the other hand there is the stringent Jail Code., There is no provision for men and women to come together and such other 'no' 'no's. These obstacles could be got over by the intervention of the Minister-in-Charge, I.G. (Prisons) and some other officials. They have not flouted the laid, instead they acted according to the spirit of the law without attaching too much importance to the letter of it. By the combination of Pradip's endeavour, Sharma's active support and the strong will and sincere effort of the inmates, the dream has at last come true. Sarbasree Swarpendu Chowdhuri, Chandana Khan, Gopal Murmu,

Mohit biswas, Tarit Kundu, chanchal Mandal, Runa Bibi have given their heart out and got a new identify of their own. The workshop kindled a new light, a ray of hope that cannot be extinguished, Theatre has become the radar of a healthy life.

On October 6, 2006 the workshop started. An assembly of large Number of men and women can make a theatre production possible. The inmates are like islands divorced from each other. The primary but the most important task is to bridge such abysmal gulf. A strong faith in the invincible spirit of man is vindicated by the fact that what was though of as a difficult task was rendered possible by the spontaneous response of the inmates themselves. The workshop starts with chanting of 'Om' in chorus and as it is finished, the inmates go back to their cells in a disciplined manner and keep their shoes in order. Culture, it seems, provides the support and confidence to live a good life.



CULTURAL THERAPY IN PRISON

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICE, GOVT. OF WEST BENGAL



**Mr. B.D. Sharma I.P.S.
I.G. Prison 2006**

The first step towards crystallization and gradual evolution of the concept of culture Therapy was taken by me in Berhampore Central correctional Home in October 2006 when I took the decision, during a visit there, for a production oriented theatre workshop for the inmates. The production chosen for the workshop was Rabindranath Tagore's play "Taser Desh" (Kingdom of Cards) which is a satire on the futility of regimentation.



After Seven Weeks of theatre workshop and rehearsals under the direction of Pradip Bhattacharya, a friend of

mine from Berhampore Repertory Theatre, a group of 24 copnviactst 18 male and 6 female, staged Rabindranath Tagore's play "Taser Desh" in an open stage performance inside Berhampore Central Correctional Home on 26th November 2006 for me. The event opened a new vista and marked the take off of the culture therapy programme by its sheer novelty coupled with quality. It sent a message, loud and clear, which was that "The Jails in India are large pools of human resources with an abundance of human potential and talent, which only needs to be tapped into."



The first public performance of this play by prisoners could be finally arranged by me on 17 th may, 2007at Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata in the presence of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the then chief Minister of West Bengal and other renowned personalities in different fields in spite of a lot of resistance and opposition by authorities in the Government and prison staff. Part of 146th 'Rabindra Janmotsava Celebrations' organized by Information& Cultural Affairs Department, Govt. of West Bengal, the performance made history. It was for the first time in the country that prisoners performed in public. There was no untoward incident in spite of apprehensions about prisoners escaping and not only did they dispei such fears but proved that when we place out trust in them and give them back their sense of dignity, they more than reciprocate. What more could we ask for from Culture Therapy? And what really stunned me was the positive response to the concept from people of Kolkata and





So I decided to go on arranging such public performances of the play subsequently in other cities of the State. Encouraged by the very positive public response, in spite of reservations in some quarters, I felt convinced enough now to take the production "Tasher Desh" to New Delhi in November, 2007 for three public performances as I had become fully confident about the efficacy of Culture Therapy concept by then. I granted 7 days' parole to the members of the troupe and took them to the capital of India by train without any police escort.



All three public performances of Tasher Desh held in Delhi at Siri Fort Auditorium, Pragati Maidan and national School

of Drama were highly successful. The performance at Siri Fort Auditorium on occasion of "Access to Justice to Prisoners." A campaign arranged by the National Legal Services Authority, was witnessed by none other than the



then chief justice of India, Mr. Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, several other Supreme Court Judges, Chief Justice of Delhi High Court and Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of 'Art of Living'. The Chief Justice of India and Sri Ravi Shankar, spiritual and founder of 'Art of Living' felicitated each participant prisoner personally on the occasion. The troupe was also invited by Sheela Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi to tea during the trip.

Subsequently many other plays were produced by Pradip Bhattacharya. Notable among them were Tagore's 'Raktakarabi' and 'Tota Kahini' which mesmerized the theatre lovers of the State.



THEATRE THERAPY IN PRISON

DETAILS OF PRISONS THEATRE - 2006-2017

Pradip Bhattacharya



2006 Given the charge of producing a drama at Berhampore Central Correctional Home (Jail). I was at a loss to find out how to proceed with those 20 rustic illiterate lifers, within the nardened sickles of strictest prohibitions. Even the male and female prisoners cannot live together there by any means.

Besides the preliminary activities such as keeping the foot wears in order before entering the rehearsal room, reciting OHM placing ourselves in a single ring, movements according to the music, walking, dancing etc. the outline of the later task was drown considering the administrative status, past life of the prisoners along with their reveal the content through body and mind. So the focus of any dramatic workshop in to put both the body and mind in action.

When the mentally depressed and negated convicts were integrating spiritually and the belief of 'Creating something

new' was a building through community, painting adding colour, preparing masks and using them to tell a tale, imagination, movements, chorus, singing of song, theatre games etc. 6 female prisoners joind the party, as the highest authority yielded to the purposed.

Shortly, the **metaphor** exercises began, to reveal the contact in a wholesome process; after a haching the younger on is born, grew up, began testing the power of its wings and finally flew in the sky swimming to survive after the capsise of a boat, visiting home on the magic mat.



In due course of time the participants worried of their experience of prison life, worried of their self identity in the Tagore play. **Taser Desh** Replacing the conventional orthodox rhetoric of Tagore plays consciously by the regional registers and culture, the prisoners enacted Tagore in a spontaneous rhythm.





Thus the play design was perfect. The prisoners turned in spirit of 'And even we can' has already performed Tasher Desh at Kolkata, Delhi, Shantiniketan and all over West Bengal.

'By overcoming the superstitions, to seek truth in what we see, to understand and to leave in truth where we are, called emancipation that emancipation is of love and revelation' — R. N. Tagore.

The production of 'Tota Kahini' (The Parrot's Tale) began keeping his truth ahead. The process is the same only the



revelation differed. The content is that, the child like innocent humanity is imprisoned behind the bling bars. The emancipation came with the death only. The liters could easily identify them selves with the experience of the Tagore short story.



The preparation for the production of "Yakshapuri" (Rakta Karabi) began some years ago. The ruthless rustic refugees are converted into lead carrying labours within the barriers of behind jail. he rustic illiterate persons asking how could Tagore create such a drama without even staying inside the jail? So, the first chosen by Tagore for this, 'Yakshapuri' is applied for greater effect.



The chief goal of this **Theater Therapy** being being applied in the reformatories than Jails in West Bengal is to reroute the prisoners into the process of human rights and to rehabilitate them in the normal social life. And Berhampore Repertory Theatre been serving thus through the mental treatment for the last 11 years.

To reveal the truth of the prison life, to source out light from the womb of darkness ---- Tagore is the torch bearer, a hand full of blue fimament, so to commemorate the centenary of his receiving the Nobel Prize, Prison Theatre Festival is nothing but a humble wreath. Let the humanity win.



REJUVENATION

Pradip Bhattacharya



In Tagore's allegorical play, 'Tasher Desh' (State of Cards) when Chhakka-panja belonging to that state asks the Prince about his identity, the latter replies most laconically 'human being'. Accustomed to strict vigilance of laws and norms, Chhakka-Panja scornfully and presumptuously says : 'What! That means you don't have race, caste, lineage etc.'

This Chhakka-Panja says to Hartani : 'If we slightly deviate, they (Administration) find fault with us and look upon us as errant and wayward : In reply Hartani says : 'Let it be our mistake, there is nothing so servile like experiencing death at every moment in life; come out with me.' All including the Queen want to know from the Prince ---- 'Can we emerge as humans?' The Prince replies confidently ---- 'Of course you can.' The irresistible 'will power' permeates every nook and corner of that mechanical state.

Let us take other instances : first, in the symbolically satirical play 'Tota Kahini' (The Parrot's story) a school-going little girl in the form of a caged parrot fervently appeals ---- 'Please release me; I shall not nibble at the fruits, I shall not pluck flowers; spring has come outside.' Second, In Tagore's master piece 'The Red Oleander' (Rakta Karabi) Chandra ardently appeals to Sardar (The leader), 'Winter (Pous) has come, grant me leave to go home.' the reply comes ---- 'The home provided for you is the best; watchman has also been employed on behalf of the Government.' Again Bishu convinces his followers that 'There is also beauty in Hell but nobody recognizes that beauty there.' Despite being whiplashed by the administration Bishu sings, '(I) Love (I) love.'

The above-quoted dramatic dialogues have been uttered at least on 2000 days within the span of ten years at Berhampore Central Reformatory by at least 70-80 Prisoners, male and female, on the occasions of the production of three plays by

Tagore. These illiterate prisoners have uttered the aforementioned dialogues on the stage from the experience they gathered in their long-term imprisonment. Word is the source of power and strength. This strength helped them get back believe that they are condemned because they are jail-bards; rather do they believe that they are condemned because they are jail-bards; rather do they believe that they are condemned because was perceived in the prisoners when a cultural programme was going on within the premises of the central reformatory at Berhampore to celebrate the inspection of IG B.D.Sharma. To take the resolution to produce drama involving the prisoners was caused by the following factors :

1. Irresistible curiosity about the jail-life.
2. Utpal Dutta's dramatic career was connected with this prison-house.
3. Many great patriots were in this jail during the Freedom Movements.

I commence this uphill task with twenty 'Lifers' without any concrete plan for producing any specific drama. In the rehearsal room I was introduced to every one of them. I came to know that each of these twenty 'lifers' belongs to the families of marginal farmers dwelling in different districts of West Bengal. Ten out of twenty life-long prisoners have come of Muslim families. Almost eight percent of them are illiterate. They had the habit of occasionally enjoying 'Yatra' but hardly had they any idea of 'Theatre'. They were long habituated in speaking local dialects. All of them had already undergone imprisonment for at least seven years and a few of them had spent 12-14 precious years of their life in the so-called reformatory. They were mentally disheveled, sceptic, and the near and dear ones. I understood that they were looking upon us skeptically but could not express





their doubt in fear of being punished. They were not shirkers of duties, nor were they doubtful in fear of being punished. They were not shirkers of duties, nor were they averse to hard toil. Physical exercise, improvisation, image making with the accompaniment of music started. We started 'Metaphor' rehearsal ---- incubation, birth of birds, flying in the open sky etc ---- also started. To swim ashore driven by the will-force to survive after the ship wreck, to pay a visit to the family on the 'magic mat' ---- all were being rigorously practised but we could not win their trust. One day I ordered to bring the food which they were given in the jail and we shared that food stuff with them. Next day onwards the language of their eyes underwent a through change. Already twenty days had elapsed by that time and the jail authority began to pile pressure on us to start the rehearsal of a specific drama. They advised us to rehearse a comedy as, in their opinion, the prisoners were not good enough for a serious dramatic production. The local jail administration could not condescend to our proposal of producing a serious drama by involving the jail-birds. They took it to be an unwarranted trouble for them but they had to swallow the bitter pill under the command of the high-level officers.

By that time we were thoroughly acquainted with jail



administration, prison laws and the ways of prisoners' life. Therefore, we obtained the confidence to do something serious keeping in mind various kinds of administrative restrictions. We experienced that the prison administration resembles in many ways Tagore's 'Tasher Desh' and understood that the spirit of this drama would be better assimilated by them. The prison administration simpered and asked 'Tagore by them?' 'We require six women', we said, 'No provision in the jail code', was the reply. However, I.G. gave us the written permission to involve the women prisoners in the dramatic performance keeping faith upon me. We became much more aware of our responsibilities. Five of six women were Muslims and one was so called 'Dehati' (those who mostly come from Bihar and Jharkhand and live in Bengal but speak in broken Bengali); all of them were illiterate and mentally drooping. The administration laughed sneeringly and questioned, 'Will they be able?...' was my confident reply.

The work began to progress and the frustrated prisoners who selected for stage performance began to get back the faith in themselves and became spiritually united. Those men and women whose hope for freedom from the stifling environment of the prison was almost blighted gradually but inevitably got back their self-identity. As soon as Tagore's songs reached the administrative quarters, the officers began to move positively.

On November 26, 2006 the play "Tasher Desh" was performed





the open stage in presence of I.G. and the performance received warm acclaim. However, we were not satisfied merely with the staging of the drama inside the reformatory; we left no stone unturned to perform beyond the boundary walls of the reformatory in presence of vast spectators. Yes, the opportunity came to perform the play (Tasher Desh) in Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata on May 17, 2007 in presence of the then Chief Minister. This was certainly a landmark in the history of Bengal theatre. Among the common people and the regular theatre-goers some sort of profound emotional interest in that dramatic performance was perceived. The joy of the prisoners knew no bounds; they gestured confidently. The administration adopted an important resolution that no dramatic performance by the prisoners would be gratis and that with the money collected from selling tickets a Fund would be built up to help the prisoners. To this Fund Berhampore Repertory Theatre first contributed Rs. 1 lakh. At present the Fund is enriched with Rs. 70-72 lakh which is being used to help the families of the prisoners of Bengal.

Another important incident of that time which deserves special mention here was to travel to Delhi by train with the prisoners without any kind of police protection after convincing the on

administrators and the state as well. The repetition of stage performances of "Tasher Desh" thrice in Delhi with much acclaim and the return of the prisoners to Berhampore reformatory safely without any tussle established the veracity of the dictum of "Culture Therapy". Since 2008 the government of West Bengal has been endeavouring to introduce recitation, dance drama, song, painting and folk drama in the reformatories of the state with the view to eliciting the hidden talents of the prisoners. Many established artists have voluntarily joined this philanthropic project.

Some important tidbits of my experiences:

1. They said they could sleep well at night subsiding anxieties because of heavy work-load in the work shop.
2. Rabindranath gradually became their intimate friend otherwise a prisoner could not have asked: "Had Rabindranath ever been in jail? If he had not been in jail, how could he write a play like Yakshapuri?" By speaking in Tagore's language for last ten years they began to feel the sweetness of love irrespective of religion, caste and creed strictly maintaining the codes of decency, of course. God knows whether this nascent love would attain maturity under the vigilance of laws.
3. Till this moment the magic incantation for the prisoners is to rise and awake.



*"There is no end of grief in this world;
there is going on a continuous process
of construction and deconstruction
under the influence of that grief. That
grief makes man great and makes him
aware of the greater reality. All the notes
of grief will be synchronized into a
joyous song."*

—Rabindra Nath Tagore

This is the soul of 'Theatre Therapy'.

Supported by :



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