Three Bangladeshi plays considered in postcolonial context

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Three Bangladeshi Plays Considered in Postcolonial Context

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1: Introduction

There is no full-length investigation of postcoloniality in Bangladeshi Bengali literature. This is partly because Bangladesh had no separate identity under colonial rule, being just another part of greater India. Then, at partition, it became one section of the unnatural union that was Pakistan. These two identities have kept Bangladesh as a relatively unknown domain, at least to the Western academy. The other reason in the context of literary postcolonial studies is that these have concentrated on writing in English, whereas Bangladeshi literature is almost completely in the national language. This study offers a discussion of the postcoloniality of contemporary Bangladeshi theatre via analysis of selected playtexts.

One reason for the lack of investigation of Bangladeshi literature using postcolonial theoretical models is the remarkable concentration of work on the contemporary Indian state and its cultural production. India has better suited the needs of formations such as 'Commonwealth literature' and to some extent (now debated) it fits the focus as well in postcolonial
literary studies on writing “by formerly colonised people in the language of their colonizers” (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox and Zantop 4 - 5), in other words, in the South Asian context, ‘Indian literature in English.’ If “the word ‘postcolonial’ is useful in indicating a general process with some shared features across the globe” and if it is always needed to be placed in specific locations (Loomba 19), then it should be a paradigm applicable to studying texts written in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, Bengali is the predominant and official national language and the major vehicle of literary expression, and English is the other language of commercial and international communication. This is a significant difference from vast India with her linguistic diversity in which literature in English has a space to grow and attract international attention. In this thesis I want to show how a postcolonial framework for literary study can be usefully applied to writing from Bangladesh. At the same time, I use Bangladeshi literature to show the limitation of current theorising and practice in postcolonial studies and the importance of those specificities of local history and cultural practice to which a general postcolonial theory often only pays lip-service.
This study will focus on three Bengali playtexts, based on the importance of the authors and the centrality of the texts to the emergent nation. *Nuroldin* by Syed Shamsul Haq has been selected for its clear embrace of postcolonial features. This can be observed in the ways it deals with contemporary state-level politics, stylistic hybridity, and even more importantly the use of class and gender discourses for the interest of dominant power groups. The playtext, *Footfalls*, again by Haq, has been written about the 1970s liberation war of Bangladesh. Its treatment of the double decolonisation of the country shows the specific dynamics of Bangladesh against the general model of postcolonial cultural production. Asaduzzaman Noor’s *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale* provides an example of the appropriation of Brechtian style and subject for local application and its recuperation into the service of the dominant power groups. More importantly, the play contains the features of what may be described in Abdul JanMohamed’s words as the “hegemonic phase” of neocolonialism when the “natives accept a version of the colonizer’s entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions and, more important, mode of production” (JanMohamed cited in Raina 17–18). In this study, the natives are the Bangladeshi dominant groups.
Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their *The Empire Writes Back*, have formulated some complex features of postcolonial literatures. My entry into the discussion of their markers starts with the notion of “appropriation” (35). Their discussion emphasises the appropriation of language: “The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised place” (38). Appropriation of language does not mean in literal terms the exercise to own the colonial language in the case of Bangladesh. But it involves the appropriation of the modes of power into the local language and it does not necessarily mean the replacement of the colonial tongue - rather the rearrangement of a colonial aftermath in which the local ruling power mechanism can work. A postcolonial writer not only appropriates the language and cultural features of the dominant western form [in case of theatrical writing] but also local features which can be used as signs of national identity to serve the purpose of a postcolonial complex power structure.
The above postcolonial scholars have also emphasised “the dialectic of place and displacement” (9) as the subject matter of postcolonial writings. It is very much a valid theme when we accept it as a process that follows from the initial invasion of a culture may delineate the displacements that have occurred to build the place of Bangladesh. In fact the crisis of “place and displacement” in the material political life of a postcolonial culture becomes progressively more complex. They have correctly identified the feature that postcolonial literature has come a long way in departing from the notion of ‘art existing for the sake of art’ and literature as expression of some lofty human experience. Rather, it is a means to express the complexity of the material every-day world.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have also emphasised the element of ‘subversion’ inherent in postcolonial literature: “not subversions of language alone, but of the entire system of cultural assumptions on which the texts of the English canon are based and the whole discourse of metropolitan control within which they were able to be imposed” (48). I will reveal in this study that the subversions can be of many kinds,
starting from the undermining of the original anti-colonial one and including class subversion of the nationalist anti-colonial ideal. Therefore, in this context, subversion works not to represent but to destabilise the notion of representation in order to bring popular anger and discontent to the surface.

Contrary to the centre and margin model of *The Empire Writes Back*, I will try to emphasise “the need to incorporate an awareness of historical and geographic difference” (Loomba xvi) which reveals that a postcolonial writing is more concerned not to write back from colonial margin to European ‘centre’, but to address the concerns of local centres. Given the different conditions of literature in Bangladesh, there is no dynamic of appropriating English to serve local ends, and, where there is a creative localisation of European literary forms, the decolonising project is politically directed more against Pakistan than dismantling European discourses.

Just after the partition of the eastern region of India (into what is now Indian Bengal and Bangladesh), from West Bengal (Indian Bengal), the
famous poet-playwright-novelist and above all, one of the greatest literary critics of Bengali Literature, Buddhadeva Bose, expressed his gratitude to the British and credited Rabindranath Tagore with making “Bengal a part of Europe, and the Bengalis citizens of the world” (Bose 59). Bose also recollected the powerful “Bengali mind” which could “discern the fire of ideas behind the smoke of guns [at the initial entry of the British to Bengal], and it seemed as if the minds of the two peoples, the Bengali and the English, moved to the same rhythmic pattern” (Bose 60). What becomes pertinent from Bose’s pride at the placement of both the minds on the same platform is that the Bengali intelligentsia became a part of European thinking from the very beginning of the British colonisation. Again, he argued that such acceptance of the “fiery ideas” allowed the British to remain “arrogantly and impenetrably the sahib, that is, the foreigner (60).” Part of the pride also depended on the Bengali intelligentsia becoming the brown-British, foreigners in their own land.

The finding of close affinity, between “the Bengali and the English” in the “strangers in appearance (Bose 60)” is not surprising when the
babus, or Bengali intelligentsia and Bengali bourgeoisie were complicit in colonisation, or in making Bengal a part of Europe. After all, the interest was mutual, and they combined to have total control over the colonised commoners. The English, as in Bose’s words acknowledged the superiority and unity of the babu:

Firstly, Bengal had already participated for centuries in a civilization remarkable for its shock-proof qualities, and acknowledged by the British in the early, pre-Suez days, in some ways higher than their own. (Bose 59-60)

This discovery of the same mental world in English language and literature is expressed in all the genres of Bengali literature that emerged in Bengal after the British took over the destiny of India. And, of course, in keeping with Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s description of postcolonial literature as an effect of colonisation (2), we can say that Bengali literature in colonial Bengal was English literature written in the vernacular, Bengali. This is evident when Bose claims:

Shakespeare, Shelley and Blake, the literature of the English tongue, this, from the beginning, is what England meant to certain sections of Bengalis, and in the politically disanglicised future, will mean to

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1 The term ‘babu’ has been used in this statement to signify a member of the dominant indigenous group that grew in Calcutta of nineteenth-century colonial Bengal. This group consisted of high caste wealthy Hindus educated in the European education system and blessed by the British Raj as collaborating with colonial rule in India.
increasingly larger numbers. This has been an inspiration in the literal sense; our literature was in-spirited and renascent. The difference between our literature and literature written by the imbibers of Western thought, though not a total one like that between Beowulf and the Canterbury Tales, is at least like that between Chaucer and Shakespeare, or the Nut-Brown Maid and Wordsworth. There is a historical continuity, but also a sharp development in the language, a sudden extension in mental frontiers and a vast complexity of form. A new life, and, with it a new literature was born in nineteenth century Bengal, as in England of the sixteenth; and Bengali prose, like English prose in the corresponding period, was newly born. (62)

It is, of course, recognised that literature is a “simple utility” whereby colonial powers can dominate the cultures of colonised peoples (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 3). This was certainly the case. This is in the imitative genres of Bengali literature, including dramatic literature [see ch. 2].

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins have studied drama from the former British colonies. They have defined the genre, in their study of postcolonial drama, as a form of “resistance to and reaction against imperial control” (Gilbert & Tompkins 295). In this respect, this study investigates more specifically the drama that arose from the British colonisation of Bengal, calling into question the resistance or reaction to colonisation; rather it arose as a basic form of service to the process of colonisation. In the postcolonial context, if resistance is performed, then the question has to be raised, whose resistance? Whose reactions?
Drama has suggested the answer is ‘The peasants’ but the dramatic literature itself speaks as a bourgeois “simple utility” for the hegemonic (post)colonial power.

Let us return to the concept of Brown-British. The babus wrote English literature in Bengali in order to be “world-citizens.” Similarly, the postcolonial Bangladeshi elite intellectuals use the past of the peasant-workers not as “new voices and new tools for understanding the past” (Gilbert & Tompkins 107), or as “decolonising imperial history” (Gilbert & Tompkins 295). Rather, it becomes enabling for a playwright to reconstruct historical events of imperial history to be used at the service of the bourgeois state. The anti-colonial struggle of a group is thus distanced from what can be described as “a material reference in social struggle” (Stephen Slemon cited in Gilbert & Tompkins 108). The modern struggle is deflected allegorically onto a historically underclass, while the conditions of a peasant rebellion leader of colonial Bengal are deployed to address the political anarchy in a postcolonial society.
Firdous Azim’s account of the non-inclusion of Third World literatures written in English in the curriculum of the English department of the University of Dhaka on the ground that these are not genuine expressions of the land and people in the context of Bangladesh reveals a deep-rooted colonial understanding of English literature and language (Azim 3). The colonialist approach posits the appreciation of literature via European notions of aesthetics and texts, which reproduce these cultural values. The native language of the land [in this case Bengali] delivers narratives of the middle class elite’s writing, the standard of which is determined by the terms of colonialist literature. It generates a process through which the class-specific interests acquire a well-defined formation from eighteenth-century Bengal. The inclusion of modern classics in the Bengali literature studies of the University of Dhaka indicates a structure parallel with the Studies of English Literature.

Azim directs attention to the emergence of Bengali literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as an elite quest to have a vernacular
literature parallel to English. In the same section of her book, she has highlighted the curriculum pattern of Bengali literature taught at the University of Dhaka:

For example, genre study within Bengali literature divides the field into poetry, prose and drama, which then is further subdivided into lyrics, sonnets to novels, essays and so on. . . . These divisions are imitative of the way in which English literature has been periodised and marked off into different genres, and draw the same connections between history and the formal properties of writing. (Azim 3)

The Bengali theatre in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was in the same manner symptomatic of the babu concern for expression of communalism in the name of Bengali renaissance. Chapter 2 of this study focuses on the falseness of the claim that drama written in Bengali was an expression of the people at large.

The present Bangladeshi nationalism manifests and contains the features of “anti-colonial nationalism” and “postcolonial nation-State” (Gandhi 120). These terms are explained by Gandhi (120) as local popular energies primarily aimed at collapsing existing reactionary state frameworks. To this extent we can think of the Bangladeshi situation as 'postcolonial'. But the original anticolonial national movement was as
much against India as against Britain, and driven by religious sectarian as well as political concerns. And the realisation of a postcolonial state fails to utilise the energies of the masses in ways recognisable as postcolonial cultural liberation. This understanding is of significance when I considering the creation of East Pakistan as the culmination of conscious struggle, often in the form of anticolonial insurgent movements, by East Bengalis. The politics of pre-partition Bengal shows that the leader of the East Bengal-based political party, the Krishak-Proja (the Peasant-subject) party, Sher-e-Bangla (the Tiger of Bengal) Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq embraced the politics of the All India Muslim League and added a powerful force in the establishment of Pakistan. Sher-e-Bangla’s role was decisive in the formation of Pakistan. The Muslim League under Mohammed Ali Jinnah was struggling to win “less than a quarter of the Muslim seats in the Provincial Elections” in the late 30s. Sher-e-Bangla’s support for the cause of Pakistan as the elected Premier of Undivided Bengal added a great momentum. His political party, the Krishok-Proja party was commanding a majority support of the East Bengalis. Khalid B. Sayeed writes:
The annual session of the Muslim League, held at Lucknow in October 1937, was probably the first indication of the growing sense of solidarity among the Muslims of India. . . Fazl-ul-Huq, premier of Bengal, and Sir Muhammad Saadullah, Premier of Assam, declared in the league session that they were advising the Muslim members of their respective political parties to join the Muslim league. No better tonic could have invigorated than those declarations. (Sayeed 87-88)

It was Sher-e-Bangla who proposed the Lahore Resolution for the formation of Pakistan in 1940 on the basis of which the Muslim majority East Bengal, Assam and NorthWestern Parts of India would form independent sovereign units of nation-states. This decision was relevant to the time and politics of the subcontinent at the end of British colonial rule. The embracing of the anti-colonial nationalism of East Pakistani Muslims was the result of the struggle of the people of East Bengal to be freed from the British colonial and Calcutta babu domination. Keith Callard argues that East Bengalis were pushing for the formation of East Pakistan as early as in 1957:

The Muslims of the eastern districts of Bengal had grievances against the Hindus and against the power exercised by Calcutta, but they had no desire to exchange the domination of that city for that of Karachi. The inhabitants of East Pakistan are, for the most part, Muslim Bengalis. As Muslims they hold themselves the equal of any of their brethren in the Punjab or Sind. But as Bengalis they have a culture and a tradition of which they are very proud. This forms a link with the Bengali Hindus, and especially with the city of Calcutta. While the ties between the two halves of the Punjab were totally severed by partition, those between East and West Bengal were not and many patriotic East Bengalis still treasure friendly relations with other Bengalis across the border. There can be no doubt that this feeling of
cultural and social separateness hinders the creation of sentiments of common nationality and patriotism. (Callard 157)

East Bengal was in favour of Pakistan as an opportunity to sever its ties of domination with Calcutta and at the same time it wanted to see itself as an independent sovereign state for the East Bengalis. Callard also said:

East Bengal was strongly in favour of Pakistan even at the cost of partition, although some of its leaders, notably Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, hoped to preserve a united Bengal. But the Pakistan desired by the Bengalis was a state that would have left them with substantial autonomy for their own province. The famous Lahore Resolution of 1940, in which the League [All India Muslim League] had first explicitly demanded the creation of Pakistan, was moved by a Bengali (Fazlul Huq). The resolution demanded ‘that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute “Independent States” in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.’ (158)

But the postcolonial nation-state structure of Pakistan has failed the anti-colonial nationalism of East Bengal. As a result, the East Bengalis moved into another phase of anti-colonial nationalism, Bengali nationalism. The language movement of 1952, the liberation struggle of 1971 and the establishment of Bangladeshi nation-state are the examples of this movement. Also, the confrontation between anti-colonial nationalism and the nation-state continued in liberated Bangladesh. It is the revival of Military rule in the post-1975 Bangladesh (which can be described with Gandhi’s term as the “imaginative lethargy”) which has confined national consciousness to the revival of communalism (120). During the Military
rule in Bangladesh the national imaginary was to refuse autocracy at the state level. I will analyse this confrontation in all three playtexts in this study.

To write the “polyphonic text” that will adequately explain the 1971 Bangladeshi war of liberation, Ranabir Samaddar has stressed the need for inclusion of all textual fragments written in response to the 1905 partition of Bengal; the 1947 partition of the subcontinent; the 1952 Bengali language movement; and the 1971 war of liberation (Samaddar cited in Menon 158). The partition of Bengal of 1905, was the first success of East Bengalis to foreground their separate identity in British India. Bengali playtexts of Calcutta at the beginning of the century presented a staging of Hindu-Muslim unity. The construct becomes a realisation of class-specific political interests in comparison to the decades of communal revivalism that preceded the period. The participation of East Bengalis in the “division of countries as a solution to intractable religious or ethnic differences and conflicting political aspirations (Menon 157)” can be interpreted as their right of self-determination in taking Muslim national identity to be freed of all
colonial and caste domination. Disillusionment of East Bengalis at the replacement of British imperialism with the West Pakistani Military and bureaucratic autocracy was expressed in the Language movement of 1952. As a result, this was not only a violent protest against the West Pakistani autocratic audacity to replace Bengali with Urdu; it was the beginning of the end in 1971’s complete liberation of Bangladesh.

For the doubly postcolonised Bangladeshi playwright, of course, the response to the movements often provides sites for the construction of Bangladeshi identity. In Nuroldin, Syed Shamsul Haq reconstructs the 1783 peasant rebellion under the leadership of the peasant leader Nuroldin against the Zamindar,\textsuperscript{2} the Mahajan\textsuperscript{3} and the East India Company to speak of Haq’s sense of East Bengali national identity. His notion of Bengali nationalism, however, is centred on the political interest of the dominant classes. Anti-colonialism and class-specific appropriation of textuality are not the same thing; the former can entail consolidating the dominant’s position and silencing the majority.

\textsuperscript{2} The Zamindar is the title of the land owning rural elite formed in Bengal by the British Raj. The literal meaning of the word is one who owns land.

\textsuperscript{3} A money-lender in rural Bengal.
Precisely in this regard, this study will indicate how Bangladeshi theatre enacts what in the words of Gandhi is “a counter-narrative to the postcolonial counter-narrative” (166).

Haq, has also problematised the war of liberation itself, made it more fragmentary in *Footfalls*, rather than writing a text of comprehensive history. He, however, recognises the potential strength of the strategy of presenting a text in the guise of another. In this sense, “the central experience of life in colonial and postcolonial cultures continues to be ‘written’ by the terms of *dominants*” (Newman 3, my emphasis).

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The postcolonial situation in Africa that Ngugi Wa Thiong’o comments on has been similar to Bangladesh. In Africa the colonial native elites started writing in vernaculars after the departure of colonisers. In outlining the features of post-independence writing, Ngugi emphasises the importance within cultural politics and the writer’s choice of
language. So while, he argues, there was a wave of writing about Africa by Africans, the use of the language of the former colonial masters led them to write in confusion:

The writer who edged towards the people was caught in various contradictions. Where, for instance, did he stand in relation to the neo-colonial state in which he was a citizen, and within which he was trying to function? (Ngugi 71)

In their confusion, the post-independence African writers misunderstood the imperialism they are still working for; they have celebrated a process of nationalism that continues the imperialism in new cloaks and new face. The exploits and excesses of the imperialism are seen in racist terms:

The sentence or phrase was ‘... when the white-man came to Africa ... ’ and not ‘... when the imperialist, or the colonialist came to Africa ... ’ or ‘... one day these whiteists, will go...!’ (Ngugi 63).

The sixties of post-independent Africa remained a “confusing bewilderment (Ngugi 63)” for the African writers. In this state the writers only discovered broken dreams, and unfulfilled dream of freeing the African masses from the oppression of imperialism.

In the changed African neo-colonial state what would be a writer’s strategy? The strategy that Ngugi suggests not only binds the writers to
the integral part of their struggling people in their anti-neocolonial struggle:

In that situation, he will have to confront the languages spoken by the people in whose service he has put his pen. Such a writer will have rediscover the real languages of struggle in the actions and speeches of his people, learn from their great heritage of orature, and above all, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves. (Ngugi 71)

Ngugi’s strategy implies an addition of language of the struggling people that needs to be accommodated in a writer’s work. The true essence of freedom from neo-colonialism lies in defiance of neo-colonialism in anti-neo-colonialism struggle in the terms and language of anti-imperial struggle. Extending this argument, I suggest that “the real language of struggle” in itself, whether it be English or national vernacular be expressive of the peasants; rather, the national language may constitute a disguise that provides an opportunity to a playwright to write the concerns of someone else, as in my analysis of Haq’s Nuroldin.

In answer to the question of postcolonial writing, Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd in their article, “Toward a Theory of Minority Discourse: What Is To Be Done?” direct attention to the division of Eurocentric and postcolonial writing into minority and majority discourses. Their division, which emphasises the element of resistance of
postcolonial writing, describes minority discourse as the resistance to majority discourse. The negation of authority of the majority discourse is an immensely difficult task. For example, Eurocentric Western humanism tends to relegate non-Western languages to a category of barbarism, hence the minority writers (here non-European, non-Western writers) are compelled to write in European languages to prove that they are not barbarians, and every time they speak or write in any of the dominant European languages they pay homage to western intellectual and political hegemony. In other words, they narrativise the majority discourse even in expressing their minority discourse. The relational production of minority majority positions is described in the theoretical concept of the subject:

Subject: The general tendency is to regard the subject as the effect of STRUCTURE rather than as its source or origin. The subject does not speak is not the origin of meaning; the subject is, rather, spoken by law and CULTURE. (Maqey 524)

The term ‘Subaltern’ has been broadly used to signify any oppressed minority excluded from the means of representing itself. This notion is now addressed in a variety of disciplines: critical theory, subaltern

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historiography, cultural theory and postcolonial theory. While its origins lie in scholarly attention to 'tribal' underclasses in India, the 'subaltern' is neither a specific class or ethnic group, but a produced subjectivity relative to the hegemonic group controlling the means of representation.

This signification derives from the term used by Gramsci who says:

> The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to at least provisional stages of unification in the historical activity of these groups; it therefore can only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately. . . . Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should therefore be of incalculable value for the integral historian. (23)

In the term borrowed from the military, subaltern, for Gramsci signifies a mediator role ascribed to this wordless position. As in a role of a mediator, a subaltern can pass on words from his or her immediate commanding officer to those who are at the bottom of the military ranks. Again a subaltern cannot construct himself or herself except with words either from the top or from the bottom. This signification of the subaltern is prevalent in the discourses of subaltern historiography, cultural theory and postcolonial theory. Here, the subaltern cannot construct himself or herself. As the subaltern is wordless, hence in the discursive modes of representation, the subaltern has to be represented by someone else in the
higher position in possession of discursive power.\textsuperscript{5} This notion of subalternity as a phenomenon to be represented by someone who has power of autonomy complicates the representation. Because it is again the purpose for such representation will affect the degree and nature of representabilty. As Ranajit Guha says:

\begin{quote}
We recognise of course that subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance. (Subaltern Studies 1 vii)
\end{quote}

Thus as new elites arise, so new subalternities are produced at the extremities of these elites' systems of control.

One working definition of the subaltern is a state of collective consciousness in underclasses. The subaltern is defined as such by the Subaltern historiographers in their effort to recover the subaltern from the past of colonial India. Here, 'subaltern' signifies the people who have no being in 'the historical', the history of colonial India. It is a consciousness that has traces of the individual consciousnesses lost in the collective. In this effort for recovery, one has to start with the construction of consciousness of a group as one unit. From the historiographical context,

\textsuperscript{5} Gayatri Spivak stressed this aspect of subalternity which is useful here. See In Other Worlds: 216.
if the subaltern agent is lost in the past, then the lost agent’s recovery is possible by constructing the collective consciousness of the agent. My theorising in the area of dramatic theory examines a particular consciousness with the help of linguistic mise-en-scène, embodiment and subjectivity. Again the construct of such collective consciousness is not an end in itself. We need to analyse the purpose for such construction. I utilise the analysis of both construct and purpose to examine the representation of subalternity of a dramatic text. A dramatic text may even be an elitist purpose, as in Syed Shamsul Haq’s, Nuroldin, in which the playwright appropriates the peasant rebellion of colonial Bengal to act on an elite audience to rise against the military autocracy.

If the Subaltern is a collective consciousness in a text then it becomes problematic to trace the subaltern subject. Hence it becomes quite likely that to recover a subaltern subject particularly in the discourse of history one has to depend on the counter-subaltern consciousness to give shape to the subaltern consciousness. Thus recovered the subaltern becomes only

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6 Dramatic language is considered self sufficient in creating the mise-en-scène in a playtext. It is the world-creating capacity of the dramatic language apart from the performative world. See Theatre Audiences: 139.
an outline of the consciousness. Guha writes about reconstruction of the peasant (the subaltern) struggles of the colonial India in the Subaltern historiography:

The object of this work [Subaltern historiography] is to try and depict this struggle not as a series of specific encounters but in its general form. The elements of this form derive from the very long history of the peasant’s subalternity and its striving to end it. Of these the former is of course more fully documented and represented in elite discourse because of the interest it has always had for its beneficiaries. However, insubordination can hardly be justified as an ideal and a norm without acknowledging the fact and possibility of insubordination, so that the affirmation of dominance in the ruling culture speaks eloquently too of its other, that is resistance. They run on parallel tracks over the same stretches of history as mutually implied but opposed aspects of a pair of antagonistic consciousnesses. (Guha, EAP: 11).

A historiographer must reduce a subaltern consciousness into a single model or unit, again breaking this into multiple units to reconstruct it. And the Subaltern consciousness has to be recovered from the opposite dominant consciousness. Now, to approach the history of Bengali elite theatrical discourse to examine the representation of the subaltern resistance against the mechanism of violent life-annihilating revenue collection of the eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial Bengal is to trace the peasant rebel consciousness in its opposite consciousness. For example, my analysis of the background story and criticism of the nineteenth century Bengali playtexts, The Indigo Planting Mirror and The
Zamindar’s Mirror show the elite appropriation of subaltern resistance that again demonstrates the subaltern consciousness. Because elite ownership of the Bengali theatre marked its beginning and development, the elite appropriation of subaltern materials, particularly there is a tendency to incorporate subaltern protest in Bengali theatre. The incorporation of subaltern protest in Bengali theatre is as old as the history of imperialism in the Indian subcontinent. There have been direct, and indirect protests against the colonial oppression of the peasantry through the theatre, The Indigo Planting Mirror in 1870, and The Zamindar’s Mirror in 1873 are the seminal examples.

The theoretical and ideological issues raised by the Subaltern Studies are pertinent to any textual and postcolonial investigation in the context of the Indian subcontinent. The complex socio-political issues of domination and counter-domination can be brought to the surface by the focus on the working of power. It is instructive to salvage the features of history of the subcontinent as seen from outside of the reach of imperial, official and elite influences. Insofar as this is possible, it not only offers the prospect of countering colonialist representations, but also of calling into question the dominant narratives of decolonising national elites.
If we approach Spivak’s theorisation of subalternity, however, we find that in an elite text, a subaltern story may be alienated. Here alienation occurs from the discursive change of the subaltern meaning into elite meaning (Spivak The Burden of English: 136). If this happens in a text, then it will serve an elite purpose even though it purports to speak for/about the subaltern. In Nuroldin, Syed Shamsul Haq situates the peasant rebellion of 1784 Bengal within the elite political space of 1970s and 1980s Bangladesh, through an allegorical analysis of the elite political present, thus subaltern material [see Chapter 3].

The thesis behind my study of Bangladeshi theatre is that national liberation is more complex than a simple anti-colonial binary opposition. National cultural expression is equally complex in that, working as an oppositional project takes it beyond any easy ‘hybridity’; it also uses the subaltern as an anti-colonial nationalist counter within a genre that leaves the subaltern fixed within new nationalist formations. At the same time, in the double decolonisation of Bangladesh (first from British, then Pakistani power), the theatre’s use of subaltern figures signals a need for
arguing class reforms and recognition of peasant agency. Such a reading is suggested in Haq’s *Footfalls*, in which the historicisation of the war of liberation shows the revenge of the Villagers for their forced involvement with the anti-force of the liberation war. They retaliate by serving a death sentence on Mathobbor (the rural powerful character). This act symbolises the whole Bengali nation’s participation and sacrifice in the struggle for a better future.

Postcolonial studies have emphasised the historicity of texts at the same time as they interrogate the authenticity of history, realising its politically interested construction. This thesis shows how Bangladeshi theatre is grounded in the historical specifics of anti-colonial struggle while refusing the simplification of reading texts as ‘authentic’ salvaging of the past. This thesis will make the point that the selected playtexts, *Nuroldin*, *Footfalls*, and *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale* create a theatrical world in which anti-colonialism, nationalism, gender and class are intersecting but different factors. These factors have combined in the radical theatre of Bangladesh to silence a genuine expression of peasant interest.
One might argue that this is not different from Mahasweta Devi’s exposure of how Indian nationalism has served to perpetuate oppression of peasants and minorities (98). However, the national rhetoric and religious discourse in Bangladesh tend to override such literary championing of the subaltern. One factor in historical specificity of ‘postcolonial’ Bangladesh is, of course, religion. Aijaz Ahmad notes that a three-world political model must take into account the divisions of Islam that cross national boundaries - something rarely noted in studies of South Asian postcolonial writing in English. The plays studied show religion is only a means to the end of political and economic domination:

(a) third world against first and second worlds
(b) tendency to see all Islamic or as non-white or non-industrialized, as a homogeneous entity,
(c) a certain kind of transitional nationalism.

The power relation across the worlds are determined by the capitalistic logic. (Ahmad 310)

However, they and this commentary acknowledge that it is a significant factor in the anti-colonialist and nationalist social dynamic, and one which resists a ready explanation by the largely secular anti-essentialist models of postcolonial cultural expression.
Recent claims by Rushdie about the poor quality of writing in Indian languages compared to writing in English provoked a storm of protest and focused attention on the national need for good translations and the postcolonial critiques confined to English (Bassnett & Trivedi 11-12). His critique drew attention to the power of international publishing in shaping the field of postcolonial literary studies. Again, South Asian study signifies largely the study of Indian texts written in English and accepted in the Western academy. My translation of three Bengali playtexts (attached as appendices) is an integral part of this thesis’s attempt to expand the scope of postcolonial studies in the South Asian context, both by moving literary study away from Indian texts and postcolonial literary studies towards a broader comparative field than that bounded only by writing in English.

Lastly, the translation of three Bengali playtexts aims to problematise English literary studies in postcolonial Bangladesh. Such studies at the University of Dhaka offer British literature, starting from Old and Middle English literature to the twentieth-century British and American Literature. The literature written in English in Third world countries is still considered as “colonial shame (Azim 3).” National literature, on the
other hand, is taught as a matter of uncritical pride. My translation of the Bengali playtexts allows their inclusion in the postcolonial studies of the English Departments of Bangladesh and other countries, enabling a critique of depoliticised English 'classics' of restrictive formations of 'postcolonial literature', and also of the nationalist cultural production of Bangladesh, by mutual comparison. For the plays indicate more truly the nature of the decolonising discourse at the moment in Bangladesh and in most of the former colonial cultures.
2: Bangladeshi theatre: a brief history of the elite possession

The contemporary theatre of Bangladesh is an evolution of the *babu* theatre that emerged in nineteenth-century Calcutta. The education system introduced in colonial India realised its aim in creating a class in the local society that would have an English sensibility in a brown body (Viswanathan 2 - 3). This far-reaching project manifested itself in the origin and evolution of the British-influenced theatre in Bengal. The history of Bengali theatre indicates the increasing ownership of it by the educated elite. It is a theatre that has extended its domination in drawing the vast masses of village Bengal not as individuals, or even as well-defined groups but rather as a faceless, silent mass subordinate to the oversight of writer and audience alike.

This chapter will indicate the limitation of these postcolonial theories which tend to erase the differences of caste, class, and gender under the one general term of - usually nationalist or diasporic postcoloniality (Mukherjee 1). The analysis of the specific history of Bangladeshi theatre counters such theoretical homogenising. The theatrical productions are
not merely "parodies" of imperial theatre rather, they were created to serve very particular class and caste needs of the time (Mukherjee 6).

I

**Jatra or the low-caste Bengali theatre**

Despite its urban nature, Bangladeshi theatre, in the name of nation, uses elements of 'folk' tradition. As such, it conforms with other postcolonial theatre practices such as the syncretic work of John Kasaipwalova in Papua New Guinea or Wole Soyinka in West Africa. Here, the major influence is *jatra*. *Jatra* has been defined as an ancient Hindu religious ritual involving large numbers of people mainly from the lower strata of the Hindu caste system. Participation in the ritual has required a pilgrimage or journey to a certain place to express the greatness of God with the combination of eulogistic songs and dances. Gradually it evolved into a performative recreation for the lower caste Hindu and Muslim peasants of Bengal from which the ‘God’s eulogy and journey’ have disappeared with the passage of time.
From a number of theatre historians, it becomes evident that *jatra* right after its emergence turned into a mass religious ritual as is indicated by Ajitkumar Ghosh:

Shivtakur was the god of crops. The village peasant men and women used to express their allegiance to Shivtakur by their festive merriment in a place with songs and dances. . . . This is called the festival of Shiva. From this festival, we have the evolvement of drama and *jatra*. (7, my translation)

The features of mass ritual and celebration of the God of crop production are also traceable in the slightly earlier form of *Gombira*. The festival of *Gombira* was characterised by songs, dances and processions with various colourful dresses worn by the peasant men and women. In the *Gombira mondop*, or the central place of the festival, there are various comic performances of ghosts, monsters, Rama, Laksman, Hanuman, Shiva-Durga, and old characters who provided jocular shows via their caricature. Ghosh suggests that the festival of *Gombira* contains the later form of *jatra*.

*Jatra* has been described by the theatre historians of Indian West Bengal as falling breath of Hindu upper-caste taste when it started to perform “human-story” instead of the “god’s story” at the beginning of the
nineteenth century. The moment it came closer to the life of common men and women of Bengal, jatra started to include commonplace erotic khemta dance and aspects of common life. The historian Ajit Kumar Ghosh echoes upper-caste Hindu distaste more than one a half century later when he says:

*Jatra* of the period has vulgar and tasteless songs and caricature in its main body. The Muslim rule in Bengal had just ended. The Ingraj [British] has not taken over the rule completely. There was anarchy in the kingdom. In such a state, there cannot be any growth of lasting literature. . . . The *jatra* of the time largely helped to nurture the lowly taste of the lowly people. The last trace of taste and decency was lost. The perversion of *jatra* and literature of the period was to maintain a close relationship with the vulgarity. The *jatrawallahs* [practitioners of *jatra*] of the period with the loose story and weak acting forms aggravated the base and animal like taste of the lowly people. That was the forecast of the end. The people of Bengal cannot accept unnatural aesthetics for a long period. With the advent of British influence, people came closer to western education, and their taste and sense of aesthetics also started to change. They started to have control and higher sense of aesthetics. The Western style theatre opened that gate to good taste. (Ghosh, A 12, my translation)

Ghosh has expressed a class-specific assessment of the state of *jatra* as virtually changeless even over a century and a half. The invasion and establishment of foreign rulers are of no concern for him; rather they are natural and rational. Foreign rule has the potential to ensure order and the nurture of an aesthetic taste in keeping with a ‘real sense of high-class elegance.’ He has also indicated why *jatra* was discarded by the upper-castes of the nineteenth century. It is clearly shown that at the beginning
of the British rule jatra has been separated off into a theatre for the vast majority of village-Bengal.

Another literary historian, Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay has blamed Muslim rule in India for the degradation of jatra into a folk theatre. However, he also admits that the upper caste Hindus ceased to work with jatra (Bandyopadhyay 126, my translation) and allows that jatra as a folk form has continued to function even today amongst the lower-caste Hindu and Muslim peasants of East Bengal and present Bangladesh.

In its present form jatra is performed with western-style theatrical features of divisions of act and scene but without stage scenery. Expensive stage materials are not affordable since both the performers and spectators of jatra are of the same low socio-economic section of the population.

Jatra is the most popular recreational medium in Bangladesh and in the Indian sub-continent. The technological intrusion of the television, Hindi cinema of Bombay, and Bengali popular cinema have not been able to take away the mass audiences of villages. Though Ajitkumar Ghosh is
very critical about the so-called lack of urban sophistication of jatra, however, he admits that it is still the one and only successful medium:

It seems, the jatra and not the cinema, nor the Euro-style theatre provides our country’s true recreational pleasure. I am not talking about the town-dwellers, rather the social formation of the illiterate peasants and labouring masses. It is jatra, which provides recreational pleasure closer to their heart. (14, my translation)

II

Reception: English theatre in Bengal

At the beginning of the Bengali theatre (that is, drama of a ‘western literary' kind), there were a few stage theatres built by the British colonial officials living in Calcutta. The production in these theatres was not open to the common Bengali city dwellers. The British performers used to perform mainly for Calcutta’s European audience and the babus. The performance in a Western-style stage theatre stage was made popular by the British missionary educationists who trained native students in schools and colleges in which English was the medium of instruction. We have to give credit to the babus for the localisation of Western-style theatre. Bandyopadhyay writes:

Inspired by the dramatic production of the English men on regular proscenium stage a group of young Bengali took to acting. Starting with English plays and regular Bengali plays their acting became much popular with the contemporary. An Englishman, wherever he lives must have a coffee-house and a play-house; acting has become part of
their natural character. In Calcutta, right from the middle of the eighteenth century, they dedicated themselves to acting. The rich and the elite of our country, watched their histrionics, and wanted to have a theatre of their own. Erecting a stage was but a simple, logical next step. That was the beginning of the history of Bengali theatre. (127)

Such enthusiastic description, expressive of the reception of everything English as ideal and superior, embracing of English theatre to be expression of the newly acquired Western taste came to be clarified by the history of Bengali theatre. Throughout the nineteenth century, the babus have exercised their self-discovery in the new theatre. In using the new form to express opposition to imperial practices and in incorporating local cultural expressions, this class followed the appropriation typical of other postcolonial productions.

The incorporation of tales of the repression of the peasants in Bengali theatre is as old as the history of imperialism in the Indian subcontinent. There has been direct and indirect protests against the colonial oppression of the peasantry through the theatre, The Indigo Planting Mirror in 1870, and The Zamindar’s Mirror in 1873 are seminal examples (Mukul 41 - 57).

_The Indigo Planting Mirror_ is the translated title in English of a Bengali play _Nildarphan_ by a native Dinobandhu Mitra in 1872 by a British Missionary preacher, Father James Long. Father Long was
imprisoned and fined by the Calcutta administrative authorities of the British Raj because the play contained the tale of Bengal's peasant oppression by Kutials, or British Indigo planters and the protest against that oppression. This protest led predictably to the Dramatic Performance Control Bill passed by the British Parliament in 1876 on the eve of the declaration of Queen Victoria as the Queen-Empress of British India (Mukul 41-57, my translation).

The Dramatic Performance control Bill of 1876 in the name of “better control of public Dramatic Performance” categorised and prohibited those playtexts, which had the slightest possibility of inciting dissatisfaction against “the Government established by/in British India.” The Bill's punitive attention to “scandalous or defamatory” plays and performances had the effect of prohibiting any performance against the class interests of babus. The Bill has powerfully imposed restrictions on the performances so much so that there was never again any performance of peasant resistance even of Nildharpan’s stature until today. It may be mentioned here that the Dramatic Performance Control Bill works outside the four metropolitan areas of liberated and independent People’s Republic of Bangladesh at the moment. The playtext for a jatra performance in the

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7 The Dramatic Performance Control Bill of 1876 has controlled the performance in British India and later Pakistan from 1876 to 1975. It is only in 1975 being repelled by the legislation of the Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh. See appendix for the complete text of the Act.
countryside has to be certified by the Daroga or the Police Inspector before it can be performed.

Even in the first playtext containing protest against peasant oppression, *The Indigo Planting Mirror*, there is an overtone of elite appropriation in the critical reception of the text after one hundred years. In the critical commentary of the Ghosh edition, we see the specific historical event reinterpreted as part of a story of emergent nationalism by a modern intelligentsia:

An uprising of the whole nation took place one hundred years back that shook the country like an earthquake to its social and state foundation. Possibly that was the first national uprising. (Ghosh, A. 101, my translation)

. . . The rebellious voice expressed through *The Indigo Planting Mirror* is not lost with the time. It became a timeless protest against sorrow-violence of all time. (Ghosh, A. 104, my translation)

This distanced voice sounds patronising and corrects political material protest into liberal humanist idealism:

. . . The characters of poor peasants and the lower class people have been portrayed skillfully in *The Indigo Planting Mirror*. I do not know whether anywhere else the peasant characters like Thurap and Aduri [the maid servant] have been portrayed. Leaving his education and differences, Dinobandhu has taken them as his heart’s relatives. He has felt their open uncultured life’s every rhythm and gesture. Thurap is a poor landless peasant worker, yet he has no fear to stand face to face against the oppressive forces. He has no feeling for his own life. He has rescued Khetramoni once and Navinmadhab at other time endangering his own life. He has lost his hand, but he has revenged
with his teeth. He is not educated and liberal in mind like Navinmadhob [a rural elite character], he does not know the greatness of forgiveness, there is no value of appeal to him. He believes in the ancient law - eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. But underneath his angry ferocious revenge is the best of all human qualities - selfless self-sacrifice, pure loyalty to his master and loving humanity. (Ghosh, A. 107, my translation).

The Indigo Planting Mirror has guided the Bengali literature to realism. The eyes of the writer started to roam around the harsh hard ground of reality. From the floral Eden of idealism, he started to discover the real truth in the hut of the poor from the palace of the rich. Thurap, Raicharan, and Khetramoni have found kind listeners to tell their sorrowful stories to. (Ghosh, A. 104, my translation)

Ghosh takes away two main participants of the event, the peasant and the Kutial, to conflate it to an oppositional struggle between the whole Bengali nation and the British Raj. From the particular village voice, Ghosh moves to generalised abstraction of peasant consciousness as part of a timeless rebellion against abstract evil. Further evidence of appropriation is offered by his evaluation of characters. The peasants, the actual participants of the event of the Indigo rebellion, are described by their material belongings and by the standards of elite education of the period. In the last extract, it is quite obvious that the arrival of realism in Bengali literature is more important to Ghosh than the historical condition of the peasantry.
The use of literature as a means of shaping elite opinions to influence socio-cultural reforms only emerges as part of an urban imperial interaction with the native upper classes:

Calcutta was the capital of British India for 155 years out of 190 years of the total British rule. The Bengali Hindu wealthy and intellectual class has gladly accepted the British rule. This class tried to consolidate itself, and termed this effort as the Bengal’s renaissance. (Mukul 21, my translation)

In this context, we would expect the theatre to reflect the parasitic sense and sensibility of the babu, whether the content dealt directly with the audiences’ own class or with rural peasant life. As a result the art of the period in general expressed the universality of human life in the light of European enlightenment.

The Zamindar’s Mirror was written by Mir Musharaf Hussain with the background of the peasant uprising of 1872-74 against the extreme oppression by the Zamindars in the Sirajganj district of present Bangladesh:

The oppression is manifested in cruel exorbitant land taxes imposed on the peasantry by the Zamindars. Here it is necessary to describe the Zamindari oppression of the peasantry. The peasantry have rights over their land from the ancient period, they used to pay land taxes to the
representatives of Monarchs, Rajas, Maharajas, and to Nababs. But the whole system was changed within three decades of British rule in India. It started with the permanent settlement of 1793. The East India Company ordered the Zamindars to pay the company taxes up to the last farthing. If a particular Zamindar failed to pay the taxes in time, his Zamindari was auctioned. The company was not at all concerned by how the Zamindars have extracted this money from the peasantry. Quietly, the land ownership was transferred to Zamindars from the peasantry in the Indian states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. (Mukul 57, my translation)

As a result the Zamindars with the blessings of the Ingraj [the British Raj, the British East India Company] built mercenary latial [musclemen with sticks] forces drawn from the Bhojpuri, Nepali, and Pathan population. The violent oppression by this latial forces for almost 150 years of the peasantry of Bengal has been described as the cruelest chapter in the history. The peasantry was not passive, and they revolted against this inhuman oppression from time to time. History has supported that the peasantry rebelled when the oppression became unbearable. The peasantry of Bengal comprising Hindu, and Muslim have unitedly resisted the oppression. (Mukul 58, my translation)

The united Hindu-Muslim peasant uprising of Sirajganj from 1872-74 is the background incident for The Zamindar’s Mirror. The then Police Superintendent of Sirajganj reported the rebellion in his words, “as the Zamindars were collecting from the peasantry the excess taxes by looting and burning their houses, the peasants of the area have answered these oppressions by violent protest and gained success against the Zamindars. The peasantry of adjoining villages, with their crucial, and brave resistance, gave an example to the peasantry of other villages that they were capable of facing the oppression, and illegal demands of the Zamindars” (Mukul 59 - 60, my translation).

This peasant rebellion of Sirajganj of 1872-74 spread very quickly, and many terror-stricken Zamindars of the area had to flee to Calcutta city to save their lives. The British rulers were forced to understand the main reason for the peasant uprising. In 1885, the Praja [subject] Land Ownership Act reclaimed the peasant’s right over the land. This legislation also prohibited the raising of land taxes at the wishes of the

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8 Rajas are the Hindu kings. Maharajas are the Hindu great kings. Nababs are the Muslim rulers.
Zamindars, and it also stopped the uprooting of the tillers from the land. (Mukul 60, my translation)

With this background in mind if The Zamindar's Mirror is evaluated then it becomes obvious that the incident of the peasant rebellion has not appeared in the play directly. It shows how a characterless Zamindar of Sirajganj abducted a peasant young woman by force, raped, and killed her, The Zamindar's Mirror contains this tragic story. Though the incidents of peasant rebellion are absent from the play, yet the play expresses the then social situation, and the picture of corrupt administrative system of the Raj. The play portrays how one can get over the judicial system with social power, and money influencing the judgement in favour. The main message of the play was that Zamindars to whom the company has entrusted the administration have become corrupt. They have become characterless, and misusing their administrative power. The main purpose of the play was to reform the character of the Zamindar by drawing the attention of the British ruling power. (Mukul 65-6, my translation)

The detailed background and story outline of The Zamindar’s Mirror make it abundantly clear that the text indirectly depicts the oppression of the peasantry. For example, the playwright suggests the root reasons for the peasant uprising, and portrays the effect of oppressions. The elite of Calcutta was part of the land-owning rural Zamindar class and the playwright was part of this elite. As a result there is no direct inclusion of peasant rebellion in the play. Hence the elite playwright exploits the story of peasant sufferings to bring in reforms on the part of the elite who are themselves oppressors.
By virtue of its power over the written discourses, and in its class, social, and economic interest an elitist text only picks up that element which serves its purpose.

In the introduction to *The Zamindar’s Mirror*, the playwright, Mir Musharaf Hussain has written, “Own face could be judged critically when seen on a mirror neutrally, other’s face cannot be judged so accurately. I was born in a Zamindar family, and all my relatives are the Zamindars. Hence it does not take much efforts for me to draw a picture of the Zamindar.” (Mukul 67, my translation)

Rather than preach radical improvements, therefore the play takes the tax-extracting function of the infamous institution as a rational system that has to be continued for the ongoing march of the colonial machinery as a whole.

Nevertheless, within the narrow confines of the collaborationist elite, the play does have some radical force:

*About The Zamindar’s Mirror,* Dr Prabatkumar Goshami, a researcher of West Bengal has said, “It was a general trend of that time that in front of a British Judge, a British Doctor (they are personally known to each other) is giving a false report holding a Bible in hand. He shows how the girl was killed from the beastly rape, but in Doctor’s report, it has been said that “there was bleeding from the lower part of the female body,” “under her throat skin there are blood clots.” Even after saying this, the Doctor has declared that she died from brain disease, and the Judge is accepting this. On the other hand the Hindu agent of the Zamindar wearing the religious dress, giving false witness in front of the Judge, and the Judge is accepting this too. Above all the Police and the Police Station, all are in the Zamindar’s hand. In this situation is there any scope to hope for justice? Hence there is nothing left other than grave cry of lamentation, and it is natural that the
playwright will set the cry of lamentation for the actors and actresses keeping in accordance with the actuality of the day. The playwright has done that. He has enough sympathy for the oppressed subjects... he wants the end of violence and oppression. In the actress’ dialogue this compassion and hope is expressed:

Will there be end of sorrows of the poor
Will the golden chastity of the helpless maid be saved? (Mukul 66 - 67)

This political protest is, however, undercut by the play’s depiction of the peasantry as passively accepting the violence of one individual Zamindar.

In fact, the playwright can only resolve the situation by appealing to the Queen Empress Victoria to save her subjects. Here we see the difficulties forcing an elite playtext attempting to historicise the peasant rising in the peasant’s terms. In the context of elite historiography, Ranajit Guha writes this significant passage:

1. The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism-colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively. Elite historiography of the colonialist or neo-colonialist type counts British writers and institutions among its principal protagonists, but has its imitators in India and other countries too. Elitist historiography of the nationalist or neo-nationalist type is primarily an Indian practice but not without imitators in the ranks of liberal historians in Britain and elsewhere.

2. Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian national the development of the consciousness-nationalism—which informed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements (Guha Subaltern Studies 1: 1).

One thing this quotation draws our attention to is that the construction of a postcolonial national independence is effected by the same class as had
previously worked along side imperial rule. When the development of consciousness of nationalism is built on the elite claim that it has sole ownership, then it is not surprising that the subaltern is excluded from the post-independence arena as well. The governing principle of discourses is to uphold the ideology that ensures the continued domination of those holding material power.

**Class specific localisation of European drama**

Being realistic in nineteenth-century Bengali theatre implied some degree of radical outlook, even if only within literary experimentation. Even a playtext which aimed to put a little regulation on the acceptance of everything European or to include elements critical of the stratified caste system of Calcutta was considered radical. For example, in 1854, Ramnarayan Tarakratna [1822-86] in his *Kulin Kula Samasya* wanted to evoke a criticism of polygamy and other social changes that the upper-caste *kulins* or *babus* have been trying to actualise. The very first production of the text has brought an end to the theatrical career of Tarakratna. The *babus* were so furious that they did not allow the performance of the play again (Bandyapadya 130).
Bandyapadya introduces Michael Madhusudan Datta, the brilliant dramatist of the nineteenth century:

Even in his boyhood, Madhusudan acquired a remarkable proficiency in English. He could read, write and speak English like an Englishman. In his early youth he wrote poems in English, while in Madras he wrote an English play, Rezia, but it was never published. (131)

It is precisely this description which constitutes the key to an understanding of the nineteenth-century eulogist stance of the babus towards English and Englishman. The reason why Datta’s English play Rezia was not published lies in the nature of the upper-caste Hindu renaissance. It permitted Datta to be a Christian-Englishman and to remain a part of the new class of Hindu bourgeoisie. However, it did not allow him to write a play which celebrated the female Muslim ruler of India, Sultana Rezia. At the same time, the new rulers of India had been compassionate to the babus by not allowing the propagation of Christianity for more than half a century after the foundation of the British rule (Mukul 16, my translation). Thus, while Datta passionately believed the superiority of the Western dramatic form, so he was also rewriting Sanskrit plays such as his Sarmista in Bengali. Datta advocated the Western-style dramatic form because it permitted the
dramatisation of, “stern realities of life, lofty passion and heroism of sentiment” (Datta in Bandyapadya 132). The reality that he endeavoured to bring within the theatre was that of the stories of the *Mahabarat* and Kalidas’ *Sakuntalam* under the guise of modern Western-style and form.

In his social satires, he tried to reform the vices of the babus the alcoholism and lechery of the affluent section of the society. It was with the writing of such satires as *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhayata* and *Buro Saleker Ghare Ro* that Datta comes closer to his “stern social realities.” The satires have attacked excesses of native administrators and businessmen belonging to an emerging parasitic class of Calcutta that received Western education and cultural life. *Brahmins* [both babus and religious leaders] started to indulge in drinking, *baize*-dance [a kind of amorous female dance] and polygamy or keeping mistresses. The title *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhayata* suggests and questions the adoption of bad culture from Europe when English education was meant to civilise the ancient culture of India. However, in asking the babus to display moral uprightness based on values from Europe and India, Datta ensured the constraining caste stratification and domination of lower-caste Hindu and Muslim peasants of Bengal.
Revival of Hindu Nationalism

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century Western-educated babus rediscovered the Hindu self that had been down-trodden for eight hundred years of Muslim rule in India and initiated the momentum for national liberation. Ajit Kumar Ghosh says:

The open and liberal light of Western education has revealed the treasure of valuable stones before our eyes. The Bengali nation could understand that they are the children of a glorious nation. From that moment, they have started to feel urge to salvage their past glory, and gradually the art, and literature and politics have started to reflect the anger at being dominated and nation’s hopes and aspirations. This is the beginning of the nationalistic feeling of the Bengali nation. (126-7, my translation)

The babus came to represent the new Bengali nation, including the silent ninety-eight percent of rural Muslim and lower-caste Hindu peasants. The Bengali national revival was led by the religious sanatan [pure, original] caste rules of Hinduism. Obviously, the British Raj was cooperative in such a salvage mission. The reflection in drama of the babu nationalism turned into the quest for a Hindu hero to be set in the context of whole of India. To revive a Hindu heroism, the playwrights did not hesitate to distort history and to identify Rajput warriors as the Hindu national heroes.
By the 1890s, Bengali drama became the expression of Hindu pride and
glory of the past before the Muslim rule in India. Islam had been
embraced by the lower-caste Hindus in order to be liberated from caste
oppression. The new nationalism while unifying Hindu India against the
British, threatened to consolidate those forces Muslims sought to avoid.
Indeed, it was the glory of the caste system celebrated in the drama of the
period. Jotirendra Nath Thakur, brother of Rabindranath Tagore,
initiated the writing of history plays to salvage Hindu glory. The plays
mainly include confrontations between Hindu and Muslim. *The Annuls
and Antics of Rajasthan* by the Lieutenant Colonel Todd, the political
Agent of the East India Company for the western states of Rajputana,
whose aim was to glorify the Rajput heroes and to defame the Muslim
rule in India became prime source for the playwrights. It is pertinent to
quote Prabatkumar Mukopadyaya here:

. . . The oral songs which had been discarded by the historian Jadunath
Sarkar as the cock and bull story of a heroin-addict, Todd made this
story his source material. . . . At that time, Maber was destroyed by the
Maratha invasion, weakened by bad rule and made spineless by the
addiction for opium. (cited in Mukul 80, my translation)

In the pages of Todd’s book, there was poisonous portrayal of the eight
hundred years of Muslim rule and there was the past glory of Hindus.
He did not do that out of his love for the Rajputs. Rather, he wanted to
show that the British rule has liberated the Hindus. (Mukul 80, my
translation)
The collaboration between the Raj and the *babus* is here quite obvious. The Dramatic Performance Control Bill did not hinder such collaborative projects.

The caste Hindu revivalism continued to be represented in the beginning of the twentieth century. Ghirish Chandra Ghosh was the main theatrical exponent of the Hindu religion in original ancient form and he has ignored the Bengali Muslim majority of East Bengal. That was the period when Muslim Bengal came to realise that it was undergoing a process of cultural erasure, a condition that the British Raj wanted to surface in Indian colonial politics. As a result, at the beginning of the century, there was the great Partition of Bengal. The Bengalis of East Bengal for the first time voiced their protest against the *babus* of Calcutta. Ghirish Chandra Ghosh, the great theatre Director and practitioner of Bengal ventured to generate a feeling of unity for one Bengal to be loyal to his class interest.

The movement for the Partition of Bengal brought in the writing and production of history plays with the patronage of Bengali Muslims favoured the character of the last *Nabab* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa,
Sirajuddaula. There was a conscious conflation of Bengali nationality and Hindu revivalism in Ghirish Chandra Ghosh’s *Sirajuddaula*. It was a play calculated to generate support for Hindu-Muslim Bengali unity. The partition of Bengal movement to large extent was a desperate attempt by Muslim East Bengal to have the right to decide the future. Ajit Kumar Ghosh describes Ghirish Chandra’s play as “aimed at salvaging the historical truth with the perspectives of the nationalist Bengali historians” (195). Ajit Kumar Ghosh has also accused the playwright of falsely portraying the *Nabab* Sirajuddaula as “humble and caring for his subjects” (195). In this accusation Ajit Kumar Ghosh shows that the late 19th century and the late 20th century *babus* have similar antagonism to any positive depiction of Muslim India.

Digendra Lal Ray introduced modern European performance styles to Bengali theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century. Part of the creative trend of writing historical plays, Ray also brought in the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity in his plays as a response to the partition of Bengal. Ray has differed from his compatriots in his portrayal of strong female characters. Ajit Kumar Ghosh has described the portrayal of females as “close to the existing realities and Ray has done that from the modern
perspectives” (231). Though based on the mythical stories, his plays turn the characters of gods and goddesses into common human beings. The female character of *Pashani* [1900], the fallen character of *Ramayana*, has been placed on a morally upright platform. Ray accused the male characters of the play like Indra of common human desire and jealousy. In the play titled *Sita* [named after the female protagonist to foreground her sacrifice for Rama’s cause], her devotion is used to provoke disrespect for Rama.

Unlike his immediate predecessors, Ray has not used *The Annals of Rajasthan* to sing the glory of a Hindu past but to convey the message of Hindu-Muslim unity and a high notion of patriotism. *Protap Sinha* [1905] is the first of his plays of patriotism. The Rajput hero fights to save his kingdom inspired by his love for the Muslim Mogul woman Dawlotthunessa. In *Durgadas* [1906], Ray showed liberal learnings in having Muslim characters admire the Hindu hero’s valour. He even portrayed sympathetically the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb whom the Hindu historians have drawn as an anti-Hindu and a die-hard propagator of Islam. Although, he depicts the general eulogising of Hindu Rajput, *Maber Pothon* [1908] depicts Ray’s notion of
internationalism. The love between humans has become a song of unity between Amarsingh, the Rajput hero and Mogul Military commandant Mohabat Khan.

**Rabindranath Tagore’s drama: the liberation of spirits**

Tagore has depicted his concern with spirituality and his political philosophy of internationalism in his drama. As a result, his drama, like his lofty poetry of spirituality, has remained far removed from the mundane physical reality of his time. Even in his history plays, he never looked at the political turmoil of his time when at the end of First World War, there were the anti-British Quit India movement, *Swadeshi Andolan*, and the partition of Bengal movement. Tagore’s *Praishichtta*, for example, has the kingly characters only. The play largely depicts the internal family conflict within the palace. Kingly love and jealousy are its dramatic elements. The spiritual poetic world of divine rule by one God is offered as an escape from the kingly world of love and jealousy.

The earthly content of the play’s message has shown what makes a “bad king,” one who is in possession of bestial desire and strength. Ajit
Kumar Ghosh has argued that the play signaled the conflict of the time between antagonistic kingly power and the oppressed subject power (233). But he has failed to see that there was no signal to be discontented with the contemporary ‘kingly’ autocratic power of the British Raj. Rather, Tagore has portrayed his own dream of a spiritual wealthy kingly power.

_Aclolaythan_ (1918) symbolises the ideal spiritual unity of the Guru or spiritual leader. The social significance of the play suggests that our selves are bounded by the pride of knowledge and material wealth. The boundless spirit has the potential to break this static formation into a dynamic one.

Tagore supported the rule of the priest-king in _Mukthadhara_, a rule that has the ability to sustain human spirituality. The western industrial revolution and the concept of state and nationalism have upturned human spirituality. The dramatist’s message of spiritual liberation contradicts Ajitkumar’s claim that the play’s conflict is between Uttarkot and Shivtorai, where Dannojoy becomes the Mahatma Ghandi (234). Struggle depicted in the play is non-violent but it also resists materialism.
and works to transcend the boundaries of the states. It is the struggle to resist the power of pran or the spirit. In Rakthakorobi [1931], Tagore expressed his disillusionment with the industrial civilisation by depicting the human spirit in the bondage of automation. Kaler Jatra is spiritually sympathetic to the lower caste shudra. Tagore has showed that the time itself is moving by the force of shudras and he explains the Hindu religious justification that the god of hinya or mean lowly and pothithya or the fallen, implies that the caste is ordained by the religious belief in the rebirth, he locates Mahakalnath or the time God in the dust beneath the feet of the shudra. He implies, however, that the God is with the Hinya and shudra, and the shudras do not need to break the bondage of caste.

**Resistance in Bangladeshi as East Pakistani drama**

The forms of history play and farces for social reformation introduced by Datta (1824-1873) have ruled playwrights up to the Second World War. The use of history plays to arouse Hindu-Muslim communal consciousness was the major thematic concern to the end of Second World War. With the end of the Great War, the Dhaka-based
Bangladeshi playwrights brought in the western contemporary performance trend in both form and content.

About the Bengali situation in the East Bengal as East Pakistan, Azhar Islam says:

In 1947, the subcontinent was divided into two states. Accordingly, the Bengal with the majority of Muslim population became part of a different state. The then people of East Bengal have experienced the independence for the first time. Despite the experience of non-fulfilment in various aspects of life, the majority Bengali Muslims of this country have been inspired to cross the backwardness of the centuries; there was renewed vigour and enthusiasm in the workplace. That initiation is praiseworthy, but the history of the period says that within a few years of independence the people of East Pakistan were entrapped into a base conspiracy to suppress their political, economic, cultural and linguistic freedom. (12. my translation)

It was such a middle-class intellectual consciousness, which has been extended to embrace the consciousness of the whole population. The drama of the period consciously expressed the pain and disillusionment of the middle class of East Bengal at the loss of possibility of independence of the subcontinent. The literature as a whole rehearsed the discontentment and anger at the loss of new-found freedom in the conspiracy of the West Pakistani power group to entrap Bengalis in the constraints of new kind of colonialism.
The political scenario of Bangladesh during 1947 to 1971 was not conducive to freedom. Political power at the state level had been seized by the power blocs consisting of the West Pakistani ex-British soldiers, ex-British civil servants, and religion-based extreme right small political parties. In the new state, the military Generals have applied the repressive law left by the Raj with renewed enthusiasm.

The playwrights who have written against the repressive regimes and the culture that built up in Bangladesh had to use the form and content with fine subtlety. They have preferred to write symbolic drama to avoid the repressive laws. Bishwajit Ghosh comments about the consciousness of social and political reality of Sikandar Abu Jafar:

who has written the contemporary time in his play *Shokuanta Upakhayan* (1961) or *the vulture story*. In the symbolic implication of the birds, he has brought to the surface the conflict between good and evil. In this conflict the evil has been defeated. (287)

The evil is the new power bloc and the playwright has echoed the commotion against the war.

Jafar has also written a history play centred upon Sirajuddaula (1965) like his babu predecessors, Girish Chandra Ghosh and other history
playwrights. But this time appropriation of the historic material has not been aimed at insincere intention of the playwrights for the so called unity of Bengali Hindu and Muslim. The playwright has endeavoured to arouse a consciousness of strength and bravery of Siraj among the people of Bangladesh against the neo-colonial rule of military autocracy. He has expressed his message to revolt against the social oppression in his *Makorsha* or *The Spider* (1959).

The period between 1947 and 1971 has seen a rise of a politically conscious section of Dhaka-based Bengali elite of East Bengal. In this context, the conflict has mainly arisen from the collision of political and economic interests between dominant elites of East Bengal and West Pakistan. As a marked project to colonise East Bengal, the west Pakistani power group has denounced the Lahore Resolution of 1940 which outlined that the Muslim majority Eastern Bengal and part of Punjab, Sind, Beluchistan and North West Frontier Province will form Pakistan and the each wing will have independent and sovereign status. The denunciation of the resolution after the partition of Indian subcontinent has provided a status of province to East Bengal. The second step by the ruling regimes of Pakistan was the attempt to leave Bengali and to make
Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan. This ignominious attempt was confronted by the sacrifice of students and youth of various educational institutions of Dhaka. They are known as martyrs of the language movement of 1952.

Monir Chowdhury has written his play *Kobar* or *the Grave* to commemorate the language movement, the protest against the heinous attempt and the sacrifice of the language martyrs: Rafique, Salam, Barkat, Jabbar and numerous others. The play was written in 1953 and published in 1966. The time gap obviously speaks about the laws of the British Raj in practice to protect the honour of the state of Pakistan. Chowdhury has also written a history play based on the third battle of Panipat [1761] to express his anti-war consciousness. He has not used history to celebrate the communal consciousness as was done by his predecessors.

Said Ahmed has written a series of plays in the form of experimental and absurd theatre of the West. He has used symbols and allegory to portray the oppression by the imperialism and colonial powers. In his *Thrishnai*, he has expressed the repressive forces of colonialism, and the common people’s class struggle to be freed of oppression, and the pain of life.
East Bengal-based Bengali drama between 1947-1971 has features of contemporaneity, and political consciousness. The protest has been directed against the repressive political and economic policies by the West Pakistani ruling regimes. It has taken the forms of European Absurd and Impressionistic drama, using allegory and symbolism to survey the politico-cultural context.

Again, due to the continued application of the Dramatic Performance Control Bill by the autocratic military Governments of Pakistan, there was no significant development of protest drama during the period. Hence when the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh repealed the Act in 1975, it opened the possibilities of writing and performance of resistance works:

A. For the proper development of national culture, the Honourable President has waived the entertainment taxes on the performances of the amateur drama groups. Accordingly the Ministry of Finance has reformed The Bengal Amusement Act 1922 (Bengal Act V of 1922).

B. The scrutiny of the manuscript of a play is in practice at the moment. The Ministry of Information and Radio will work with the Ministry of Sports and Cultural Affairs to reform the Act No. 29 of 1876 (16th December 1876), An act for the better control of Dramatic performances. (Ghosh, B 297-8, my translation)
However, although the repeal of the Act opened scope for depiction of the organised resistance of peasant-workers, it did not occur because of class-specific appropriation of theatre by the elite.

**Theatre in the Post-liberated Bangladesh**

In 1970, there was a general Election, the first and last under the Pakistani state. The Awami League, the political party of East Bengal, won a massive landslide victory. The manifesto of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s party was to attain full autonomy for East Bengal. The Military regime backed by small political parties of West Pakistan refused to hand-over power to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s party. According to parliamentary law, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was supposed to form a national government of Pakistan. The Military General Yahiya Khan under the guidance of the politician, Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto sent regular armed forces to crush a national movement. The resistance war by the students, peasants, workers, intellectuals and politicians brought the occupation forces of West Pakistan to surrender on the 16th of December 1971. That was the beginning of People’s Republic of Bangladesh.
The war of liberation and the national liberation brought about the breakdown of the power of middle-class values. In the new situation, the middle class adjusted itself to have a passage to higher wealthy and powerful class of Bangladesh. There was a renewed zeal to avail themselves of the fruits of independence. In the theatre the change of atmosphere was quite remarkable. The plays were performed seasonally in pre-liberated Bangladesh. For the first time, popular theatre groups in Bangladesh started to perform in the permanent proscenium theatre, and the drive to localise Western forms accelerated. In the content, the playwrights have become more and more concerned with social reality. Majumdar’s comment about the drama in the post-liberated Bangladesh is worth noting:

Most of the plays were written about the contemporary society. The decay of moral values in the society, human frustration, merriment and festivity became the subject matter. (Majumdar cited in Ghosh, B 292, my translation)

The society he meant here is the urban middle-class one. It is the reality of this class that has been largely depicted in the plays.

The middle-class social values of the playwrights have conditioned their social consciousness. They have worked with a variety of western forms
such as forms of Brecht, Becket, Eugene Inesco and also explored the
Bengali medieval dramatic traditions. But the class-specific use of the
forms and subject matter has surfaced in most of the writings.

The war of liberation of 1971 became the predominant subject matter of
the drama. There was the possibility of representing the life struggle of
the great majority of commoners. There was a renewed commitment to
using the theatre for change to establish an exploitation-free society. The
realisation of all these possibilities again depended on the Dhaka-based
elite. To that we have to add the change of political power, the killing of
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and re-entrance of an anti-liberation force in the
guise of Military autocracy. As a result, the so called progressive section
of elite, in which I situate the playwrights of this study, to react against
those ominous forces. They are progressive in bringing the peasant-
workers within the playtexts, but they do not differ in the class-specific
celebration of liberation from the nineteenth-century *babus* of Calcutta.
3: Nuroldin: the appropriation of subaltern significance

In the previous chapter, we depicted contemporary Bangladeshi elite theatre as heir to the interests of the urban elite. But from the eighteenth-century Bengali theatre to the end of twentieth-century theatre in Dhaka, theatre was not always solely in the service of the elite. This chapter will supply an example of Haq’s appropriation of the story of a peasant leader and his rebellion of 1783 colonial Bengal to address indirectly the elite political issues of the 1980s.

The antagonistic polarisation of the peasant on the one hand and the East India Company-Zamindar-Mahajan alliance on the other had surfaced within three decades of the East India Company rule in Bengal. The Zamindar-Mahajan class was the supplementary local power group to the Raj. As a result, the history of resistance to the colonial oppression in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Bengal was one of peasant uprisings at
the primary level against the Zamindar-Mahajan class and indirectly against the Raj.

There were as many as 29 peasant uprisings against the zamindar, the mahajan, the East India Company and later the British Raj (Mukul 60, my translation). Nuroldin (as the name is spelled after the pronunciation of Nooruddin in the village tongue of Rangpur) was created as a peasant leader by the uprising of 1783. It was an organised resistance, even running a peasant government in the Rangpur district. The peasants under the leadership of Nuroldin stopped payment of taxes to the zamindars and subscribed to Nuroldin’s war of resistance. His resistance gained success in defeating the mercenary forces of the zamindars and mahajans. He was well aware of his strength and he never aimed at confrontation with the East India Company forces. His aim was to convey the message of peasant discontentment at the zamindari oppression, the primary oppression of his time. But the East India Company compelled Nuroldin to fight face-to-face with the Company forces. This confrontation resulted in the death of Nuroldin and the end of the Rangpur rebellion.
There was an internal conflict over the class transformation of the peasant leader. It arose from a section of peasants who wanted to see a *Nabab* in Nuroldin and his determination to remain a peasant-leader. These are the historical records from the history of Shuprokas Roy. This material from history has been developed into a playtext by Haq (58). The analysis of *Nuroldin* will describe the subaltern historiography that rewrites a colonial history of Bengal from the perspective of the peasants. Although, Haq used historiographical devices of salvaging the history of peasant, he appropriates the text in the elite political interest.

**The peasant insurgency of 1783 & dramatic underpinning**

For Foucault the fundamental problem is how we human beings come to understand ourselves, our understanding of ourselves depends on the construction of ourselves by history. In such a situation the validity and the very essence of human subjectivity are questioned by the historical questioning. Such a situation shows all our assumptions, categories and objectives are products of the history. So when we question the past we need not only to make ourselves our object of investigation but our methods and tools of knowing the past need to be critically questioned and analysed (Roberts 186).

This quotation shows the limits of Haq's project. He clearly questions the past, but he does not make clear how he has questioned his own relations to the subaltern, or the dramatic methods used to depict it. Haq's construction of “peasant-consciousness” as the insurgency in *Nuroldin* implies that he starts with rebel consciousness that springs from the
resistance to power. The “insurgency” as consciousness of the subaltern, Guha says,

informs the activity of the rural masses known as *jacquerie*, revolt, uprising etc. or to use their Indian designation - dhing, bidroha, ulgulan, hool, fituri and so on. (Guha, EAP 4) ⁹

Haq recovers the power relationship between agents starting from the resistant, subjugated, struggling with the agents of economic and political power. He presents a reconstruction of power relations from the perspective of the peasants. This aspect of the peasant consciousness will be revealed in the following discussion of the play’s internal structure. This is also required to understand how the internal structure of the play registers the conditions of original uprising in 1783.

The plot of *Nuroldin* progresses by a series of episodes, which test one consciousness by showing it in interaction with the opposite. The action moves through contrasting Red [subaltern] and Blue [collaborationist] interest as well as native and colonial forces. The action follows the uprising of peasants of Rangpur of 1783 and the encounter with the East

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⁹ Guha’s *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* is cited in my text as EAP with page reference following.
India Company officials. In the play’s world the notion of peasant consciousness of defiance turning into a consciousness of domination underpins the dramatic conflict. The obstacles to insurgent consciousness both inhibit and produce such a shift, and we need to identify what constitutes these obstacles and how they surface in the dramatic world of the peasantry.

In *Nuroldin*, female characters do not have fully fleshed out identities. Haq’s females are closer to the traditional role of being secondary to male pursuits. They are meant to represent an abstract mood, which is not complementary to the male serious pursuits. As in peasant rebellion, Ambia is related to a ‘harmful dream’, so in the company camp’s war against the rebels, Lisbeth is accused of distracting with her presence signifying sexual and emotional pursuits leading to the Company camp’s failure to curb the rebellion. Even though Lisbeth returns the accusation, yet she does so by showing the importance of her role as a traditional caregiver, and love-giving female.

Lisbeth is represented as female icon of the company whose presence is in no way secondary from the role of the male company officials. She
does not submit to self-abasement, rather she glorifies her role as a representative of white female in the initial colonisation of India. The failure of the Company in bringing the peasant rebellion under control is attributed to emotional conflict of two young Company officials, the Lieutenant Mcdonald, and Morris. Goodlad accuses Lisbeth with his sharp metaphoric terms, and points his finger of accusation directly to Lisbeth:

Goodlad: The company is having lot of troubles. To crush the dacoits [outlaws] in Rangpur is our main concern, you know that pretty well. Morris and Mcdonald are burdened with this great responsibility. Is it wise to make them jealous of one another? (xi.126-7)

He tries to place company’s failure to the emotional conflict of two young company officers and asks Lisbeth to turn away from them. Lisbeth does not accept his accusation. Her long speech made to Goodlad:

Lisbeth: When in this India, to the King’s scepter holding
Kingly persons of Britain, our stories will seem like fairy tales,
When in India there will not be mosquitoes, flies, malarial fever, and dysentery.
When there will be health, fat, and rosy skins,
Electric fan in summer, drinking fountain water, resort, hunting, leisure, landau,
Light-bearer-khanshama (cook) - Nukor (orderly)-
Ghulam [slave-servant] served this India in the near future, will be felt
like heaven on earth.
Then in our own country,
In archive, library, India house,
I know, some researcher will put aside the Company’s
dispatch, reports, memos,
Will search for some personal letters, diaries of whom?
Those women
Who came to this God forsaken land
Not on anything else, but depending on God’s mercy
Came here leaving their parents
Came as wife, as sweetheart, came as lonely white-bodied
female,
As only known flower to the company’s male tents. (xi.129)

Lisbeth’s speech points to her presence, which is emblematic of essential
in building the foundation of the East India Company in India. In the
context of the rebellion, Goodlad must not spend time in searching for
failure in wrong avenues; rather he must jump on Nuroldin with all the
forces, thus he can make himself immortal in history. Lisbeth is allowed
to assert her position in the colonisation of India. Though she is attacked
for creating insignificant barrier to the very important male camp of the
East India Company. Again the male-dominated colonising camp of the
East India Company does not fail to consider her role in the process of
colonisation as inferior and insignificant. By asserting her role in the
colonisation process, Lisbeth is allowed to break the silence of her
secondary position.
Conflict between body and consciousness

Hegemonic cultures work to reduce subaltern labour to an unthinking body. Nuroldin presents the conflict between body and consciousness as a sign of political and insurgent awakening. The conflict consists of characters’ urge to keep bodily comforts by preserving the status quo: Nuroldin is conscious of his father’s reduction to brute body as opposed to human speech and desire, his wife’s and peasants’ inability to conceive of new consciousness other than as a better form of status quo (Nabab) leaving them as more comfortable but still only as brutes/bodies.

The conflict between body and consciousness is reflected in the dramatic tensions that characterise Nuroldin. When the peasants celebrate their first victory over the zamindars and mahajans, they want the kind of material benefits that will turn their leader into a new kind of Nabab. Nuroldin resists this, and he is supported by his close associate, Abbas. In the traditional jatra form, Abbas is the embodiment of conscience or vivek. He represents the moral of a play. Shadon Bhattacharya describes the Vivek’s role in a jatra drama:

If choral songs and characters are not the main features of the Jatra drama then undoubtedly Vivek’s songs are the main features. (453, my translation)
In the performance on Western-style proscenium stage, it is this adopted device through which a playwright or a director can comment on the incidents of the performance. In this play Abbas is the conscience of reason who analyses every action for its cause and effect. He is against the dance of celebration by the Red Chorus. He opposes Nuroldin’s participation in such dance because it will turn a peasant leader to a 

*Nabab.* In fact Abbas stands for the playwright’s interventive position, indicative of what peasants should not do. They must refrain from a self-indulgent dance of apparent victory and from transforming Nuroldin into a substitute feudal overlord.

Abbas’s criticism of the *Nabab*-making-dance of the peasants sets him as the critic of the whole body of peasantry of Rangpur. This is further proved by his exchange of dialogue with the Blue Chorus. The Blue chorus is the collective of peasantry that betrayed the peasantry, and collaborated with the colonial system of domination. Here this collective of peasantry is that group who collaborates in cultivation of indigo with

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10 Literal meaning of the *Nabab* is a Muslim ruler in India before the British Raj. Here it means antagonistic attributes of the consciousness hostile to peasant.
the *Kutials* (British Indigo Planters or owners of Indigo plantations of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century rural Bengal). The Blue chorus is part of the original social order oppressing the peasantry and its privileges under colonialism are threatened by peasant revolt. The rising follows from the forced seizure of blue-land by the British Indigo Planters, and forced deployment of their labour in indigo cultivation.

There are as many as three instances of peasant rebellion against the forced deployment of land and labour, and destructive (destruction of villages by setting fire to houses, killing the male members of peasant families and rape of the female members by the Indigo planters) forces of the *Kutials* in 190 years of the British colonial rule in India. These are (a) the Indigo cultivators rebellion 1778-1800, (b) the movement of indigo rebellion 1830-1848, and (c) the indigo rebellion 1859-1861. These are organised, united and anti-repressive risings by the peasants. (Mukul 50, my translation)

In the context of the indigo rebellions of the British India, the blue chorus is the section of the peasantry, which participates actively with the *Kutials* in betraying the peasants’ cause. The British colonial machinery tried to weaken the indigenous resistance by co-opting a faction with offers of money and power. For example, when the East India Company took control of political rule of Bengal, it helped a section of the ruling dynasty against the last free non-Bengali Muslim ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1757, and installed a puppet regime in Bengal. This change gave the East India Company a kingmaker’s role, which in short time
gave the company an opportunity to become the ruler Ingraj (the British or white). The member of the ruling dynasty whose betrayal brought in colonisation of the Raj - Mir Jafar - became such an ignominious name in the subcontinent that even today no Muslim parent from rich or poor, high or low class will name their newly born son by that name (Kshetranath Bandyopadhyay in Chatterjee 18-19). Despite betrayal being hated throughout, the British colonial machinery always found a section to win over to collaborate with its cause. This is the story of ‘divide and rule policy’ in India. In the same vein in the context of Indigo rebellion, the Kutials always tried to diffuse the rebellions by supplying the collaborative with “full belly rice and milk” (iv.78) when the rebel peasants are starving. Here again, we see the play contrasting bodily comfort with a higher political consciousness.

Nuroldin's memory of his father is revealed as the tragic struggle to remain human with consciousness in confrontation with the repressive forces of domination. His father was locked into such a position – where there is no demarcating line between human and brute consciousness.

When, some time in the past, on a day,  
On a day, not a moon-lit night,  
The sun throws fire on the head.
Then Nuroldin was only a boy.
An eight nine year old, goes to the \textit{mokthob}\textsuperscript{11}
Eats, plays and roams around.
Swims in the Tista for whole day long
Picks the fruits and eats
Breaks the branches of the tree and smashes the flowers and flees away.
At night, he sleeps at the comfort of his father’s bed.
On some nights, he dreams of being flying in the blue of the sky like
the white king storks.
One morning, he prepares his books to go to the \textit{mokthob}.
His father calls him and says, ‘my boy Nuroldin, will it be fine if you
don’t go to the \textit{mokthob} today? Will you go to the field with me, my
boy?’
Hearing this, Nuroldin gives three jumps at the fun of not going to the
\textit{mokthob}.
If you don’t go to the \textit{mokthob}, that means no studies.
Your ear is saved from the \textit{osthad}\textsuperscript{12}.
Have as much fun as you can in the field for the whole daylong.
He goes dancing in front of his \textit{bap} [dad].
Carrying the plough on his shoulder, his \textit{bap} reaches the field.
After reaching the field, he still remembers his \textit{bap}’s voice; it sounded
so strange, as if in someone else’s voice his \textit{bap} says, ‘come here.’ He
calls his son, ‘Will not we be able to plough the field?
We, \textit{bap} and \textit{beta} [son] will plough the field today.
Come my boy, come.’
‘Tie the bulls with the plough then, \textit{baba},
and, show me how to plough, then I will be able to learn.’
So much fun, he can’t even bear a moment’s delay.
To push the plough seems to a great fun.
Suddenly, Nuroldin sees and gets surprise, he sees,
His \textit{bap} puts the \textit{jual} [the part of the plough to be tied with the neck of
the bull] around the neck,
Slowly, his \textit{bap} arranged the \textit{jual} around the neck.
Nuroldin ask at the end of his breath, ‘how can it be? Where is the
bull?’
‘\textit{Bap} is the new bull for the plough from today.’
Again Nuroldin asks crying,
‘\textit{Bapjan} [affectionate address of \textit{baba}], why you? Where is the bull?’

\textsuperscript{11} A rural school for the Islamic learning.

\textsuperscript{12} Teacher.
‘No bulls do I have now, sold the bulls to pay the taxes of the king somehow.’
Till today, Nuroldin can see that scene clearly,
The sun throws the fire on the head,
On the branch of a dead tree, a vulture sits and looks at them.
Underneath, the sharp metal of the plough tills the soil of the field.
His hands shakes and stops the plough,
His bap turns and shouts, ‘Naughty one,
If you stop again, then I will break your bones.’
Again Nuroldin holds the handle of the plough tightly,
Again, pulling the jual, bap goes plough the field
Bap goes ploughing bending the heaps,
The sun throws the fire at the midday.
Suddenly, with the jual on the neck, bap falls on the ground.
He groans in pain breaking the shoulder for a while,
Then, raising his head, looking with his eyes at the blue of the sky,
bapjan, my bap, cried out in the bull’s voice at the last moment.
The human cried out in the language of animal.
The vulture looks with surprise.
On the ground,
Nuroldin sees,
Not his bap, but a bull groans in pain,
Becomes still after a while,
Eyes fixed at the blue of the sky.
The vulture flies out in the restless wings,
Such a still bull lying on the ground, not a human.
Shouted, once, Nurol then,
He could hear,
His own voice has changed to the voice of a bull.
Then, then, the sun comes to his heart and throws the fire inside.
Suddenly, the vulture bites away the meat.
When? In the past, on a day.
(viii.108-109)

It provides a ‘fiery’ consciousness; Nuroldin is no longer caught in the
temptation of physical comfort to be a part of destructive forces of
domination. Drawing the memory, Nuroldin can only permit antagonism
to the brute forces of domination. The defiance in which Nuroldin
believes so firmly marks the only political identity for the peasants, which cannot be effaced by the temptation of becoming a *Nabab*.

The peasant’s desire to rise to the position of domination is a negative feature of rebel consciousness, a desire that sacrifices the subaltern cause for the material change, a position that gives rise to hostile attitude to what peasant rebel consciousness strive against. The gendered subaltern is related to this negative trait, relating female inferiority - these stereotypes of the gendered subaltern representation demonstrate pressure of playwright’s elite writing position, a convention in which a gendered rebel consciousness is not allowed to surface.

Nuroldin’s speech in scene vii expresses - a peasant’s dream, which is that of fulfillment of minimum requirements of existence. The scene invokes through Nuroldin a reading to locate and reinscribe a subject position in the confrontation between - control and insurgency, a peasant insurgency and counter insurgency, it is done by the externalised internal conflict of Nuroldin on his turning to a *Nabab* (an autocratic power institution). The dream of becoming a *Nabab* is harmful; this has been suggested through the anxiety of Nuroldin. Abbas’s reply to Nuroldin
suggests the opposition between human suffering, and natural extravagance of beauty and happiness. In such a situation Ambia, Nuroldin’s wife, dreams of becoming a queen, which is a harmful dream. The harmful human dream relates a character to the indifference of Nature to human sufferings symbolised by the full moon’s beauty:

Nuroldin: . . . the full moon walks
  Over the head, does not look down.
  My water of the Tista goes red with blood
  The full moon tramps the blue of the sky.
  My child cries alone in the deserted yard of my house
  The full moon, what bothers her?
  Not the full moon, the starving people
  Want the fragrance of the new rice,
  The Child’s face illumined like full moon
  Nothing more I want. (viii.102-3)

In fact, Haq inscribes the traditional patriarchal notion of femininity as indifferent and incompatible to the rebel consciousness. He combines the peasant’s desire to cross the subalternity, natural indifference to peasant sufferings, and the women as meant for traditional task such as to remain in the household and to be a refreshing sight at the household to the tired men. Therefore Ambia is allowed to have the dream of becoming a Rajrani [Queen]. That will bring no change in her role as a household beauty in a more decorative way.
In the character of Ambia, the embodiment of female inferiority speaks for negative attributes that only be ascribed to her. Her inferiority is related to the body in conflict with consciousness. Ambia describes her position in the following extract:

Ambia: After winning the war my husband came home
To celebrate that I need to wear a fire coloured sari [a garment for women in rural Bengal]
When you are going to bring a fire coloured sari?
I will visit the neighbours wearing that sari. (x.123)

In this man assigned world of Ambia, she can only dream of wearing a new sari, which can be possible by the material gain of the peasant rebellion. By the fierce outcry of condemnation she is thrown out of the peasant world of rebellion.

The fierce outcry against Ambia’s dream illustrates the rebel consciousness that must not accommodate such dream. Nuroldin invokes the sufferings of the peasants to provide a condemnation of any dream of passage to the dominant class. His fierce words to Ambia:

Nuroldin: Fire, fire.
Not in sari, in belly, belly.
Fire, fire is burning, here, in my belly,
In the belly of the peasant’s child.
Who weaves that fire coloured sari is naked,
he is naked,
Not a single thread around the skeleton body.
The fire coloured sari is snatched to the Company’s Kuti
The fire coloured sari burns in the belly of the weaver.
The fire coloured sari burns in flames all over Bangladesh.
You see at your heart’s content.
See, see, sitting idle, Ambia. (x.124)

The fire coloured sari as a metaphor signifies the eternal suffering of the peasantry in Bengal, the presence of this meaning of sufferings is essential that invokes the rebel consciousness, and at the same time it warns a peasant from betraying his or her own class.

There is a fine line between subordination and domination. When subornation is vindicated, we would expect domination. This universality of human behaviour divides the two positions, and to some degree it is responsible for continuation of subjugation and subordination. The conflict of rebel peasant turning Nabab as an internal conflict of Nuroldin is externalised in the internal level of Scene xiii. Abbas represents this notion, for Nuroldin’s passage to the oppressive class. Nuroldin’s vehement opposition to such accusation is suggested violently when “he presses strongly the lips of Abbas”. This is not true and it is suggested in the internal level by informing that the peasants are not fully prepared for any rising for a revolution. For the dramatic structure of the text the rebel consciousness is built strongly by a long speech of Nuroldin:
Nuroldin: I am waiting to see,
   In every mind, the fire of mine is burning.
I am waiting to see,
   Everyone’s fire burning all the thorns
I am waiting to see,
   Again rivers flowing full with water.
I am waiting to see,
   Again the Bengal’s chest is filled with alluvial soil.
I am waiting to see,
   Again the peasant ploughing the fields and sowing seeds.
I am waiting to see,
   Smell of new rices filling the country.
I am waiting to see,
   My cow is giving milk endlessly.
I am waiting to see,
   People are building houses without fear.
I am waiting to see,
   People have sweet soft dreams at night.
I am waiting to see,
   Hundreds of red shimul flowers blooming.
I am waiting to see,
   In my son’s hand there is future.
I am waiting to see,
   My daughter has good dreams. (xiii.135)

The divide between subordination and domination revalues the concept of throne by foregrounding *Nabab* and throne, which are to be avoided, as these will bring chain again. When breaking of chain means breaking the cycle of subordination or subalternity, then it marks an end to the human economic life cycle - a cycle that exploits the subaltern as an economic factor. By stereotyping as economic labour it extracts all that is life enhancing. Clearly subalternity is a fruit of economic explanation of life. Though colonisation starts with the territorial invasion - but it needs to be
manifested in exploitation of the population and subalternity is a trait or marker for the act of exploitation. Nuroldin wants to see the end of repressive domination from all types of thrones. He wants to see a future in which the basics of peasants’ existence are realised. By articulating his dream, Nuroldin contradicts the fear of his becoming a Nabab. A Nabab stands for renaming the peasant oppression, and this speech powerfully denies this accusation. This puzzling aspect of peasant rebellion is manipulated to suggest to the audience by invoking the danger that lies side by side in 1980s actuality of elite political life that the proper articulation of democracy works when the elite socio-cultural scenario is prepared to practice democracy otherwise it will lead to the violence of autocracy. Thus this scene represents the dramatist’s power to impose meaning on Nuroldin’s conflict.

Nuroldin: Abbas, come near,
Touch my forehead,
Touch here and see,
Sharp horn growing, growing.
See my knee gets powerful muscles,
See the wave of strength jumps in my body,
Goes away, goes now,
Voice shout,
Not in animal’s voice, but human tongue-
‘Hey everyone, rise, where you everyone.’ (xiii.137)

Nuroldin attains a transcendental voice that calls to rise with vigorous strength to face the brute force of domination. But Haq is too tactful to
insist upon the point. Despite his use of codes from the peasant world, yet
the speech reveals a voice. It also gives the elite audience a voice with
which they could identify the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At this
point of climax Nuroldin signifies a voice of rising against all the
antagonistic forces to Bengali Nationalism and democracy.

**The institutions of domination**

The identification of oppressive institutions occurs in long speeches
exchanged between Nuroldin and the Red Chorus. Nuroldin uses the
tropes of agitation to provoke unanimous condemnation of and rising to
resistance against the oppressive institutions such as the East India
Company, *gora* [white], Debi Singh [Moneylender], *Zamindar*, and
*Kutial* [British Indigo planter]. When all the machineries of oppression
are identified, Nuroldin lists them to inspire his followers to rise against
their intolerable lot:

*(Nuroldin)*

Get ready, ready, ready, ready, wake, and start up.
Look with careful eyes, listen with careful ears
listen carefully, brothers mine.
_Nabab_ Sirajuddaulah has been defeated at Plassey
The *gora* [white] company rules the country now.
The *gora* plays four tricks to rule seating on my chest.
Debi Singh extracts taxes tying ropes around my throat,
Tying the rope around my throat he declares
Pay the taxes with the bulls and cash money
Look at his tricks brothers mine
If you want to sell rice you have to go to Mahajan
I grow rice; I grow jute with blood-like sweat
The Mahajan buys rice with the price of his sweet wish,
I pay the taxes with the rice money, what is left for my child to eat?
The tiller goes again to the Mahajan to borrow
The tiller goes to the Zamindar again to borrow
The tiller goes to the Kutial to borrow
Admitting high interest rate, the tiller borrows rice.
How to pay back the borrowing? Again I borrow,
Given my cows and bull, given my land, given my land, given everything.
Writing away everything when I bring rice home
Oh my luck, the rice I brought home is not good enough for my hunger.

(iii.72)

The peasant had ownership of the land in pre-colonial Bengal, in 1793 the peasants’ right of ownership was taken away by the East India Company and entrusted to the Zamindars. This pushed the exploitation of the peasantry to an extreme limit. They used to pay land taxes directly to the ruler of the land in the pre-colonial Bengal (Chatterjee 36). The East India Company granted to a middle agency the ownership of land within decades from 1757. Thus it empowered a parasitic class, which was distanced from the actual production machineries of land, and labour and extracted increased revenue for quite a few shareholders of the peasant’s produce. It is abundantly clear that the peasant was the main lifeline of the whole colonial machinery starting from the Kutial, the Chakar [tea
planter] to the Queen Empress Victoria. In return, the peasant was not
granted with the minimum requirements of existence.

When the Red Chorus, the collective voice in favour of peasant rebellion,
accepts Nuroldin’s reasoning to fight against the zamindari and East India
Company forces with bamboo sticks it does so that the peasants have
nothing else to lose, they have lost their land, their wealth and kindred;
they cannot be afraid of any powers on the earth. Nuroldin suggests that
they must take up whatever arms they have. Their collective approval of
such action is signified by a lati-dance [bamboo stick dance] by the Red
chorus around Nuroldin.

Thomson, the Kutial of the East India Company is an Indigo plantation
owner. Haq’s inclusion of the Kutial in the play emphasises the
confrontation between the kutials and the peasants. A Kutial appeared in
Bengali theatre as far back as in 1872, in The Indigo Planting Mirror by
Dinabhandhu Mitra (Mukul 42, my translation). He signifies in Nuroldin,
an ever-increasing colonial desire for wealth, and for which he compels
the peasants to cultivate blood poisoning indigo instead of life saving rice.
When the play’s *Kutial* Thomson expresses concern about the imminent peasant rebellion, he does so with the knowledge of the cruel repression of the peasants that was not always realised by the British authorities.

About the functioning of the *Kutials* in Bengal, Ghosh writes:

> The Indigo planting *sahibs* used to compel the peasants to cultivate indigo with the pawn money and used to turn that into a forced bond. In most of the cases the peasants were forced to accept the pawn money against their will.

> . . . There was no way out for the unwilling peasants to avoid the cultivation of indigo. By physical repression, forgery or in any other way they used to impose the responsibility of bond on the peasants.

> . . . Bullets killed the peasants who opposed the indigo cultivation or the spear pierced through their chests, or they were kept in the lowly, narrow, dark suffocating storerooms.

> . . . Time and again, some villages and *bazaars* were looted and destroyed by the *kutials*. Daughters and wives were not spared. Quite often they were brought into the *Kuti* and kept in the stores. (Ghosh, A. 102, my translation)

Goodlad is the stage version of the East India Company’s revenue collector. He signifies the combination of power and revenue collection on which the colonisation is based on.

> Goodlad: Dear Morris, Company’s Revenue Supervisor, we have our own interests too. - To collect certain revenue. (v.83)

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13* Indigo factory and Bungalow of the *Kutial*. 
In metaphoric mode, Goodlad fears cobras, and Rangpur is the capital of cobras. When the institutionalised lust of the East India Company squeezes the very existence out of the peasantry, they react like cobras. The peasants are identified as if they move like snakes:

Goodlad: I know, in Rangpur, they roam around silently, and secretly. Their slippery black bodies suddenly becomes visible like lightning and disappear at the next moment. Now you will see something and in the next moment you will see they are hissing with flared tongues. (v.80-1)

Goodlad compares the other kind of natives with idle black dogs, signifying the elite-natives of Calcutta city. Among these two kinds of natives one is collaborative with British colonial rule, the other one is dangerous and close at hand:

     Goodlad: Rangpur is much more in distance from Calcutta, than India is from England. You have Fort William in Calcutta, here you are your own fort. (v.82)

The favourable native was the high-caste Hindu babu of Calcutta that is consisted of “petty-bourgeoisie, agent, merchant, and Zamindar. It is the collaborative supplementary force for the foundation of the British rule in India” (Mukul 14, my translation). With the change of ruler, from the local Muslim rulers to the British Raj, this Bengali high-caste Hindu realised that it would be the main indigenous beneficiary of the change of
ruler with the blessings of the Raj. Goodlad gives the valuation of this class in the play when he describes the oppositional nature of these two kinds of natives:

Goodlad: . . . The natives in Calcutta begs our favour, our kindness. Here [in Rangpur] if possible the natives want to revolt. (v.82)

The natives are not the Debi Singhs [the class of rural money-lenders who used to bribe the colonial officials with expensive gifts to carry out their money lending business] in Rangpur. In the colonial world of Bengal, these two groups, the colonial officials and local wealthy class are united in their common interest of accumulation of wealth. The peasants again generate all the wealth of these interested groups. As a result if there is any resistance to the colonial rule it comes from the peasants.

The East India Company was successful in overthrowing the last free ruler of Bengal Nabab Sirajuddaulah, with the help of local ruling collaborative section of 1750s Calcutta. Similarly the repressive agencies of the colonial India such as Kutials have picked up a section of peasantry to set up the cultivation of indigo in rural Bengal. The peasants who participated in this suicidal cultivation did so to meet the basic requirement of their living. This type of class betrayal is sometimes
required for survival. However, at the time of greater crisis like rebellion, the peasants normally unite to face their common enemy. This is reflected in the dance of Nuroldin in scene vi. This dance invokes the reconciliation with the peasants who betrayed the common cause of peasants by their participation in the cultivation of indigo. In order to signify total unity of the peasantry, there is a dance of acceptance by Nuroldin, which reconciles the peasants who have collaborated with the kutials, and betrayed the cause of the rebels. By singing and clapping, he persuades some of the collaborating peasants signified by the Blue Chorus to be part of the rebel peasantry. Their throwing off the blue dresses and wearing red dresses indicates this. Nuroldin’s agitating speech appeals to the peasant members of the Blue Chorus. He asks that if the peasants have drunk the milk of the mother earth, they must not contaminate it with the poison of Indigo.

Equally strategic is the public announcement by the Blue chorus, which represents the Company’s attitude to insurgent consciousness in Scene vii. The scene represents the dramatic impact of the heavy-handed dealing of the peasants by the Company. The announcement of the Blue
Chorus also makes obvious who is the owner of *Hukum* or whose rules prevail in the Eighteen-Century Bengal:

Blue Chorus: The creation belongs to the almighty creator  
The land belongs to the *Badshah* [Muslim ruler]  
The order, order, order is of the company. (vii.100)

The peasants are described as ‘outlaws’ and their rebellion is nothing but looting of common people’s property, and killing innocents. The outlaws are bringing in chaos in the orderly rule of the Company. By outlining the nature of punishment that awaits the outlaws the play structures the height of anti-rebel consciousness:

The Blue Chorus:  If it is learnt that in some village the dacoits took shelter - then that village will be charged with whole scale fine.  
If someone hides the whereabouts of the dacoits then that person will be sold as a slave.  
Every member of the dacoits’ family will be sold as slaves.  
If any dacoits is caught then he will be hanged.  
He will be hanged publicly in his own village.  
His dead body will hang until it finishes by rotting. (vii.101)

The announcement of severe punishments of the rebels represents the colonial degree of cruelty with which the East India Company tried to subdue the peasant rebellion.
The speech presented by Nuroldin to the East India Company officials exposes the reasons for peasant rebellion. Nuroldin starts with the history of colonisation of Bengal. He speaks about how the trader-\textit{Ingraj} [British, or White] became the ruler-\textit{Ingraj}. The ruling system introduced into the country is chaotic, as the \textit{Kazi} or judicial system the \textit{Ingraj} has introduced, has no judicial power over the rulers. At the top level, the \textit{Ingraj} appoints local rulers. All the oppositional forces to the peasants worked solely to collect revenue in various modes and methods. Nuroldin indicates one of the modes:

\begin{quote}
Nuroldin: Another day, I saw your friend Debi Singh standing in front of my house, 
   Never heard before, he asks for four times more taxes, 
   He asks in cash, he asks for fifty percent of the value in a \textit{taka} [unit of currency in Bengali] 
   If I can’t pay he takes everything by force, 
   Burns my house, we all cried in suffering. (vi.95)
\end{quote}

Debi Singh signifies a direct threat to the survival of the peasant in rural Bengal and we can easily trace his stereotypical class presence in today’s rural Bengal. As a representative of the money-lending class, Debi Singh’s mode of money lending and collection severely threatened the peasant, because to pay \textit{Zamindari} and Company taxes, the peasant was bound to borrow from the \textit{Mahajan}. Then for day to day requirements, the peasant borrows from the \textit{Mahajan}. The peasant pays back this loan
with all the produce of his field. The following fragment exposes this cycle of peasant oppression:

Nuroldin: Admitting one *taka*
interest in one *taka*, I
approached the *Mahajan*,
Written my land, as I am unable to pay back the loan,
Sold earthen pots, ploughs,
Sold my own son, sold my wife, they snatched my young girl,
Fled to the jungle, my great-great parents’ house became *gurusthan* [Muslim graveyard] and *shashan* [Hindu cremation spot],
My own yard, my land gone to the occupation of Satan.
After a long thought, and consulting everyone, I
am presenting this application on behalf of everyone,
To the Company, Company’s Collector, through you.
I am telling, my condition is beyond any bearing,
I cannot bear further.
You must redress my condition,
Please take away Debi Singh from this area immediately,
And, snatch away the whip of *Zamindar,*
And snatch away from the *Mahajan*, my interest on interest payment account book.
Give back my land from the indigo cultivation,
So that I can work justly, give back my house so that I can rest my head.
You must do these
You must do these in this month,
If this month exceeds, then we won’t be liable, to what my two hands do. (vi.96)

Nuroldin’s demand to the Collector of the East India Company expresses the unbearability of the repressive revenue collection. History writing and the elite theatrical power permit a much greater canvass that implies national movements and empowers the dramatist. When Nuroldin issues
his threat, he asserts peasant agency. The rebellion is meant to signify the attainment of responsibility of self-rule by the peasant:

Red Chorus: No more justice or redress is wanted from you.
Nuroldin: Say, Brothers, say,
Say all at a time-
My right in my own country.
Red Chorus: My right in my own country.
Nuroldin: Hey, we majur [labourer] and peasants give labour to our land. Our soil produces gold
You have no right to that gold. (vi.99)

By using the slogan “My right in my own country,” Haq explicitly identifies the peasant revolt with the politics of late 1970s and 1980s Bangladesh led by the national elite. It also underscores the centrality of the separate national identity of the East Bengalis during the partition. It was the dominant feature of progressive politics from 1947 to 1971. Through this slogan, there is an expression of frustration in becoming East Pakistanis which meant exclusion of one’s own right on the self. This interplay between past and present more importantly becomes an impassioned plea to resist the anti-Bengali politics of the 1970s and 1980s.

Thus, the text loses its hold on salvaging a history of subaltern revolt when it relates the peasant uprising to the nationalist opposition to the
Raj. The focus of history of colonisation on the change of ruling authority from the indigenous ruling class to the British colonisers may exclude the situation of the peasants. To be sure, the changeless socio-economic condition of the peasants follows their collective role as the provider of lifeline of colonisation to all dominant systems. To elide the rebellions of peasants as the Nationalist resistances against colonial rule is to empower elite and to make the resistances more powerful. Thus when a playwright from the elite position employs this strategy, such an act becomes class-specific for him/her. Seen in this light, Nuroldin engages this strategy.

The endangered time
To understand the textual dynamics of Nuroldin, we need to analyse the time when the play was staged in Bangladesh - the late 1970s and 1980s. First comes the liberation war of 1971 and its aftermath have become the predominant concerns for the intellectual elite of Bangladesh. To indicate the importance of the war, Feldman says:

A second feature around which the interests of Bangladesh emerge is the rape and mutilation of women and their kin, as well as the systematic murder of the country’s intellectual elite during the liberation struggle. . . . Moreover, the proximity of the liberation war experience, its horror and the belief that Partition and the language
movement were natural precursors to independence is supported by the finding that most social and political histories of Bangladesh offer only scant mention of the anti-colonial struggle and Partition in the 1940s (173).

There was an overwhelming quest to discover the resisting Bengali self in art, literature and history. There was an attempt to revive and re-flow the consciousness of resistance of freedom-loving Bengalis of East Bengal and now Bangladesh. The efforts are manifested in placement of the spirit of resistance in contemporary Bangladesh. The progressive elite intellectuals have rediscovered in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, “the best of all Bengalis” (Ghosh B 304, my translation), the symbol of Bengali Nationalism.

The euphoria of freedom was short-lived. The killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four other front-ranking Awami league leaders by a few junior non-regular Military officers put the Bangladeshi political scenario back to the days of Pakistani type Martial law. In the post-1975 Bangladesh, the military generals, Ziaur Rahman and Ershad reintroduced the politics of religions practiced in Pakistan of 1947 to 1971. The state principles of Secularism, Socialism, Democracy, and Nationalism introduced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were reversed to the Military-
religious formula of running corrupt reactionary governments with the socio-economic policies conducive to the rise of a business group who exploited the freedom guaranteed by the regimes. Feldman writes about the process of resistance to the Military and politics of religion:

Concurrent with the rise of communal violence in India in the early 1980s has been the struggle against the military regimes of Zia Rahman and General Ershad in Bangladesh, including challenges to the passage of the 8th Amendment in 1988 which redefined Bangladesh as an Islamic state. This Amendment, passed under General Ershad, was the culmination of an alliance formed between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, of Zia Rahman and the Islamist Party, Jamaat-e-Islam. Constructing political legitimacy under Zia included moving away from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s commitment to a secular state and lifting the sanctions on extremist religious parties with the passage of the 1977 constitutional amendment that substituted this commitment with the words, ‘absolute trust in Allah’. Under both military regimes there was an increasing representation of religious political parties with a recognised voice in political decision making under Ershad. (173-4)

Along with political rationalisation of Military autocracy by revival of politics with religion, these regimes gave licence to communalisation of Bengali national culture. The communalisation permits import of oposankskriti or bad culture from the Western consumer world in place of local cultural artifacts. For example, the regime of General Ziaur Rahman started to telecast the American television shows, which were vulgar and obscene from the Bengali cultural standpoint. There was a media projection of distortion of the history of liberation war of
Bangladesh. There was superimposed history, which wanted to deny the liberation of Bangladesh as a culmination of self-determination of Bengalis from 1947. The struggle that manifested in 1952’s Language movement was the indication of Bengali discontentment and to separate East Bengal from a fictitious religion based nationalism. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League became the two inseparable names in the realisation of Bangladesh. The media under Zia’s regime wanted to distort this history. In the analysis of Nuroldin, the description of “the endangered time” helps us to understand the discursive strategies of Haq.

**Self-conscious Exploits**

In a search for the self-conscious construction of peasant insurgent consciousness in the text, I begin with the playwright Haq’s project that is given expression and made real through the text. It is evident that the playwright expresses his pedagogic project to remind the nation of its past.\(^{14}\) The playwright’s elite subject position motivates him to relate the peasant uprising under the leadership of Nuroldin to all elite movements - the nationalist - anti British *Raj*, to the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh

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\(^{14}\) Haq has expressed his project to be realised in the text in the introductory note attached to the play.
against West Pakistan, as one platform, as a linear historical movement.

Haq proclaims in the introductory note to the play:

(Humbly presented)
Among my many commitments to myself, the most significant one is to write something in the dramatic form about the heroes of our soil. I have started that project with the writing of Nuroldin. The nation that forgets its past fails to build its future. I hope with writing of Nuroldin we will see in front of us those people’s heroes whom we have already forgotten and we will learn that the history of people’s insurgency is long and great - above all the movement of 1971 is not an isolated one. (Haq 58)

The “heroes of the soil” are the leaders of the people, both subaltern, and elite, who led the nationalist and anti-colonial movements against the British Raj. Thus, he relates peasant leaders to the elite leaders of anti-colonial movements. But the peasant insurgencies are primarily directed against the rural elites, or such as Zamindar and Mahajan. I contend that the playwright relates two different movements, and conflates these into one elite anti-colonial, nationalist movement. Such inclusion, or treatment, makes the peasant insurgency an elite struggle, which denies the purpose of peasant struggle. This is an example of epistemic violence.

The prologue opens with the monologue of Sutradar. This device is drawn from the ancient Indian dramatic tradition of Sanskrit. Sutradar is
an instance of the playwright’s intervention in the performance by outlining the moral or teaching of fable in performance of a text. If seen from this point of view, the following speech of Sutradar relates all the movements from 1783 peasant insurgency to contemporary elite-led movements for democracy as one platform, and conflates two different struggles: one for democracy at the state level, and one for the survival of the peasant. Obviously, the elite is empowered by such conflation, and the struggle of the peasants is distanced from its actual signification:

Sutradar: . . . Nuroldin’s home was in Rangpur [a district in Bangladesh]
Nuroldin called the people in Rangpur
In 1189 [1783 in Christian calendar]
Again the Bengal seems to remember Nuroldin
Seems to remember Nuroldin
When vultures come down to the golden Bengal
Nuroldin comes to memory
When my dreams are stolen
Nuroldin comes to memory
When in my own country blood flows down to earth from my body
In history’s every page. (Prologue. 60-1)

While the peasant rebellion of 1783 under the leadership of Nuroldin is invoked by “Nuroldin called the people in Rangpur”; the playwright emphasises its different function for the elite audience. Focusing on the power of the consciousness to rebel and on the collective feeling of necessity to protest the unjust, the playwright connects the consciousness
to the social function of the theatre, and this theatrical function makes Nuroldin’s presence a signifier of rising every time the nation is face to face with crisis. Such crisis may take the form of establishing democratic rights of the elite at the state level. The movements against the anti-force of political despotism is not an easy one, rather it becomes often bloody. Whatever the crisis may be the playwright needs the performative presence of Nuroldin to arouse the collectivity of the protest.

Sutradar: The tale of Nuroldin as if in the whole country
Like the hilly rivulet flooding away everything
The wretched rises with the hope
That again Nuroldin will come back to Bengal
Again Nuroldin one day in black full moon
Will call, “Rise, everyone, where you everyone?” (Prologue 61)

Sutradar does appeal imitating Nuroldin’s call, “Rise, everyone, where you everyone?” (Prologue). It is an appeal not to rise up against any oppressor of the peasants, but to voice their protest for the elite immediate purpose of restoring democracy at the state level. The audience is appealed to fight the collaborative forces, a part of the elite that has opposed the liberation movement, and to protest against the then Government of the late 1970s and 1980s which tried to rehabilitate the collaborators. Here it is pertinent to illuminate about the collaborative section of the elite of Bangladesh. This section surfaced prominently in Bangladesh from the
1971 war of liberation against West Pakistan. The traces of this section are easily be discerned from the British India. It is the faction that utilised the religious belief of the people as means to divide the Indian subcontinent. With partition of the subcontinent this section was the main beneficiary of the new religion-based state of Pakistan. The war of liberation is to come out of this religious state frame where religion is used to exploit. This faction directly opposed the war of liberation in its own interest. When in 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister in the liberated Bangladesh was killed; this faction was rehabilitated in the state machinery and other walks of life by the Military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad. Since the elite needs the consciousness to rise to face the crises, Nuroldin’s theatrical presence enables the playwright to arouse the audience to reset the democratic principles and abolish the collaborative faction.

The name ‘Nuroldin’ functions as a dense signifier for the audience. It is supposed to create a sense of urgency to protest against the despotic-dictatorial rule that the country is undergoing. It attacks the political process that rehabilitates the anti-people and anti-liberation faction of the country of 1970s, and 1980s. The people include both elite and subaltern,
but the political problem that is mentioned does not concern the peasantry. As the whole politico-cultural system is given to the elite, hence the elite problem is termed as the problem for the entire population. Again, the peasant insurgency that Nuroldin stands for is a metalepsis being used to appeal to an audience who are several steps removed from the peasantry of Bangladesh.

The metaleptic reading of Nuroldin as allegory bringing in the past is repeatedly suggested by the supra-structure of the play. The mise-en-scène changes, the sound of the bullhorn bugle takes the stage to the world of Nuroldin’s insurgency of 1783 [1191 in Bengali year] in Scene i as Sutradar exits. In the performance note to the scene, we are introduced to a constant sound of bullhorn bugle and we are introduced to two members of the Red Chorus, who are under the influence of a dream. In this dreamlike space they hear the voice of Nuroldin from the past, “Rise, everyone - hey where are you everyone?” (i.63)

Additionally, the parable of the contemporary democratically elected leader turning into a Nabab-like autocrat is given a performative articulation, which is circumscribed with the images of a dancer.
Descriptions of the process that makes a *Nabab* suggests that the allegory in the play also functions to surface the danger that lies at the edge of elite parliamentary democracy. The play makes such use of the figure of a dancer - its possibilities of dancing of its own, and dancing by the direction from others - the act of dance suggests that it is the elite who elect, and make a leader also possesses the dangerous power to push an elected leader into becoming a “*Nabab*.” The “*Nabab*” as a link to the peasant rebellion of 1783 illustrates a deadly chain that is going to take the democratic freedom.

Abbas: Whose fault? One who dances, or who directs the dancer?
Dance, brothers, dance, dance lifting him on your head,
Dance the *umal y dhumal* dance\(^\text{15}\),
Hold an umbrella over his head
Why just control yourself calling him a leader?
Why don’t you call him a *Nabab*?
Make him a *Nabab* on throne
- I don’t like that, nothing makes me happy. (iv.76)

The sarcastic rhetoric of Abbas suggests that there is a fine line between democracy and autocracy, the process that makes democratically elected popular leader can by the over-allegiance to that leader makes a despot.

\(^{15}\) A kind of folk dance in Bangladesh.
The audience is reminded of this danger. The audience should accept the solution:

Abbas: With patience - with patience make ulghullan [movement]
Let it take, brothers, one two, or three generations. (xiv.140)

It is with the concern to avoid Nabab making process that Abbas suggests to continue the democratic movements for generations. Since the democratic process moves on a fine line, the thoughtful and tireless movement for democratic norms proved to be a reasonable way to work with.

The play overtly refers to the killing of the head of state of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, for, as his killing suggests the anti-force of collaborators and autocracy to be established in power. He was an immensely popular leader who gave himself to the cause of Bangladesh, and led the country in its struggle to come out of the state frame of Pakistan. It was realised through a bloody war of liberation against the then despotic forces of the western wing of Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the liberated Bangladesh became an icon of Bengali nationalism. He is the first voice of freedom from the inception of British Raj in Bengal in 1757 which was made possible by overthrowing the last
free ruler of Bengal, *Nabab* Sirajuddaulah, by the local collaborators of the East India Company, so his killing is a threat to freedom. In *Nuroldin*, the entry of the first free voice is heralded by the inclusion of the slogan of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman:

> The gold of the golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh.  
> The gold of the golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh.  
> The gold of the golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh. (xiii.136)

The slogans of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman exemplify the threat the nation faces is equivalent to reinstallation of the colonising forces. In particular, it reflects the exploitation of the country’s resources by foreign powers. It reminds the audience about the fundamental danger of colonisation that does not allow the right of ownership on own wealth.

The contemporary relevance of the supra-structure of the play is also exemplified by the theme of the voice of freedom that gives birth to a hundred thousand voices of freedom. If thousands of voices originate from one single voice of freedom then the killing of Sheikh Mujibur

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16 During the 1970’s General election of people’s representatives to the National Assembly of Pakistan, first and last general election on the basis of adult franchise under the Pakistani state frame, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s Political party *Awami* [people’s] league’s slogan was to bring an end to transfer of capital from Bangladesh [the then East Pakistan] to West Pakistan.
Rahman, the founder leader of Bangladesh cannot bring an end to the elite struggle for freedom:

Nuroldin: . . . What should I think about, Abbas?
If I die, I don’t have repentance for that.
If I die, the life-force will not die.
If one Nuroldin departs,
Thousands of Nuroldins will come to Bengal. (xvi.139)

Again a democratically elected voice of freedom cannot turn into an autocrat, as he is one of the people. The message of the text suggests that Bengali nationalism is the unifying force to face the counter-liberation forces. If the future generations are raised with the ideals of Bengali nationalism then there will not be birth of the collaborators who signify transfer of wealth to their foreign masters.

**Crossing the consciousness**

Equally strategic is Haq’s expression of purpose of the peasant rebellion of 1783. The demand of the peasants from adjoining districts of Rangpur,
and their slogans indicate that Nuroldin stands for the total liberation of
the peasants from all the oppressive domination:

Slogans: We want liberation from Ingraj [the
East India company’s oppression]
We want liberation from Debi Sing
We want freedom, we want liberation. (xii.131)

These slogans animate the rebel consciousness to one unified demand of
the peasants from every village of Bengal. When the peasants’ slogans
demand liberation from all repressive domination, it is related to the
emblem of liberation, Nuroldin, and when the slogans term him as Nabab,
it foregrounds the inherent conflict of peasant’s subordination, and its
oppositional domination. Doyasil makes this dramatic conflict present by
mild contradiction to peasants’ slogan as suggesting Nuroldin as one of
them, and not a Nabab. The demand for basics of peasant existence and
survival are voiced by the slogans. It implies peasant rebellion ensures
peasants’ survival. But the addition of Nabab before Nuroldin implies the
end of the liberation; the short-lived liberation is going under the chain of
domination again. This conflict is detailed violently in Scene xii. Haq
regulates this meaning for his purpose as part of the elite theatrical
manifesto. The first democratically elected leader of Bangladesh, Sheikh
Mujibur Rahman in the 1970s could have led to become a Nabab like
tyrant, the elite audience must be cautious about it, the *Nabab* brings not the democratic freedom but the autocratic domination. This purpose of the play is indicated when Ghosh comments on the play:

To overcome the endangered time of Bangladesh in the post-liberation period, Syed Shamsul Haq has recovered the brave peasant leader of Rangpur, Nuroldin from the 200-year-old history. (Ghosh, B. 303, my translation)

The “endangered time” invokes the state structure that is undergoing a chaotic time and political uncertainty in the post-liberation period. It follows the threat of the anti-liberation faction, and Military autocratic rule that follows after the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

The dramatic end of the play is suggested by the culmination of rebel consciousness, but it never ends with the death of Nuroldin. It expresses itself in thousands of Nuroldins. Nuroldin’s final prayer:

My house in this country which has Himalayas on the north  
Let the people be upstand like the Himalayas.  
My house in this country which has Bay of Bengal on the south,  
Let people’s voice burst like the Bay of Bengal.  
My house in this country which has the Brahmaputra on the east,  
Let people’s blood jump like the Brahmaputra.  
My house in this country which has hilly soil on the west,  
Let the people’s fort be strong like the hilly soil. (xvi.139)

When Nuroldin prays, his prayer invokes the collective sense of Bengali nationality, a site populated with upright, voice, vibrant, strong defenders
of the national freedom. Elite and peasant are linked together by the peasant rebel consciousness. The endless consciousness moves unto eternity, this suggestion ends the play. Abbas speaks about “ulghullan” [movement, revolution], the successful revolution will not come easily, but the preparation for such “ulghullan” is important, even if it takes few generations. The “preparation for ulghullan” illustrates the perilous path to the democracy at the state level, which may not be attained in one generation.

Throughout the play, Haq is consistent in his presentation of peasant rebel consciousness as indicative of a later elite consciousness of anti-Pakistani subversion. He uses the peasant character Nuroldin as a representative example of the voice of freedom. Certainly, if Haq is writing on an allegorical level, as he appears to be, the peasant rebel consciousness is an appropriate focus - historically [subaltern historiographically] only peasants have resisted colonial rule in Bengal as they were the principal group experiencing exploitation. However, a recovery of the peasant past as restoration of a subaltern subject seems to be of little concern to Haq, for he appropriates the subaltern material as vehicle for realising his contemporary meaning.
4: Footfalls: appropriation of the war of liberation

The Bangladeshi war of liberation of 1971 was characterised by mass participation when West Pakistani occupation forces started their orgy of mass murder and provoked the resistance that was built by the students, peasant-workers, intellectuals, soldiers - in a word the whole Bengali nation. The claim for power at the state level of Pakistan with the mandate of the majority, the empowered Awami League and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was answered with bullets and when the people of East Bengal realised that the West Pakistani Military Generals would never hand over the power to people’s representatives, the war of liberation was aimed at total liberation of Bangladesh with establishment of a secular, democratic state, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The dream of an independent secular state of Bangladesh surfaced right after the partition of Sub-continent in 1948. The disillusioned Bengalis of East Bengal realised that a kind of unnatural exploitation of its politics and economics in the name of Pakistani nationalism had replaced the British imperialism. This is why, the history of 1947 to 1971 is the struggle of East Bengalis to
bring a kind of order by establishing democracy and power of the masses in the unnatural state frame of Pakistan as it was formed with the nationalism based on religion. The war of liberation is the culmination of the effort, in the face of Military guns, to uphold the East Bengal’s democratic Ballot victory. In March 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and East Bengal became one to face the West Pakistani forces. This war involved India in humanitarian support during the mass exodus and military support involving a full-fledged war against Pakistan. In the larger super power level, Bangladesh was supported by the former Soviet Union, and Pakistan was pushed forward to mass murder by the United States and People’s Republic of China. Haq has situated this war in a village of Bangladesh in *Footfalls*. This chapter will provide an understanding of how it intersects with national and international frameworks. It will also address the gender issues in the play. This chapter is the smallest of three written on the selected playtexts. This is because the text of the chapter deals with a limited number of issues in comparison to other two texts.

The war of liberation of Bangladesh started when the West Pakistani military regime of President General Yahiya Khan decided not to hand
over the power to the elected people’s representatives under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the then East Pakistan who had absolute majority in the national Assembly of Pakistan, and cracked down on the civilian population with already mobilised military forces in all the major cities of Bangladesh. The occupation forces started their massacre of students, intellectuals, and common city dwellers in Dhaka on the 25th March in 1971. Gradually, this genocide spread all over Bangladesh. During the nine-month-long occupation of Bangladesh the West Pakistani forces killed three million people. More than ninety percent of this mass murder comprised the killing of peasant-workers of Bangladesh. For the last three decades the debate amongst the political parties of Bangladesh mainly centred around which section of the elite participated in the war of liberation and which section was antagonistic in its role. In this debate, there is very little discussion about the peasant-workers’ sacrifice and contribution in the liberation of Bangladesh, or any effort by the military Governments of 1980s to make the peasant workers of rural Bangladesh the beneficiary of liberation. When in the play the Villagers ask Mathobbor about their safety on the eve of liberation, the collective voice
specially asks the elite audience to recognise the contribution of the Villagers in the war against occupation.

Here if we explain the event of liberation war of Bangladesh with the postcolonial markers of resistance and decolonisation, we will miss the historical and cultural specificities. A detailed reading will show how dramatisation of a representative incident indicates the working of power groups, both colonisers and elite, is oppressive of the majority of the population, and that colonial oppression continued in the internal power situation after two independence struggles.

**Subaltern & Elite in Footfalls**

*Footfalls* solves the debate about writing the story of liberation war highlighting the mass participation by foregrounding the realistic time and space, populating the play’s stage with the villagers. Their reaction to the uncertain near future, that is going to befall them, features their concerns. This is both the setting and one of the themes of the play. As a
setting it physicalises the fear of the Villagers that puzzles them because of their role during the liberation war. It was influenced by Mathobbor’s role and forced participation with the occupation forces. It is mostly a fearsome reality for the Villagers; their existence is at the brink of collapse. Throughout the period the villagers have guarded the villages from the possible intrusion of the Freedom fighters to carry out the orders of Mathobbor - whenever they found somebody suspicious in their villages they have handed the suspects to Mathobbor’s forces.¹⁷ They clearly understood that some of the suspects had been killed, yet they did not dare to question the acts of Mathobbor. This social system is an evolution of the relationship between peasants and zamindar, in which the land ownership was granted to the high caste Hindus to have control over the labour and land of rural Bengal by the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 by the East India Company (Dharwadker 81-82). The abolition of the Zamindari by post-independence Government of Pakistan in 1950s did not mean the transfer of land ownership to the peasants. Rather, it

¹⁷ During the war of Liberation, the freedom fighters comprising youth, students and peasant-workers took shelter in the Indian territory. To conduct the guerrilla warfare against the occupation forces they used to enter into Bangladeshi territory.
meant the transfer of ownership of land to the middle land owning groups. Mathobbor of the play is a representative of that class.

Because of this forced subordination that characterises the relationship between the Villagers and Mathobbor, they are entrapped in an imminent fearsome, and uncertain future. The fear of the Villagers is expressed by the rumour that the freedom fighters are going to liberate the villages from the occupation forces of West Pakistan. The Villagers, who normally depended for their safety on Mathobbor, now want assurance of their safety from him. While to participate with Mathobbor is to go against the cause of liberation by collaboration with the occupation forces, their questioning of him about their future figures them on the role in favour of liberation in other words to question the collaborative role of Mathobbor. By condemnation of their own role under the subordination of Mathobbor, Haq suggests that the Villagers could overcome their ignominious role during the liberation war.

The Villagers are presented as a collective voice that could be of any Bangladeshi village. The play’s world is crowded with at least twenty villagers to suggest the rural masses. They form a chorus representing the teeming millions who invested their labour for the lifeline of the whole population of Bangladesh of 1971. The playwright’s gaze defines the villagers of 1971 as he says in the stage direction to the play:
The number of villagers on the stage is to be decided according to the requirement, but there must be male and female villagers of various age groups. At least twenty villagers will be an ideal number on the stage. I imagine at least one female villager who is nearing 100 years, and another who is at least ninety. . . . The role of off-stage-sound of rhythmic footsteps and the regulated lighting on stage is a must as the characters in the play. The off-stage-sound must start to rise in scale with the entrance of Mathobbor’s Daughter and must reach the climax. . . . There will be a musical sequence of flute and country-drum from back of the curtain; it gives the effect of beats of a heart or the footfalls of many nearing gradually. (13)

The stage direction suggests the mass participation of the villagers in the liberation war against the West Pakistani occupation forces. It was essentially a war of the villagers as it was thrust upon them with the atrocities of the West Pakistani forces. Their participation and sacrifice are indicated by the fact that more than 90 percent of 3 million killed by the occupation forces were villagers.

The characters of Mathobbor and Pir constitute the power group of the village. These characters are the representatives of the rural power group of Bangladesh in general. The character of Mathobbor signifies the economic and social power in the village. Pir has domination in the spirituality of the villagers. Mathobbor goes on wittily to suggest that they share the power in the village:
MATHOBBOR [to Pir]:
In heart, you are in favour or against me
You are not the soul
To deny the truth, everyone knows.
They also know
For three generations, your father, grandfather
All being sustained by my family.
But, I must tell you
As always I looked after your worldly existence
You have also looked me after.
Is n’t it true?
The religious and spiritual priests of your family
Have bestowed their blessings on our generations
Is n’t it true?
Taken-given, Given-taken.
Now at this dark time
We two are under one umbrella
All others have no umbrella. (34)

Mathobbor’s speech sets forth the institutionalisation of power in rural Bangladesh. It indicates the power of domination of the rural power group represented by Mathobbor and Pir as supplementary to each other, their mutual dependence signifies that by virtue of his birth, Mathobbor can subordinate the affairs of the villagers in deployment of their labour to increase and accumulation of his wealth which he does because of his ownership of land and other production machineries. Pir, with his power of regulation of the religious and spiritual belief of the villagers, directs their allegiance to the continuation of power of Mathobbor to regulate their everyday life.
This power group of village-Bangladesh has played the role of anti-force to the mass struggle against the occupation forces of West Pakistan; the role of this class is stereotypical of enemies of the villagers and in the war in general. In this role they have helped the occupation forces in killing freedom fighters. They have provided food and other supplies to the occupation forces. This class is also responsible for justifying killing of millions of Bangladeshis with the religious explanation that the freedom fighters are the agents of non-believers, and India. This explanation as the main undercurrent has been put forward by the West Pakistanis in waging a war against Bengalis:

This is a war between the pure and the impure. . . . The people [East Bengalis] may have Muslim names and call themselves Muslims. But they are Hindu at heart. . . . We are sorting them out. . . . Those who are left will be real Muslims. (Mascarenhas cited in Feldman 179)

In the play, Mathobbor is the pure Muslim who has participated in the massacre of his own impure kin.

By this collective representative character of the Villagers the dramatist actively tries to recover their resentment at the forced participation with the occupation forces.
THE VILLAGERS::
Salamalekum, Salamalekum 18
No one can sleep in peace
Loo wind is blowing away the fields
Quite a few of them are telling
Look the Freedom Fighters marching in from the east
Swimming through the Jamuna, definitely
They will come today or by tomorrow, definitely,
Deep inside in every one's heart
Something like a blind animal jumps in everyone's heart
Eats their hearts
No one can abstain from looking around,
All the youths, olds, wives and peasants of all the villages, all around
Came to you. Tell us what to do?
We obey you as our father and mother, you told us
Keep away from the freedom Fighters, you told us
Though they are our children and brothers dear
Yet they are agents of our enemies, you told us
Keep no relation with the Freedom Fighters,
They want to hand over this country to our enemies,
you told us
What to do now?
Today or by tomorrow they will march in. (18)

Vivid images of entrapped scenario and darkness of sufferings transform
the villagers as the forced participants in the cause of Mathobbor. The
imminent liberation enables the Villagers to be active in assertion of their
disapproval of Mathobbor. Their collective defiance to Mathobbor’s
cause is expressed by the role of a judge at the end of war when the
freedom fighters are approaching the village.

18 Be peace with you in Arabic.
**Power added value**

If we focus our attention to the representation of how a subaltern group confronts the value, the “element which permits dominant classes to subjugate subordinate classes with a minimum use of power” (Hardiman 217), and if we apply this notion to *Footfalls*, we see that, in the representation of the relationships between Mathobbor, Pir and the Villagers, Haq, presents the project of Villagers realising the collaboration of local elites and regain the possibility of their active act to overthrow the vested interests in the name of national liberation. Haq here exposes the relationship of power of Mathobbor with the Villagers by their dependence on him for their safety in the imminent danger. More specifically, the power structure that works in rural Bangladesh is exposed by the encounter among these three sets of characters. The structure consists of economic and political power represented by Mathobbor and the spiritual power of guidance to be loyal to the power of Mathobbor represented by Pir. Mathobbor tells Pir, “Unseen otherworldly affairs are in your hand, mine is worldly affairs,” (22). He invokes the sense of rural power structure based on the ownership of land
and production machinery backed by religious rationalisation of the social structure.

In his desperation, Mathobbor tries to win back the power of domination back on the Villagers by asking them to surrender to the will of God, the Villagers do not accept his logic of Allah’s ways to Mankind:

THE VILLAGERS:: You made Allah responsible for everything, as if a
Human being has nothing to do in the world,
He gave us hands, intelligence and conscience
And told to create thy own fate.
Never confine to the house, said Prophet Mustafa
Leaving your own efforts, said Prophet Mustafa
He migrated to Medina from Mecca, Prophet Mustafa
One has to be steadfast in efforts; it’s his words. (25)

The severe words of the Villagers disrupt the very base of the rural power structure. Mathobbor tries further to terrorise them by describing their act as a blasphemy which questions their belief in the oneness of Allah. He invokes the century-old rationalisation of the dominant classes which uses the religious belief of the Villagers to construct the subordinated groups in their location, and if somebody tries to analyse this situation then it is an act of blasphemy. The religious explanation terms poverty, famine, and sufferings of the peasants in rural Bangladesh as divine intervention. The natural calamities are inflicted from above and those who suffer are
pre-ordained by the divine. Similarly, the rich and the poor are the divine creation. The main purpose of such an explanation is that the peasants must not be discontented with the rich and powerful, rather, accept the catastrophes stoically.

**Vehicle for greater meaning**

The thematic strand in the play, the historicisation of the war of liberation comes under the event that purges the Villagers of their guilt from the forced involvement with the anti-force of liberation war, they are able to do that by passing their judgement of death sentence on Mathobbor and by his execution. This act has potential to be used for writing the Bengali nation’s participation and sacrifice for the better future. The entrapped and enforced participation with the occupation forces by the Villagers symbolises the entrapped population of Bangladesh during the nine-month’s war of liberation. Mathobbor symbolises the reactionary elite of the nation that has co-operated with the occupation forces in killing their own people, intellectuals, freedom fighters and peasant-workers. The
killing of Mathobbor is thus becomes an act of purgation of the guilt for the whole nation:

THE VILLAGERS::It is required. There is urgency. Not so much as an evildoer you will give your life, More than that, for we allowed you to be an evil-doer For that, we want your death today. If not your blood wets the village-road Then how people will walk with their heads erect on the village road? (54)

The symbolism of this act provides the dramatist to write off that part of disgrace in the event of liberation war when he extends the particular nameless village of the play to link with larger frame of the whole country. It is the shame of collaboration with the occupation forces of West Pakistan by the extremist religious parties such as Jamaat-e-Islam and The Muslim league. The paramilitary forces formed by the members of these political parties are largely responsible for the killing of Bangladeshi intellectuals in the war.

PYEK:: This way, all come this way now Let me show you all then, In what nightmare everyone was When cruel despot had rule Hundreds of kin were killed by that rule. Come this way, all come this way now Let me show you how when How many Military troops made camp here Who collaborated with them then? (55)
When the actual entrapped scenario of Bangladesh is vividly described, an extended depiction of entire Bangladesh is brought into focus. The nightmarish entrapment, cruel despotic rule, and killing of kin illustrate the entrapped Bangladesh during the war of liberation.

The male-dominated play’s world has its only female figure named in terms of her relationship with her father, Mathobbor’s Daughter. This identity of the female figure in the play is also reinforced by making her a part of the symbol of total sacrifice and tribulation of the whole nation. In the liberated Bangladesh, the female sacrifice is viewed in terms of rape and loss of chastity in the hand of barbaric forces of West Pakistan. The Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh termed such female victims of war as Birangona or heroic female to exonerate the female victims of rape. The word Biragona is supposed to hide the shame of the nation in its inability to save the chastity of the victimised female in the war of liberation.

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19 The literal meaning of the word is the heroic female who lives in the confinement of the yard of a household.
Of course, the character Daughter does not have a fully fleshed-out identity; rather, she embodies the Birangona or the female sacrifice of the nation in the war of liberation. She is not a name. She is an unmarried daughter of Mathobbor. She is identifiable by this title, a girl confined to the household of Mathobbor. She had a little religious education from the village religious or spiritual leader. When she enters the stage, her entrance marks a defiance of the male standard of purdah or the veil. Her painful questions to the Villagers:

DAUGHTER:: Yes.
Telling you all present, believe me
My baba [dad] is telling the truth
Military [member of the west Pakistani force] came to this house yesterday.
There is no mistake in it
No doubt about it
That he himself came yesterday.
As human leave footprint on path
Like that there is the footprint
As flood-water leaves alluvial soil on banks
Like wise there is alluvial soil
As cold winter night leaves dew on leaves of tree
Likewise there is dew.
That there is not a single letter lie that he came yesterday.
But you ask
You ask my baba. (39-40)

Her questions to the Villagers in metaphoric language reveals what painful loss she is undergoing from the night before when the West Pakistani Military Captain took her virginity. However when the
Daughter’s chastity is lost, she is allowed to show her anger and sorrow in front of the Villagers. In contrast to her anger and accusation, Mathobbor tries hopelessly assuage his guilt by describing her as abnormal and being possessed by an evil spirit. He also appeals to his daughter as a father not to reveal the truth of how he gave his own daughter to the Captain. Nevertheless, Mathobbor does not find any ground to defend himself in front of the Villagers and his daughter’s accusation. When he tries to dismiss the proposed arranged marriage of his daughter with the School teacher on the ground that the teacher has joined the *Mukthi Bahini* [liberation army], the Villagers reject Mathobbor’s reasoning and want to know details about how he has given his daughter to the Military Captain in marriage without observing the Islamic rules:

THE VILLAGERS:: Mathobbor shaheb, we want to know everything clearly.
One who encourages others to have courage
Had his own house-hold being eaten by the time-mouse.
When fearsome darkness is approaching
When head of state can save all
When all eyes on him
If he fails to assure of safety with courage
If he can’t utter nothing than empty words.
Then the empty sandy shores of the Jamuna emerges
In everyone’s mind. Then all of a sudden if we hear
Our head is shelterless himself
That pleases our mind
If not in good luck but in bad luck
We are equal.
Tell, tell us clearly.
When did it happen with your daughter?
When did the Captain flee with your honour and chastity?
When was the marriage solemnised?
Who conducted it? (43)

The loss of Chastity is the loss for all members of the Villagers. The ironic logic of the Villagers suggests that if they are not equal to Mathobbor “in good luck” then at least they are equal in “bad luck.” It also transforms their judgement on Mathobbor into an opportunity to turn the innocent girl’s slaughter as their sacrifice to the war of liberation.

The daughter’s loss of chastity is made 'respectable' in marriage to the Captain by uttering Allah’s message from the Koran. Haq’s insistence on the point exposes the covering over of widespread social anarchy in the supposedly 'pure' order of Pakistan. The audience can decode this message easily. It is the religious justification of the pains of oppression to the state level exploitation.

Mathobbor’s legitimisation is a clear fraud and is insufficient to prevent his execution once his outrage (lash or 'dead body') becomes known. The rape stands for the sacrifice of sixty-eight thousand villages of Bangladesh and the father's crime is an insult to it. Purgation of national
infamy is figured dramatically in the exposing and punishing of the local village boss.

Mathobbor’s confession when all the fingers point to him and accuse him as a war criminal is used by the dramatist to expose the role of the collaborators during the war of liberation. The collaborating forces have caught and held their own people and handed them to the occupation forces to kill. That crime became a *boomerang* for Mathobbor when the Captain of the occupation forces wanted to satisfy his sexual desire with the daughter of Mathobbor. Mathobbor’s persuasion to restrain the Captain from molesting his daughter exposes the act of collaboration:

I said, Captain Shab
I have never disobeyed your words,
Never protested, if you remember
You remember certainly, your interest always
I have considered my own interest. Thus,
I have left nothing unturned to give you.
When roads were unknown, I showed you the roads
When you failed, I handed over lot of Freedom-Fighters to you
When you had shortage of ration, I arranged your food
I gave you more than I afford. (46)

The paradox of collaboration and faith in same religion is explored in Mathobbor’s speech. The collaborators of 1971 united with the

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20 Colloquial version of Sahib.
occupation forces in a bondage of faith in one religion indicates the formation of the state of Pakistan. Religion became a tool to justify the exploitation of the majority of the population and rule of the few. Mathobbor’s inability to utter *kolma* or a Koranic verse that signifies one’s faith in oneness of Allah expresses the sheer exploitation of the faith for the crime of exploitation.

This insincere exploitation of faith as a tool for economic and political domination, Haq uses to allow Daughter to question the existence of Allah. The Daughter has learned all the rules of faith in Allah from Pir. If faith in Allah saves people from dangers in life then she had no less faith from anyone else. “If utterance of Allah’s name saves one from all the danger then where was Allah when the black snake attacked her?” (48). Pir warns her that she should not question Allah’s existence. Daughter’s reply to Pir implies that by the utterance of Allah’s name the sinner can commit crime as Mathobbor gave his daughter to the captain (49).

What becomes remarkable about Haq’s fabrication of Daughter as the symbol of sacrifice for the Villagers is done by not allowing any future
for her. In this scenario her “happiness is stolen like all the milk from the breast of a cow by one single cruel stroke” (51). She is defined as the sacrifice by her imminent suicide. She cannot be allowed to survive when no one wants a female whose virginity is lost in the house, or to survive when no one wants to see her who brings bad name for the village. She will bring the bad name of unchaste to the maidens of the village. She is not more than a “plate already licked by a dog” (51).

At the climax of the play, the stage is described as the liberated Bangladesh signified by a large flag of independent Bangladesh at the background of the stage (55). The stage is crowded with the figures of freedom fighters. Pyek is standing with the case of a sharp hidden spear in one hand and the blood stained spear on the other, the dead body of Mathobbor is fallen on the stage. Pyek declares that he has “finished the great Satan. But there are smaller Satans left around, if they are not searched for, they will flee away” (55). When Pyek declares this, the opportunity for the dramatist is evident to enlarge the issue to identify the collaborators of the occupation forces.
The play can be read, therefore, as 'post-colonial' resistance to neo-colonialism, celebrating the local overthrow of oppressive military occupation and the moral cleansing of the nation. But there are specificities of national history and class that make it unsuited to a narrow model of postcolonialism. It is not, for example, 'writing back' to any outside western culture. Moreover, it is revealing how the national elite was complicit in the oppression of the common people, and draws on audiences' attention to unresolved malpractice (military elitism, religious fanaticism, and importation of 'bad culture') within the new nation.

The play suggests that the history needs to be reformulated to include the Villagers’ struggles so that it does not reflect only an elite story of triumphal participation in the independence war. I am not suggesting that avoidance of appropriation of peasant stories will solve theoretical problems concerning subaltern representation (or improve the social conditions of subaltern peoples). However, critical analysis of appropriation by elite discourse may clear the ground for more satisfactory way of recognising peasant contributions to culture and national history.
5: The Dewan Gazi’s Tale: the construction of an institution and elite appropriation

In this chapter, I will explore the construction of an oppositional voice for the peasant-workers of rural Bangladesh by Asaduzzaman Noor through his adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Mr Puntilla and His man Matti*. Noor’s 1977 adaptation *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale* considered with enthusiastic celebrations of adopted Brechtian theatrical styles in the elite theatre of Bangladesh. Although the play appears to be about class issues, I will show how it also functions as a political critique of the state level military regime.

I will show how a postcolonial state and its internal power centres exploit marginalised stories in their favour in the same way as postcolonial theories try to homogenise postcolonial spaces to preserve First World disciplinary power. On the face of it, the play would appear to fit comfortably within postcolonial literary worlds such as Ashcroft et, el's ideas of localising appropriations of European texts and even Fredric Jameson's notions of Third World writing as national allegory. However,
the point of the play is not creative hybridity (and it is not creolised English in any case), nor does its attack on landowner's hypocrisy and abuse of power lend itself to reductive reading such as Jameson's.

The adaptation of Western performance modes and the translation of European plays became one of the creative trends in the post-1971 Bangladesh. Translation work had occurred previously but there was a renewed zeal to work with the form and content of drama. Ghosh has pointed out that in the 1971-1995 period there were translations or adaptations of the drama of Becket, Ionesco, Brecht, Sartre, Camus, Albee, Moliere, Muller and Shakespeare (Ghosh B, 309, my translation). The playwrights and theatre practitioners were influenced by the socio-political reality of the period. The local and the global concern with the liberation of the working class has influenced the playwrights and theatre practitioners to work with the Brechtian performance forms and playtexts. More importantly, the translation of European plays empowered the playwrights to comment indirectly at their political reality at the state level. It provided an outlet for the elite middle class compassion for the working classes. The plays express the discontent of the progressive elite
and deals on the surface with the problems of working class. It is useful to quote Ghosh’s comment about Haq’s translation and adaptation of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar:

. . . Syed Shamsul Haq’s *Gononayek* [1976], translation and adaptation of Shakespeare is remarkable in the list of such plays. (Ghosh B 309, my translation)

And Zia Haidar’s comment on the play:

We have to talk about Syed Haq’s *Gononayek* specially for its subject matter. The play was written with the inspiration of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The similarity between the killing of Julius Caesar and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been drawn in the play. The tragic destiny of Sheikh Mujib and the conspiracy of the Western imperialistic power guided the killers. (Haider cited in Ghosh 310, my translation)

This assessment shows how translation and adaptation were meant to deal with the political reality in the post-1975 period of Bangladesh.

The addition of Brechtian plays to Bangladeshi theatre generated the new experience of spectators being involved in the staged and leaving the theatre with his/her own changed attitude about the issues performed on the stage. The Brechtian performance forms, “that is anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world ...” (Wright 67). By utilising this change, the Bangladeshi elite
theatre from the 1970s created an arena for protest, often dealing with the elite socio-political issues of the time.

Since the early 1970s, there has been a renewed zeal in working with subaltern material, which has a contemporary relevance for the elite theatre. The allegory of the period exemplifies the voicing of the protest against the contemporary despotic regimes, and *razakarisation* of Bangladeshi culture. By the *razakarisation* of Bangladeshi culture, I mean, the deliberate attempt by the post-1975 Military Governments of Bangladesh to rehabilitate those right-winged political forces who opposed the liberation of Bangladesh, and collaborated with the West Pakistani occupation forces during the liberation war of 1971. On the state principle level, these military Governments attempted to revive the politics with religion, and turned a secular state structure into a religion based one. On the cultural arena, there was a deliberate attempt to erase traditional artifacts of the Bengali culture by importing what may be called *oposhanskrithi* or bad culture from the West, and from the United States in particular. This is again resisted largely by the progressive section of the urban elite.
Beyond appropriations at the thematic level, the performative appropriation of Brecht’s theatre principle is the radical factor, which needs to be considered here. First, the appropriation of Brecht’s epic as a narrative turns a spectator into an observer (Wright 37). The use of the word ‘observer’ instead of a spectator implies a judgmental role of the spectator. In the case of the play *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, this role of the spectator is emphasised in the direct interaction of the actors with the audience, the latter being asked for the solution to the enacted problem. Although the judgmental role of the spectator in the indigenous tradition of the Bengali theatre is in existence traditionally, in the urban theatre context it resulted from the localisation of Brecht.

The judgmental role of the audience is achieved through use of Brecht’s ‘verfremdungseffekt’ as alienation, estrangement, *distantciation*, or defamiliarisation (Brooker 62). This is meant to separate the audience and the actors from the theatrical character and incident. In case of *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, it is evident from the presentation of Dewan Gazi as a prototype for the rural elite as an oppressive institution (i). The actors
on the stage and the audience are supposed to work together critically to
construct Dewan Gazi:

Dewan Gazi has many faces, and many arts
Respected audience, watch his many games with your sharpened
intelligence. (i.10)

If *Verfremdung* is meant to exclude uncritical sympathy from the
performance experience of the audience, then it is an innovative addition
to the 1970s theatre of Bangladesh (Wright 136). In the case of *The
Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, there is a subtle mixture of elements of empathy and
distantiation. In the final scene of the play, the audience’s empathy is
called for when Shakina, the maidservant of Gazi *Bari* [Gazi’s house or
household], presents her life cycle:

Shakina: You are a male [to Makhon]. That’s why you
could say that. Think of me, what can I do? We are
females, if we starve then we tie stones in our belly,
if we feel sorrow then we harden our heart. But even
then our mind is still alive. My Mum was a maid-
slave in this house. I don’t know who my Dad was.
Dewan Gazi might be my Dad. My Mum was a slave
maid, I became a slave-maid too. Can you tell me
why I became a Shakina and not a Lailee? I know why
I could not become a Lailee. I cannot become a
Lailee - we are not supposed to be Lailees. (x.75)

It creates a paradox for the audience, as it provokes an emotional reaction
of fellow feeling while allowing at the same time a dispassionate
assessment of the social structure producing her misfortune. This
Brechtian mode is to be found in the thematic structure of the play in which allegory allows both sympathy and objective assessment as it tells two different stories – middle class and subaltern.

The localisation of the Brechtian performance principle has definitely empowered post-1971 Bangladeshi theatre “to astonish [audiences], make them angry, plead with them, sharpen their hearing, invite sympathy, and bring out their protest” (Wekwerth 25). But the effect of middle-class actors presenting peasants to middle-class audiences can be to direct attention through the interactions staged to issues of middle class import.

In its aim to interact with the spectator, Brecht’s epic theatre is "anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world. . . . [it] must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to"(Weber 57). This anxiety to teach is described by Elizabeth Wright as "social intervention, whereby the prevailing power structure must be felt intolerable and act as a trigger for the critical process of analysis, with
both author and spectator equally involved in challenging the text” (Wright 33). This performative element is deflected (and thereby weakened) in the protest theatre of Bengal. In the example of The Zamindar’s Mirror, the playwright has not directed the attention of the audience to the potential of peasant uprising. The peasants are shown as the victims of the zamindari oppression\(^{21}\), but by portraying the cruel violence done to the peasant woman, the playwright has aroused the empathy suited to a ‘sentimental’ tragedy. In The Dewan Gazi’s Tale, more objectified challenge to the text is directed away from peasant revolution to the subtext of the contemporary elite contending with the state level autocracy of Military dictatorship.

Now if we analyse The Dewan Gazi’s Tale considering two essential Brechtian practices - gestus and Verfremdungseffekt - then we find the fable of The Dewan Gazi’s Tale aims to affect the attitude of the spectators, and transform it into progressive politics in which the rights of the working class will be established. The play was adapted in 1975 from Brecht's Mr. Puntilla and His Man Matti and refers to early 1970s'
politics of Bangladesh. After the liberation of the country in 1971 through a bloody war, the state of affairs was quite favourable for a socialist transformation of the state. The text exploited the then general favourable reception of the issues of the working-class population.

In *The Dewan Gazi's Tale*, Brechtian estrangement is used to allegorise social reality. The estrangements are i) the relationship staged between Gazi, the Zamindar or landlord and his domestic servant Makhon; (ii) the Drunken Gazi's marriage proposals to three prostitutes; and (iii) the experiment of marriage between Makhon and Dewan Gazi's daughter Lailee. These are the elements of estrangement in the context of an already estranged socio-political milieu. Firstly, for a person being placed in the highest social class to be drunk is highly surprising and creates discomfort for the spectators whose class is being represented by Gazi. Secondly, the marriage proposal, even in Gazi's drunken state, to a prostitute is impossible where class background is a decisive factor in matrimony.

Estrangement is given a socio-political dimension when we are shown details of the working world of the working class. In Scene iv of *The
Dewan Gazi's Tale, we also see Gazi's two conflicting behaviours, in drunkenness and sobriety analysed by two day workers, one clerical employee, maidservant Shakina and Makhon. All of them comment on Gazi's oppressive attitude towards the working classes. Thus the power of public space is used to evoke the social context.

The Dewan Gazi's Tale brought in a new kind of the audience participation, though audience participation in the performance of a production is not an altogether new addition in Bengali theatre. It is practiced in indigenous theatrical forms, particularly in Jatra. What is new is arousing the judgement of the spectators in the sense of questioning the issues presented through the narrative. The text was reacting against the social class of the performers and the spectators ironically during mid seventies productions by the Nagoreek theatre Group in Dhaka. The dialogue of Makhon, which echoes the then political slogans of Bangladesh, can explain this. In scene ten, Makhon utters:

Makhon: Look around, paddy fields, battle-nut gardens, fishponds, rice-mill, they are devouring all. Hardly any room left for us. They are going to occupy all. We can hardly breathe. Air, little free air! Got to take a chest full of free air. Got to
stand strong. Got to crush this darkness into dust, otherwise we cannot survive. (x.75)

Makhon’s devouring ‘they’ stands for the social class of both the performers and the spectators. The metaphoric use of darkness is interesting as it stands for the autocratic political reality of the audience. It translates the peasant surface of the text into a wider double meaning. The subterfuge shows that Bengali theatre is still haunted by the ghost of The Dramatic Performance Control Act 1876 of British India, even after double political emancipations (the 1947 partition of Indian subcontinent and the liberation of 1971). The enactment of peasant-worker oppression serves the purpose of the elite concern of facing the socio-political reality. The audience is meant to rise up to clear the darkness of autocratic misrule.

**Dewan Gazi: the oppressive institution**

The translation of *Kissa* meaning ‘tale’, attached to the title of *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, invokes more significations than is expressed by the English word. *Kissa* in Bengali came from the long tradition of oral story-telling in the rural culture of Bengal. In this tradition, the subject matter of a
story is generally the heroic pursuits by kingly people, their emotional life, or at least the pursuits of other than common people with higher social status. *Kissa* is also a recreational outlet through which the villagers retreat from the everyday world of struggle for survival to a make-believe world of kingly stories, and fairy tales. Hence the inclusion of *kissa* in the title signifies that the text contains the heroic pursuits of Gazi, the hero of the tale. Whatever Gazi does with the wealth accumulated by his ancestors, the land-owning rural elite from the exploitation of land and labour, becomes a *kissa* before the audience of the play. The allegorical tone of the play is thus set which will reveal in the guise of the comic construct of Gazi, a serious message of cruel reality of the exploitation of peasant-workers. At a deeper level, it will comment on the contemporary reality of the elite.

This signification of *kissa* establishes, by contrast, the modern irony of the play, since the Gazi’s acts are not heroic, but a comic caricature, with the wealth and social power exploited from the peasant-workers. This inclusion of strange elements in the *kissa* coincides with Brecht’s device
of making familiar social aspects visibly strange. Those strange elements may be ridiculous for the class to which Gazi belongs, but to a peasant-worker; they are a painful reality. Hence comic signification causes Gazi to represent an oppressive institution. His apparently frivolous, activity in the text is itself a form of oppression. Gazi is synonymous with *taka*, or money; both reciprocate each other. As he represents money, so his power is money:

Prologue: Sutradar’s song
Listen, listen my respected Ladies and gentleman, listen
I am telling Dewan Gazi's tale, please listen.
This Gazi is Dewan Gazi, everyone knows him by one name,
Money is his life, and death, he buys the world with money's name.
When he drinks and loses his senses
He speaks all sweetness
And after the worldly gain
When Gazi is back to his senses. (i.10)

Brecht describes *Gestus* as the "whole complex of individual gestures and statements of most varied kind, which underlies the strange/estrange proceeding between people and which is related to the full spectrum of attitudes of everyone involved" (Brecht 24). Gazi’s *kissa* from the very beginning of the play suggests that he is going to be objectified in the text.

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22 Brecht suggests that the stage must be freed from everything ‘magical’ by *verfremdung* in order to arouse a sense of inquiry for the audience about the issues presented on the stage. See Willett, *Brecht on theatre: the development of an aesthetic*: 136.
so that his individual gestures and dealings with his underlings provide us with an overview of the "spectrum of attitudes" of class oppression.

Gazi’s behavioural gesture is both setting and subject in *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, a structure to provide the action to every scene of the play. The action of Scene i is centered on Gazi’s drunken state. He is discovered in a village pub with two other characters. One is his friend; a lawyer by profession, the other is Makhon, a rickshaw puller, now appointed by Gazi as his *khash* bearer, or personal servant. In his drunken state, Gazi becomes very kind to the poor working people but even in this state he is exposed as not separated from his greed for money. This greed empowers him to have domination over working people. In his drunken state, he is aware of the fact of the “psycho-social”23 reality that a monied person is meant to be served, and not to serve others:

Gazi: . . . Why to get up? Am I your father's domestic servant to listen to you. I am not that stupid. Here I am sitting, want to see who can move me! (Sees the bottle on the ground) Oh all sweet dear spirit fall on the ground for doing up and down for listening others. All sweet divine moistening the bosom of mother earth. One can't understand what is poison if one is not bitten by the poisonous! But where to get a bottle now? Hey, anybody there? (i.11)

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23 The ‘psycho-social’ is Dharwadker’s term used here to mean the social reality of structure of domination of rural-Bangladesh. See Dharwadker: 82.
The power to indulge in any sort of sensual luxury for Gazi’s class signifies the transformation of former Zamindar and Mahajan class to a new class which has the social power of domination, and at the same time is in possession of the production machinery by the ownership of land and small factories.

The relationship between served and server is constructed differently from the “psycho-social” relationship of actuality. In everyday actuality, Makhon is supposed to serve Gazi with great submissiveness. The drunken state can only turn this relationship into one of equal status. The semiotics of class relationship are clearly visible when. Gazi constructs himself in terms of his possessions, as “Gazipur’s Juthdar [land holder], vast land and fields in possession, cattle farms, rice mill, and many fruit orchards” (i). On the other hand the type of service Makhon provides to Gazi’s class forms the servant’s identity; he has completed grade three, he was a rickshaw puller, then he served as domestic servant. From yesterday he has become the personal household servant of Gazi.
The drunken state of Gazi makes him aware of the desires and intentions of a servant. His expression of good wishes to the servant is not merely a gesture of benevolence; rather it will help Gazi to understand the weaknesses of Makhon, which in normal day-to-day transactions will help Gazi to have more control over the server.

As Gazi lowers himself in his drinking sprees to the level of the server, similarly he can mix with working-class women to indulge in sexual extravagance. Lust for physical pleasure is merely an extension of material greed and another expression of power. Gazi expresses his strong confidence in the socio-cultural values, which are meant to serve those who are at the top level of society.

Daughter Lailee’s attempts to restrict Gazi's drinking reveal the social history of drinking liquor in rural Bengal by the traditional dominant land-owning class. But both restraint and indulgence serve only to honour the rules set by the rural elite. Gazi’s social life is not at all affected by the drinking in his elite circle. This again demonstrates the authority of the elite in setting rules for the rural community.
Gazi’s sexual desire is displayed as a sign of class power. Gazi talks to the audience about the physical abundance of his daughter’s would be mother in law (i). His physical life with the working girls of the fields is not kept secret from his daughter. He exposes his physical adventures himself:

Gazi: . . . Do one thing; send that new girl you have
appointed as a maidservant. I will spend the night talking to
her. (ii.20)

Gazi is expressing his long practiced sexual relationship with the working girls, but he is not allowed to do so according to the moral codes of the rural elite. Here again is an instance of moral double standards being set by the elite to secure their pleasure.

The problems of the dichotomy between the moral rules and breaches of these rules by the same elite class are made pertinent in the relationship between two classes. Makhon’s submissive participation in what is immoral in the elite’s social standards again shows the dependence of the working class on the upper land owning class. He drinks with his master, because the latter wants it. Similarly, the new maidservant is bound to spend the night with Gazi, as the latter wants it. The dominant class can
go on breaking their own rules at the cost of the forced submissive participation by the working class.

The one central figure in opposing Gazi’s reckless drinking and womanising is his daughter, Lailee. But her opposition mainly originates from her concern that Gazi is parting with his money in his drunken state and, womanising. She reminds Makhon to behave like a servant.

Makhon expresses his estimation of Gazi:

Makhon: In fact as long as he drinks, it is better for us. As long as he is drunk, he is very kind to us.
Lailee: Don’t cut jokes with your master. Don’t forget, you are a servant. (ii.22)

Lailee’s warning implies that an elite’s good treatment of his servant will never be based on a relationship between the two on equal terms.

The various thematic stands in the play - class relationships, exploitation of the lower class by the land-owning elite for the gratification of desires - are brought together in the symbolism of three prostitutes - Chameli, Lata, and Kusum. The three placards read as “Gentleman’s house: No entry;” “Medicine Corner;” and “Cow Milk Shop;” (iii). These three names suggest legalisation of the desires of the dominant elite class,
implying that Gazi can gratify his desires for illegal liquor, and bodies of the prostitutes within these legitimate sounding businesses. Both of these are saleable commodities made illegal by the elite laws, such opposite words of the placards help the illegal consumers to be legal ones.

Chameli raises the legality of Gazi’s desires exposed in his intention to drink from that shop which has license. The license of the legal shops protects the man, or the honour of the elite class. Gazi is determined not to drink liquor from any illegal shop:

Gazi: Oh, wait, wait, and please sit quietly there, I have promised not to drink any illegal liquor, how much can you ask of me! What manners you have! You don’t keep the honour of the mani [the honoured]! Those who don’t obey the law, move out of lines are the enemies of the country. I am Dewan Gazi, leader of the people, everyone obeys me. (iii.25)

The symbolism of legality also implies the element of illegality. These two co-exist, as mustard seed contains a ghost (iii), by applying the stick of legality on the lower classes, the upper class moves out of law.

To this symbolism of legality is added the matrimonial relationship which allows the people of same class to be united in wedlock. By the proposal of marriage to three prostitutes, Gazi exposes the class conventions of
marriage (iii). Gazi in his search for liquor and female companionship proposes to the prostitutes to come to his house to enter in wedlock with him. All of them refuse Gazi’s marriage proposal on the ground that such a marriage is illegal. The gratification of his sexual desire is represented as being an addiction. Like his addiction of alcohol, he will do anything to gratify his sexual desire.

The law of the society implies one has to be illegal to be legal. All the prostitutes have opened their shops through an illegal process of bribing the authorities to obtain a license. For Lata, one has to be out of legal line first to be legal (iii). For Chameli, it is the law that provides the license for the upper class to be out of line (iii). For Kusum, to marry a prostitute, a commodity is illegal. One cannot treat a married wife as a commodity, therefore, if Gazi wants to marry a prostitute, it is a machination to extract every juice from the commodity before throwing away:

Kusum: Oh my paramour of love, do you think, a wife is a vegetable oil, and salt from a grocery shop, or hot sweet meats? (iii.28)
The elite law sets its right and wrong in terms of moral values, but elite behaviour shows everything reduced to opportunistic materialist exchange and consumption.

**Drunken State: the face of oppression**

In *Gazi Bari* [Gazi’s house or household], every member of the working class is shown to have a strange relationship with the master, Gazi. This relationship is made strange with the help of Gazi’s drunken state. Through his drunken state, the actual socio-psychological relationship is revealed. First the unequal relation between the rural elite and the working class is constructed. In his drunken state, Gazi claims an equal relationship between the classes, which in his normal state will bring a cruel blow for Makhon. The maidservant of Gazi Bari, Shakina, understands this. The actuality of the relationship gives Gazi’s words a double meaning:

Gazi: Strange, if I say there won’t be any difference between one human being with another, then how come it is a sin? Take for example you and me.
Makhon: Leave me-
Gazi: All right, take my relationship with Shakina, don’t I treat her as my own people, don’t I have love-chat with her, don’t I want to . . . (iv.32)
Gazi’s loving words operate to give him tighter control over his household servants.

In the same manner it is the rural elite class which takes away the means of survival and makes the working class more dependent on the dominant class. This is explained by Gazi’s appointment of day workers who carried home boxes of liquor bottles to work in the field. Makhon requests Gazi to fix the wages for the day workers, because he knows when Gazi is back to his normal state he will not keep those workers. But Makhon’s act of good will for his fellow workers are misunderstood. The workers accuse him:

1st Worker: You are really a third class person. You tried to deprive us of our food. You don’t understand the sorrow of the poor, being poor yourself.
Makhon: Am I to deprive your food. It is those who have always done that, they deprive. I was speaking for your good. (iv.34)

Under an abusive system of feudal power, successful relations between classes are impossible. If Gazi makes a promise based on equality when drunk, he expects everyone to realise the basis of privilege, from which it is make:
Gazi: See the intelligence of the son of a slave. When did I recognise people if I am drunk? When am drunk, I might have told you to give my daughter in marriage with you. Do you think that I will give my daughter to you? (iv.38)

It is social status of the people that decides the matrimonial relationship. When Gazi calls Makhon “the son of a slave,” his angry abuse shows us the real status of a domestic servant.

The narrative of the matrimonial relationship of Gazi’s daughter with the Daroga (Police Inspector) can be understood only with reference to the social history of the contemporary rural elite of Bangladesh. The present rural elite are transformed Zamindars who were established by the British Raj from the Eighteenth Century, and continued up to the middle of the present century. The purpose of this Zamindar class was to collect the British land revenue from the rural working community or the peasantry. Hence the Zamindars had power to be the deciding body of all aspects of life in rural Bengal. They are actual landowners and the peasant-workers are only the source of labour, and virtually the peasant has no control over the labour. Although with the independence of the Indian subcontinent, the postcolonial Governments have abolished the Zamindari system, yet the system of exploitation still exists. The land in possession of the new
elite has decreased, but the class has compensated with its ownership of other production machineries. Now it is the member of the rural elite who has more money and who still commands social authority.

The valuation of social status in terms of money is thus most pertinent in the arrangement of the marriage of Gazi’s daughter. In fact Nafar Ali, who is the Daroga [police inspector] by profession is attracted by Gazi’s money, and wants to marry Lailee. The interest is mutual for both Gazi and the Daroga. In the contemporary context, Daroga signifies power at the village level authorised by the Government of the country. At the same time it is blessed as a huge illegal money-earning machine. In this context money is the deciding factor in forming any matrimonial relationship within this class:

Lailee: How far do I have to make clear? He [Daroga] does not want to marry me. He wants to marry my dad’s money. (v.41)

As a result, the Daroga is not at all moved by the pretension of Lailee, and Makhon that they are in love. Even his discovery of Lailee and Makhon’s sexual relationship in the presence of Gazi does not change his decision to marry Lailee. Rather, he uses this scene as a tool to
extract more dowry money from Gazi. On the other hand, Makhon does not accept any money for his role in the episode:

Makhon: You see, my name is Makhon Ali. I eat with labour. You cannot buy me with the money. You stay with the heat of your money, I am going. (v.42)

Makhon is human in comparison to other characters in the Gazi Bari. He is ready to face the risk of losing his job for the favour he does for his master’s daughter. Even so, he does not upset the social order. His morality is based on his labour, and as such preserves the difference between the worker and the monied class that will always employ him.

The Gazi Bari’s boundary binds two oppositional characters – the one with human values and the other without them. The confrontation scene between the Daroga and Lailee foregrounds this contrast. The Daroga’s love for money motivates him to marry Lailee.

Daroga: No, don’t you understand - have not you read in drama and novels? In fact whenever I come in front of you, I start to get imbalance with my head.
Lailee: Your head gets dizzy seeing me, or seeing my Dad?
Daroga: Seeing Dad, why, why?
Lailee: No in fact seeing my Dad, rather seeing Dad’s money. (Vi.47)
The *Daroga’s* love for money makes him a baser animal, whereas Makhon’s human status is ascertained by his not giving himself to money. When *Daroga* finds that Lailee is not going to succumb to his false love trap, he goes on to use his official power of a *Daroga*. He threatens to put Makhon into jail with a false case of illicit sexual advances to Lailee. He is going to trap Gazi in a murder case, and burn the Gazi *Bari* with the miscreants at night. In this situation Lailee pleases the *Daroga* by her vocal consent to marry him. But she does not surrender to *Daroga* helplessly, as she threatens in front of the audience:

Lailee: Bastard *Daroga*, you have seen the dove but haven’t seen the dove-trap. I am also Dewan Gazi’s daughter. I know how to tame a dog like you. (vi.49)

The play reflects the contemporary social problem of the impossibility of marriage between members of master and servant classes of Gazi *Bari*. In her wildest of thoughts, Lailee thinks of marrying Makhon. She approves her own thought on the ground that Makhon’s appearance is good, that of a master class person, and he has had little school education, but his only drawback is his poverty. But in the class configuration of Gazi, this is the central factor. Lailee is confident that Makhon will
overcome his vice of poverty with her Dad’s money. Above all he will be
a servant to Lailee:

Lailee: How about marrying Makhon? . . . His only drawback is
his poverty. If he gets my Dad’s money then he will attain
the class status of the Gazi Bari. Then no one will call him a
servant. Moreover there are good points of marrying him.
He will carry out my orders. He will not show temper
like Daroga. (vii.49-50)

As usual, the domestic servant Makhon can cross his class identity only
by the monetary favour he receives from Gazi. Lailee’s assumption

about the prospect of Makhon as a would-be husband is good, but her
choice of Makhon is undermined by the reality in which a man in
possession of money commands authority. Lailee’s dream will never be
realised as Gazi wants to have strong foundation for his social position,
and it is only possible if he gets the Daroga as his son-in-law.

The imprint of working class acceptance of the social order, and class
relationship is evident in Makhon’s reaction to Lailee’s marriage
proposal.

Lailee: I am telling you after thinking in cool head to marry me.
Makhon: Please pardon me.
Lailee: Why, what’s the problem?
Makhon: Look, I am a poor fellow, I’ve almost lost my job. I don’t want to get killed.
Lailee: Your job is more valuable than my life to you.
Makhon: No, not that. Do you want to change the law of the Nature? Marriage between a big person’s daughter and a poor is only possible in a film. (vii.51)

This transaction suggests that Lailee’s wild efforts at making a relationship between members of two unequal classes are too absurd, that anyone who wants to violate the rules of the society will go against the rule of Nature. Such a marriage can only take place in an unreal film world, as it lives in the imagination of Lailee. Makhon knows that if he wants to cross the boundary of his class in marriage then it will be life threatening.

The structure of oppositional relationships within the Gazi *Bari* is further extended by the presence of three prostitutes at the entrance. The prostitutes Lata, Chameli, and Kusum are here as Gazi has, the previous evening promised to marry them on this day. Gazi can have a night out with the prostitutes, but he cannot marry them. The prostitutes are aware of this social reality, but their working class existence makes them come to eat to their heart’s content at the wedding party of Gazi’s daughter. The implication is clear: the prostitutes are selling their bodies the same
as the domestic servants trade their physical labour. No one can escape from this class identity:

(Song)
We are living deads, you are not spared from that
You are not spared from that, Makhon-bai [brother]
Whatever temper you show, there is no difference between you and us,
You me, me you sell our bodies to eat.
You want to be of high class?
What ever you try, you are not of high class,
You are the washerman’s donkey, carry the burden of others. (viii.59-60)

The song exposes the social power structure based on the regulation of labour. Staging an awareness of this power structure however disrupts the system by raising the possibility of a threat to overturn it for the survival of peasant-workers.

The scene of marriage ceremony in the Gazi Bari can be understood with reference to the contemporary rural elite of Bangladesh. This class justifies the inequality among classes as ordained by Allah. To talk of equality is to take a position against the order of religion. This question is also interesting in the light of rationalising rhetoric as exposed by the exchange between the Chairman of the village union parishod [union] and the Kazi or the marriage registrar. Sufferings from the struggle for
survival of the peasant-workers follow “their weakness of *iman*,” or faith in Allah. This is exemplified by the Village Union *Parishad’s* (council) Chairman who is outwardly affluent because he has strong *iman* in Allah. The play reveals however that the Chairman misappropriated public money intended for the welfare of the villagers. He responds by twisting politics into religion and making the people their own enemy.

Chairman: Those lower class bastards have one fault. They don’t want to see the good of anybody. They can’t do anything themselves, if somebody does something they can’t stand that. They are in fact public enemy.

Kazi: Yes, you are right. There will be riches, and there will be poor in the country, Allah wishes that. They want to rule over Allah’s will. (ix.60)

The principal difficulty for the working class population is their belief that people are born rich or poor. As one cannot have any influence on his, or her birth, similarly a servant cannot become master, or a master cannot servant. In the marriage ceremony of Scene xi, this has been demonstrated by Makhon’s test of Lailee for her future prospect of becoming a *kuli-majoors*’s [labourer] wife. This test proved Lailee must born into the house of a *kuli-majoors*:

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24 These two words have same meaning of a labourer. Kuli is often used in a derogatory sense since the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent.
Makhon: In fact one cannot be a *Kuli-majoors* wife, sir. You have to be born as a wife of *kuli-majoors*. Just look at me, if I want can I be a Dewan Gazi? If I want to be a Dewan Gazi I have to be born in the Gazi *Bari*. (ix.68)

The play’s staging of Makhon’s argument allows the gap between actor and audience to see the two sides of the case. On the one hand, class is not ‘nature’ but ‘nurture’ (being taught over time to occupy a role). On the other, it is not just a social construct easily overcome. The play is radical in opening up a critique of landowning privilege but contains its revolutionary potential at the same time.

Such a state of entrapment involves the psycho-sociology of the working class as well as the politics of the cycle of domination of contemporary rural Bangladesh. Gazi is a symbol of all-devouring appetite, threatening to leave nothing for the peasant-worker to exist on the face of the earth:

Gazi: Look, look around. As far as your eyes go is my property, if you walk for whole day you cannot finish seeing my property. That paddy field, that beetle nut garden, that fish pond, - all mine. Rice mills, cattle farms, saw mills, all my property, Makhon, my property. (x.74)

Gazi becomes a signifier of the ever-expanding oppressive domination, and Gazi *Bari* transforms into a suffocating space for Makhon and
Shakina. For them only alternative left is to crush this suffocating darkness before it can crush them.

If suffocating darkness is the time out of joint for the progressive section of urban elite of 1970s and 1980s, Gazi Bari is Bangladesh under military despotic rule. The elite must crush the evil of despotism to attain the freedom of democracy. In comparison to Haq’s Nuroldin in Chapter 3, Noor’s *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale* is stronger in its direct representation of underclass characters. Therefore, Makhon and Shakina can depict a subaltern politics, even if the play as a whole addresses elite issues. However, the resolution that the play appears to offer is not relevant to the magnitude of the problem constructed in the text. Its revolutionary potential remains unrealised for being contained by entrenched rural power and textual split between its rural class focus and an underlying message about national political issues. The play is supposed to be written for the audience that is the urban version of Gazi. Their presence seems to have influenced the text’s oblique metaphoric solution to the problem of the urban elite:
As a text directed to an urban audience, this suggests national self-determination. It implies they must work to snatch the freedom of democracy from the state-level political authority, from the faction within the elite that has opposed the liberation of Bangladesh and which is reactionary to the core. The principles are nationalism, secularism, socialism and democracy. But telling a national elite to "be the owner of yourself" is not at all the same thing as telling a class of servants to liberate themselves from their masters.

If it is true, as Gramsci says, that the subaltern history is “intertwined with that of civil society” (Gramsci 52), then the contemporary elite playwright fashions the subaltern material for the whole in which subaltern gives way to an elite purpose. One thing becomes clear - any attempt at representing subaltern groups must have subaltern interests as the playwright's sole purpose in realising the text.
6: Conclusion
This study asserts the importance of local factors such as anti-colonial nationalism, nation-state and class as part of any reading of postcolonial drama - and in this case it is more enabling for the reader due to availability of the translated texts. In *Nuroldin*, Haq brings in the peasant leader from the past, and in *Footfalls*, he historicises the event of liberation war. In *The Dewan Gazi’s Tale*, Noor localises a Brecht play. All these processes bring in allegory, appropriation and class specific inclusion and exclusion of the cultural-political signifiers. Indeed, the analysis of intersections amongst these elements foregrounds a socio-political signification kept hidden or distanced by the signs on the surface.

The study of discursive intersection in a postcolonial text does not suggest that Third World postcolonial texts are an expression of the people; rather, it helps to define the limits in and around a text as an expression of the people. It shows how and what a text needs to include to be a viable expression of the politics of popular existence. The postcolonial texts need to focus the disillusion of the masses in a postcolonial state, the violence and rewinding of the wheel of progress by
the autocratic governments and to raise the consciousness to face this anarchy wreaked upon the life of the people.

This study shows how, in addition to the characteristic feature of a postcolonial text, it is not only “subversive in its “maneuvers” of “rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional records” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 196), but also rewrites the local colonial past and adopts European performance codes to face national contemporary political reality. Postcolonial texts are involved in a counter-discourse to the forces of colonial revivalism at the regional and national level.

This study adds a further dimension to a postcolonial refutation of “universal human values” in English literatures, and shows how the field has to date been closed around texts in English. This study reveals with its case study of the playtexts that the “universal human values” propounded by the discipline of English and its service to the empire has changed into establishment of the domination of local elites in the vernacular literatures of the postcolonial spaces.
What has emerged from the study of the plays is the necessity to view dramatic representation as complex. A playwright’s background as a representative of a class and more importantly the purpose of a representation determines the text's construction. Even a playwright’s devotion to a particular project is not good enough, the social, political and cultural construction have intersected in the process.

The appropriation of the peasant rebellion and the story of participation of the villagers in the war of liberation of Bangladesh powerfully indicate the continuation of an elite appropriation of peasant rebellion and rebel consciousness. The playwright has succumbed to the social, cultural, and political constraints that direct all texts to the elite classes and the process of domination. The texts illustrate a dynamic tension between anti-imperialist national revolution and conservative class nationalism.

This study conforms to Leela Gandhi's project of moving postcolonial studies to look at local voices that are not just 'writing back' or readily consumed as cosmopolitan diasporic texts, but which extend beyond limitations of anglophone and Indian-centred focus that characterise her
work and others like Ania Loomba, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Moreover, the plays considered here resist 
co-option into theories of hybridity and post-national globalisation even though their internal operations are consistent 
with some postcolonial work exposing class-based inequities under the name of national liberation.

If postcolonialism is a struggle between Marxism and postmodernism (Gandhi) then these plays do not lend 
themselves to a postcolonial theoretical reading; as nationalist anti-colonial salvaging of history, they fall short 
of any postmodern engagement and as critique of class, they refuse Marxism because of the governing discourse 
of Islam. A reading of the plays can be congruent with postcolonial interests (there is an impulse to class and cultural liberation; there is a Brechtian disruption of realist ‘reality’) but has to locate them alongside rather than within existing critical paradigms.
7: Bibliography


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Among my many commitments to myself, the most significant one is to write something in the dramatic form about the heroes of our soil. I have started that project with the writing of Nuroldin. The nation that forgets its past fails to build its future. I hope with writing about Nuroldin we will see in front of us those people’s heroes whom we have already forgotten and we will learn that the history of the people’s insurgency is long and great - above all that the movement of 1971 is not an isolated one.

I have got Nuroldin, Doyasil and Goodlad from the history. I have created Abbas, Ambia, Lisbeth and Morris with my imagination. I have collected Nuroldin’s soul and inspiration from the history. I have discovered his personal life and mental conflicts from probability.

The historian Shuprokash Roy has written the name ‘Nuruluddin’, we would say it is Nuruddin, but I have used Nuroldin, as the common people of Rangpur would pronounce it. Though the regional dialogue has been used as the language of this poetic play, yet I have tried to work within the understanding of all Bengalis. One phrase, Ding Khorcha - is taken from history. Nuroldin used to collect subscriptions from the peasants to bear the expenses of the war.
The attentive reader and the play director will notice that the poetic play has been written to be staged under the open sky in any common space. If it is required to be staged on a proscenium theatre, then the stage has to be extended into the spectators. The talented director can use any stage for this poetic play. Whatever he or she may do, my suggestion is that he/she must not imagine a stage like a picture, and he will distribute the dialogues of the Red and Blue Choruses according to the number of persons available for acting.
Characters
Nuroldin/the peasant leader
Abbas/Nuroldin’s childhood friend
Doyasil/the Dewan of people’s army
Sutradar/Preamble
Goodlad/the collector of Rangpur
Morris/the revenue supervisor
Macdonald/the Military officer of the Company
Ambia/Nurol’s wife
Lisbeth/Thomson’s wife
Thomson/the Kutial of the Company
The Red Chorus/the people’s army
The Blue Chorus/the Company forces

Place
The town, the villages and the jungle of Rangpur

Time
1189 Bengali Year/1783 in the Christian calendar
(Sutradar)
The blue sky, thousands of stars in that sky and
Under the sky, there are huts, bazaars and seventy-nine thousand
habitations.
The shine is falling from the full moon like white milk.
The field is rotten, the river is dry, the seed is rotten, and most spoiled of
all is human family.
Then, all of a sudden, why does such a big moon appear in the blue sky?
All of a sudden.
What utterance breaks the body of silence? What sound is that?
Please make a circle, you all,
Come closer, all of you,
I ask you, please sit still.
In this bright moon light
Nuroldin comes to the memory.
When ominous sleep appears in Bengal,
With his long figure Nuroldin appears in the dead yard of Bengal.
Nuroldin’s home was in Rangpur.
Nuroldin called the people in Rangpur
In 1189 [1783 in Christian calendar]
Again Bengal seems to remember Nuroldin
Seems to remember Nuroldin
When vultures come down to golden Bengal
Nuroldin comes to memory
When my dreams are stolen,
Nuroldin comes to memory.
When in my own country blood flows down to earth from my body
In history’s every page.
Come; please come, to this wide yard tonight;
When the milk of memory flows down with the moonshine,
Then who can sleep? Who can keep inside the door?
Who sits alone and sheds tears?
The tears of all rivers are lost in the Brahmaputra.
The tale of Nuroldin is the whole country’s
Like the hilly rivulet floods everything,
The wretched rise with the hope
That again Nuroldin will come back to Bengal.
Again Nuroldin one day in black full moon
Will call, ‘Rise, everyone, where are you everyone?’

THE BUL-HORN BUGLE SOUND COMES FROM THE FAR OFF.
SUTRADAR QUICKLY DEPARTS, THE BRIGHT MOONLIGHT
FLOODS THE STAGE.
Scene One
THE BULL-HORN BUGLE IS PLAYED AGAIN. TWO MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS APPEAR ON THE STAGE AS IF THEY ARE MOVING IN DREAM. THEY ARE CARRYING STICKS AND POLOS.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, Yes,  
The bull-horn bugle is played again.  
Do you hear, is the bull-horn bugle played again?  
Can we hear again? Can we hear again?

NOW THE BEATS OF COUNTRY-DRUMS ARE NEARING. TWO MORE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS APPEAR ON THE STAGE.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, Yes,  
The beat of drum signals seems to be heard.  
Do you hear the beats of drum signals again?  
Do we hear again? Do we hear again?

NUROLDIN’S VOICE IS HEARD NOW.

(Nuroldin)
Rise brothers - where are you, everyone?

TWO MORE MEMBERS THE RED CHORUS APPEAR ON THE STAGE.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, Yes,  
It seems to be Nuroldin’s voice  
Do we hear Nuroldin’s voice again?  
Do we hear again? Do we hear again?

NUROLDIN’S VOICE IS HEARD AGAIN.

(Nuroldin)
Rise brothers - where are you, everyone?
TWO MORE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS APPEAR ON THE STAGE.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, yes,
It seems to be the call to form lines.
Do we hear the call to form lines again?
Do we hear again?  Do we hear again?

ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS LOOK FOR THE SOURCE OF THE SIGNAL.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes Yes Yes Yes
Yes Yes Yes Yes.
THERE IS A SYMPHONY OF BULL-HORN BUGLE, COUNTRY-DRUM AND THE VOICES. MEMBERS OF THE BLUE CHORUS STARTS TO GATHER AT THE FAR IN THE DARKNESS.

(The Red Chorus)
It seems to be the signal-beat of the drums,
It seems to be the bull-horn bugle music
It seems to be the call to form lines,
It seems to be the voice of Nuroldin.
Yes yes yes yes
Yes yes yes yes.

SUDDENLY, THE BLUE CHORUS BREAKS INTO THE STAGE WITH LOUD LAUGHTER. ALL THE SOUNDS FADE AT THE SAME TIME. THE LOUD LAUGHTER ECHOES FOR A FEW MOMENTS. THE MEMBERS OF RED CHORUS MOVE A FEW STEPS BACKWARD AT A TIME.

(The Red Chorus)
Who laughs?  Who laughs like owls?
Where?  Who are they?  Tell your identity.
Do not move a step forward,
Before making any noise,
Be careful, stand still.

AGAIN THE LOUD LAUGHTER OF THE BLUE CHORUS.
(The Red Chorus)
Still laughing? Who, who laughs?
No mercy for them.
If you are a mahajan
If you are a Juthdar\textsuperscript{25} if you are a Gothidar\textsuperscript{26},
If you are a latial of the kutial shaheb
Still there is moonlight tonight.
Go for your safety.
If you stand there,
Whoever you are
Then there is no mercy; it is your last day,
Sirdar\textsuperscript{27} Nuroldin
Will take your life.

(The Blue Chorus)
No, no, he is nowhere.
Where is your Nuroldin? No, no, he is nowhere.

(The Red Chorus)
Who says that?
If you have guts, come forward, we want to see your face.

THE BLUE CHORUS COMES TO THE LIGHT WITH LAUGHTER.

(The Red Chorus)
Hey, my wife’s brother,
You dilute indigo in the Indigo planter’s factory.
There are big drums of Indigo,
Go, hide there, you my wife’s brother.

(The Blue Chorus)
Ha, ha [laughter], what can I say?
You fill your belly with Debi Sing’s waste flour.
Debi Sing’s house is in Mugolhat,
Save your life, go flee away from here,
Why do you stand here?

\textsuperscript{25} Smaller zamindar or person with land holding smaller than that of a zamindar.
\textsuperscript{26} Person who takes possession of land by force to carry out the order of the zamindar when a peasant fails to pay the taxes with the produce.
\textsuperscript{27} Leader.
(The Blue Chorus)
Ha ha, why are you standing here!

(The Red Chorus)
Hey, my wife’s brother,
If Nuroldin finds you, he will cut your throat for sure.

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes yes yes
My leader, Nuroldin is in Kazi’s hut

(The Red Chorus)
Your leader Nuroldin is not even in Kazi’s hut.

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes yes yes
My leader, Nuroldin is in Pangsha.

(The Red Chorus)
Your leader, Nuroldin is not even in Pangsha.

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes yes yes
My leader, Nuroldin is in Patogram.

(The Red Chorus)
Your leader, Nuroldin is not even in Patogram.

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes yes yes
My leader, Nuroldin is in Dimlah.

(The Red Chorus)
Your leader, Nuroldin is not even in Dimlah.

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes yes yes
My leader, Nuroldin is in the whole of the country.
My leader, Nuroldin is in the whole of the country.
Who says no?
(The Blue Chorus)
No, no, he is no more alive.
Nuroldin has been carried away by the waters of the Dudkumar.
No, no, he is no more alive.
Nuroldin has been drowned at the bottom of the River Tista.
No, no, he is no more alive.
Nuroldin sleeps at the bottom of his grave.
No, no, he is no more alive
You sit and dream of him when we see him no more.
Your leader, Nuroldin is no more alive.

(The Red Chorus)
No more alive?
Is Nuroldin dead?

(The Blue Chorus)
Try to remember, brother, in the battle of Patogram
The Sepoys of the company came with canons.

(The Red Chorus)
No more alive?
Is Nuroldin dead?

(The Blue Chorus)
Try to remember, brother, in the battle of Kazi’s hut
How the company’s Sepoys bombarded with canons.

(The Red Chorus)
No more alive?
Is Nuroldin dead?

(The Blue Chorus)
Try to remember, brother, in the battle of Dimlah
If the canon is fired, no one can remain alive.

(The Red Chorus)
No more alive?
Is Nuroldin dead?
(The Blue Chorus)
Try to remember, my wife’s brother, in the battle of Mugolhut
If the canon is fired, your leader, Nuroldin is no more alive.

(The Red Chorus)
No more?

THE BLUE CHORUS BREAKS INTO LAUGHTER AGAIN AND
CHASES THE RED CHORUS LIKE A HUNTER.

(The Red Chorus)
No more?

THE LAUGHTER OF THE BLUE CHORUS.

(The Red Chorus)
No more?

THE LAUGHTER OF THE BLUE CHORUS.

(The Red Chorus)
No more?
DOYASIL COMES TO THE STAGE IN BLOOD-STAINED
CLOTHES AND STANDS IN SILENCE. THE RED CHORUS
COMES RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM AND STOPS IN SURPRISE.
THEY SEEMS NOT TO BELIEVE. WITHIN A FEW MOMENTS,
ABBAS AND OTHERS CARRY IN THE DEAD BODY OF
NUROLDIN. THEY SET THE BODY ON THE STAGE IN SILENCE.
THE RED CHORUS ASKS DOYASIL IN SAD FORLORN VOICES.

(The Red Chorus)
No more? No more?
Nuroldin is no more?
Who called with the bugle?
Who shouted with the beats of drum?
Who called us to the moonlit night suddenly?
Tell the truth, Doyasil, is Nuroldin no more alive?
(The Blue Chorus)
Has HE no answer?
No more, no more.

(The Red Chorus)
Tell us quickly, Doyasil,
Is Nuroldin no more alive?
Why don’t you answer, brother? Why are you quiet?
Why don’t you talk?

(Doyasil)
Why? Why? Why?
Why didn’t the Baghban\(^{28}\) take me away?
No one could survive the canon fire at the battle of Mugolhut.
Only your poor Dewan is still alive.

(The Red Chorus)
Tell us quickly, Doyasil,
Is Nuroldin no more alive?
If not alive, then who plays the drum?
If not alive, then who plays the bull-horn bugle?
Tell the truth, Doyasil,
We grab your feet, Doyasil,
Nuroldin’s Dewan, Doyasil,
With blood-wet body, is he no more alive?

(Doyasil)
No more. No more.

(The Red Chorus)
No more. No more.

THEY WALK AROUND THE DEAD BODY OF NUROL DIN ALL TOGETHER. ABBAS STANDS AT THE BACK. HE DRIES HIS TEARS. THE BLUE CHORUS BREAKS INTO LAUGHTER AND LEAVES THE STAGE.

(The Blue Chorus)
No more. No more. No more. No more.
SHARP LIGHT FALLS ON THE DEAD BODY OF NUROL DIN AND THE MUSIC IS PLAYED AT HIGH PITCH.

\(^{28}\) Hindu address to God.
SCENE TWO
THE MUSIC SOFTENS AND NUROLDIN RISES SLOWLY. A BLOOD-STAINED SHROUD AROUND HIS BODY. EVERYONE MOVES AWAY LIKE A WAVE. NUROLDIN OPENS HIS EYES SLOWLY. HE THROWS AWAY THE BLOOD-STAINED SHROUD. THOUGH HE STARTS HIS DIALOGUE IN A WHISPERING VOICE AFTER A FEW LINES IT REACHES HIGH PITCH.

(Nuroldin)
Who says no more? Who says no more?
Is not Nuroldin in front of you?
Is not Nuroldin in front of you?
Then, why do you cry?
Then, why do you cry?

HE CALLS EVERYONE RAISING HIS TWO HANDS.

(Nuroldin)
Come closer, everyone,
Look with careful eyes, everyone.
The light is burning in this night.
After looking with careful eyes, brother,
Tell me, IS your Nuroldin no more alive, truly no more?
Think and try to remember my brothers,
What did I tell you before starting our journey to the battlefield of Mugolhut?
If I die in this battle, there’s nothing to repent.
If I die, life will not die.’
Can’t you remember? Can’t you remember? No one can remember?
You forgot, brother?
Even before it could bet morning, you forgot, brother?
You make seas with your tears, before seas could come to you?

NUROLDIN WALKS AROUND EVERYONE ON THE STAGE AND STANDS AT THE CENTRE. AFTER A FEW MOMENTS OF THEATRICAL SILENCE, SUDDENLY HE RAISES HIS FACE UP AND BLOWS AN IMAGINARY BULL-HORN BUGLE. A BUGLE STARTS PLAYING. HE JUMPS IN A DANCING STYLE AND PLAYS STICKS ON AN IMAGINARY DRUM. THE DRUM
STARTS PLAYING- TITI DIDIM DIM, TITTI DIDIM DIM. HE MAKES CIRCLE AND DANCES AROUND.

(Nuroldin)
No, no, hey no
Your leader Nuroldin is not meant to be dead.
Yes, yes, oh yes
Your leader Nuroldin is with you.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, yes, oh yes
My leader Nuroldin is still alive.
Yes, yes, oh yes
My leader Nuroldin is still mine.
Still I can remember, still I can remember
The sepoy came from the town of Rangpur.
Still I can remember, still I can remember.

(Nuroldin)
Still you can remember, can you remember-
The gora shaheb on horse-back searches for me.

(The Red Chorus)
The Gora shaheb on horse-back searches for you.
Who and who has not paid taxes to Debi Singh?
Who has beheaded the Mahajan?
Who has set fire to the house of the Zamindar?
Who is not still willing to grow indigo?

(Doyasil)
Who and who has gone with Nuroldin?

(The Red Chorus)
Who has listened to Nuroldin and joined him?
The gora sepoy is going to jump on you, no doubt about that.

(Doyasil)
After Listening this Nuroldin announces -

(Nuroldin)
Take care, take care, don’t be afraid.
(Doyasil)
Don’t be afraid, hey don’t be afraid.

(Nuroldin)
Who will be saved, if we don’t save my own house?

(Doyasil)
Form lines, all, form lines
Then fight, brothers, fight with your life.

(The Red Chorus)
Ready, ready, ready, says the tiller throwing off the plough,
Ready, ready, ready, says the jaluja [fisherman], says the jugi [ascetic],
says the theli [one who extracts oil from the vegetables]
Ready, ready, ready, says the young madrasar [Muslim cleric],
Ready, ready, ready, says the sutar [who weaves clothes], says the kamar [iron smith], says the kumar [potter].
Throwing off the plough, throwing off the baisha [carpenter’s instrument], throwing off the fishing net,
Throwing off the ketab [religious book], holding spears, sticks and gulthi [marvel],
Hold to whatever near to your hand,
Making bow and arrow with the bell [a kind of fruit]
Ready ready ready ready ready ready ready ready ready.

(Abbas)
Destroy the black and the white raj, both of them.

(The Red Chorus)
Destroy the house of Debi Singh at the same time,
Light the funeral pyre for the Mahajan, dig the grave for the Ingraj [British]

(Doyasil)
Break the Kachari [the zamindar’s office] and the Kuti like clay toy.

(Nuroldin)
Ready ready ready ready and stand up.

(Doyasil)
Stand firm, my poor brothers.

(Nuroldin)
Ready raedy ready ready and stand up.
(Doyasil)
There is no way out if you don’t stand up.

THEIR GROUP-DANCE STOPS HERE. AS IF IT IS FROZEN IN MID-STEP. THE LIGHT CHANGES FROM MOON-SHINE TO VERY BRIGHT SUN-SHINE.

Scene Three
THEY BECOME ALIVE IN THE SUN-SHINE AGAIN.

(Nuroldin)
Get ready, ready, ready, ready, ready, wake, and start up.
Look with careful eyes, listen with careful ears
listen carefully, brothers mine.
The Nabab Sirajuddaulah has been defeated at Plassey
The Gora [white] company rules the country now.
The Gora plays four tricks to rule seating on my chest.
Debi Singh extracts taxes tying ropes around my throat,
Tying the rope around my throat he declares
Pay the taxes with the bulls and cash money.
Look at his tricks, brothers mine;
If you want to sell rice you have to go to Mahajan.
I grow rice; I grow jute with blood-like sweat,
The Mahajan buys rice with the price of his sweet wish,
I pay the taxes with the rice money; what is left for my child to eat?
The tiller goes again to the Mahajan to borrow,
The tiller goes to the Zamindar again to borrow,
The tiller goes to the Kutial to borrow,
Accepting a high interest rate, the tiller borrows rice.
How do I pay back the borrowing? Again I borrow,
Giving my cows and bull, giving my land, giving my land, giving everything.
Writing away everything when I bring rice home
Oh my luck, the rice I brought home is not good enough for my hunger.

(The Red Chorus)
How to be saved? How to be saved?
Alas, alas, What has Allah done?
What has Vishnu Mohassawar done?
But brother, now we have to depend on Him.
Now I will be a Sannyasi [Hindu ascetic],
Now I will be a Fakir [Muslim ascetic].
I will be a Sannyasi,
I will be a Fakir.
There was no cloth on my body at birth,
Now I will dress myself in no dress.
I will leave this sansar [the worldly life] for Mecca [the Muslim holy place],
I will leave this sansar for Kailash [the Hindu holy place]
I will leave this sansar for Azmir [the Muslim holy place]
I will leave this sansar for Brindaban [the Hindu holy place]

(Nuroldin)
I will not eat rice, I will not eat pan [beetle leaf], I will leave my house,
Even if I go on pilgrimage, I have to pay for that.
You will pay to the right, you will pay to the left, you will have to pay to the Kachari.
You to pay to the Mahajan, you will have to pay to the Company.
The Darpatanidar, the Gothidar, the Zamindar and the gora
Extort in one hand and lash me with the other.
They snatch away my woman of the house, they burn my house,
The gora sows the indigo on my chest.
The poison, like the poison of the cobra,
Turns my blood blue in my body.
Black and white join hands to take my life,
The gora shaheb, the Hindu and the Muslim combine their hands.
I don’t see them different from one another,
One who oppresses me is my oppressor:
Black skin, white skin, do not differ from one another,
One who kills me is my enemy.
Black, white, all the same upstairs,
All the same nation upstairs.
Watch carefully my naked brother,
We are of another nation because of our poverty.

(The Red Chorus)
Tell me, how to be saved? How to be saved?

(Nuroldin)
How to be saved? How to be saved?

(The Red Chorus)
Tell me, how to be saved? How to be saved?
(Nuroldin)
How to be saved?  How to be saved?

(The Red Chorus)
We cannot bear this oppression, any more.
We cannot bear this starvation, any more.
We cannot bear this injustice, any more.
We cannot go on sitting, any more.

(Nuroldin)
If you can’t bear any more, then don’t bear any more.
Raise the stick at your feet.
Raise it, hold it in your hand.
Holding the stick, be united.
Be united, all, be united.

(The Red Chorus)
Be united.

(Nuroldin)
Yes, yes.

(The Red Chorus)
Be united.

(Nuroldin)
Yes, brother, yes.

(The Red Chorus)
I feel frightened.  I feel frightened.

(Nuroldin)
Hey - why are you frightened?
The naked have not even a loincloth - then why are you frightened?
You’ve lost your wealth, lost your dignity, you only have this living body,
And - your child is looking at your face.
Then - why do you feel frightened?

COURAGE IS TRANSMITTED INTO THE RED CHORUS.  THE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS SURROUND NUROL DIN, THEN THEY MAKE A DANCE SEQUENCE PUTTING HIM AT THE CENTRE.
(The Red Chorus)
I have leader Nuroldin, what should I be afraid of?
The house of father and grandfather is in Nuroldin’s hand.
The house of father and grandfather is also the house of my child.
Nuroldin is with you, what should I be afraid of?

(Doyasil)
My leader Nuroldin, raise him on your shoulders.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes, raise him on our shoulders.
Brother, raise him our heads.
Ali, raise him on our heads.
Shiva, raise him on our heads.
Remembering Ali and Shiva, let’s go home, quietly.

(Nuroldin)
Is there anything like home? My earthen house.

(The Red Chorus)
Depending on Allah and Hari, let’s go home quickly.

(Nuroldin)
Hey, my fort is that earthen house from now on.

THE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS LEAVE THE STAGE RAISING NUROLDIN ON THEIR SHOULDERS. ONLY ONE FIGURE, THAT IS ABBAS, PRETENDS TO FOLLOW THEM FOR A WHILE, THEN SLOWLY HE REMAINS AT THE CORNER OF THE STAGE. THE LIGHT FADES INTO NIGHT.

Scene Four
ABBAS STARES INTO THE DISTANCE OFF FOR SOME TIME. THE BEAT OF THE DRUM IS PLAYED WITH THE SEQUENCE OF THE LAST SCENE FOR A WHILE. THEN IT FADES AWAY.

(Abbas)
Whose fault is it? One who dances, or who directs the dancer?
Dance, brothers, dance, dance lifting him on your head,
Dance the umaly dhumaly[a kind of folk dance in Bangladesh] dance,
Hold an umbrella over his head.
Why just call him a leader?
Why don’t you call him a *Nabab*?
Make him a *Nabab* on a throne
- I don’t like that, nothing makes me happy.

THE DEWAN DOYASIL APPEARS IN SEARCH OF ABBAS.

**(Doyasil)**
Hey, you are here, brother? I am looking for you.
He looks for you.

**(Abbas)**
Who?

**(Doyasil)**
Who else? Nuroldin looks for you.
He said, where has he gone, Abbas?
Said, ‘call my heart’s friend to me,
I have a great affair to discuss with him.’
Let’s go, let’s go, brother.

**(Abbas)**
Pardon me, brother.
I am not a young lad; when everyone dances
My feet do not want to dance. I will come later.

DOYASIL LEAVES AFTER A LITTLE HESITATION.

**(Abbas)**
Whose fault? - One who dances, or one who makes another dance?
If someone does not dance, then another will insist to dances.
If one refuses, then another will search around for him,
Till he gets a person like a puppet;
If he is found, then everyone makes him dance,
But one who dances? Why does he dance? He is not stupid.
- I don’t feel good, it does not suit me.

ABBAS HAS NOT NOTICED THE NIGHT GUARDS OF THE BLUE CHORUS COME AND WAIT IN SILENCE. HE SEES THEM AS HE TURNS TO LEAVE.

**(The Blue Chorus)**
Who is it? Abbas Mondol?
(Abbas)
Yes, yes. Who are you?

ABBAS CANNOT SEE THEM PROPERLY AS THEY ARE STANDING AT THE DARK. NOW, THEY COME TO THE LIGHT.

(The Blue Chorus)
We are from the *khuti*.

(Abbas)
From the *khuti*? Of which *khuti*?
The indigo or the Company?

(The Blue Chorus)
What’s the difference, brother? It’s all the same. It is the *khuti* of the *gora*.
What do you do all alone in the dead of night?
What engrosses you, that you cannot recognise me?
In the same village, we are living here for so long,
Why do you get alarmed seeing me?

(Abbas)
Alarmed?

(The Blue Chorus)
Yes, yes. Look, brother, you look alarmed.
As if you don’t see me, you see an unholy spirit.

(Abbas)
If you don’t make any noise, brothers, if you turn about breaking the land
If you stand still like a tree,
Then I have to be alarmed,
As if the sky is erased by the blue tree
Suddenly.

(The Blue Chorus)
When I was starving,
Often I get alarmed at anything.

(Abbas)
Yes, yes. Now, your belly is full with milk and rice.
(The Blue Chorus)
Why are you distant?
Why don’t you join us? The Gora will give you a blue uniform.
I will take you to the group, make you a person of the *khuti*,
You will also live with milk and rice.

(Abbas)
Yes, yes. Yes people do wear *piran* [uniform, or clothing].
At a special time
A person can be known by the *piran*.
You’ve given me something to think about.
Go home. It’s getting late.
ABBAS EXITS. AT THE END OF THE STAGE, HE LOOKS BACK.
THEN, HE EXITS.

(The Blue Chorus)
I heard the bullhorn bugle,
I heard people cry -
Not one or two,
At least one, two, three score it seemed to be.
When I came here, I found no one.
Abbas Mondol and the moonshine of full-moon.
The old men and women say, hey,
The boundary of the night ceases to exist on a full-moon-lit night,
Many beings appear in the lonely space,
Many beings come down to the bank of the river,
They start their fanfare,
Vanish as soon as human beings appear.
Yes, yes. This must be correct.
No, no, you must have heard
Nuroldin’s voice, not any ghost or spirit.
For a few days
I’ve seen him engrossed in some thought.
People from the far off villages look for him.
What important meeting do they have all the time?
They whisper,
They move quietly;
When they see me they grow till, they hide from me.
I don’t think it’s ghost, or spirits,
But Nuroldin’s meeting takes place in the full-moon.
What may come out of that?
What may come out of that?
I have to collect the *sambad* [information, news]
I have to collect the *sambad*
Detailed
Detailed.
Let’s move forward, let’s move forward.
If you have heard the hue and cry yourself,
Then it is required to inform the *khuti*
Whatever the *sarkar* [authority] will do.
Let’s run, then, let’s run.
THE BLUE CHORUS STARTS MOVING FAST.

Scene Five

THE STAGE IS LIT WITH MOON-SHINE. THE KUTIAL THOMSON SHOUTS AS HE ENTERS THE STAGE.

(Thomson)
Ho - ho - *Moshalchi* [the torch bearer]
Lantern, show me the lantern.
My guests, please come to the yard.
There’s beautiful moon-shine here,
Please come.

COLLECTOR GOODLAD ENTERS.

(Goodlad)
Why do you need a lantern, Thomson? Such moon-light.
Income, expenditure, pawn, goods collection and dispatch
Has spoiled your sense of humour.
What’s the use of a lantern in the moon-shine?

(Thomson)
The path you came through the garden is very dark.
The bush and creepers are on all side.
They say Rangpur is the capital of cobras.
Ho - *Moshalchi*.

(Goodlad)
Yes, that’s true. I forgot.
Your wife’s hospitality,
The grilled bull-meat, the red wine,
All made me forget whether I am in Bengal or in my own country.
(Thomson)
Oh, Mr. Goodlad, we must not forget that we have to be careful all the
time in Bengal now.
I’ve been feeling quite a few days, everything is not all right in
Rangpur.

(Goodlad)
I know. In Rangpur, they roam around silently, and
secretly. Their slippery black bodies suddenly become visible like
lightning and disappear at the next moment. Now you will see
something and in the next moment you will see they are hissing with
flared tongues.

THE REVENUE SUPERVISOR MORRIS ENTERS.

(Morris)
Are you talking about Cobras? In my estimation,
Humans and cobras are equal in number
In this God-forsaken district of Rangpur.

(Goodlad)
And Morris, they are equal in character too.
THOMSON MOVES AWAY A LITTLE AND YELLS AT HIS WIFE.

(Thomson)
Lisbe--th, we are here.

(Morris)
This is called love for the wife. Can’t even bear a little separation.

(Goodlad)
Thomson is so lucky. His wife lives with him.

(Morris)
She is very courageous, no doubt about that.
I have not heard that any white female has come to Bengal, so far.

THOMSON CALLS AGAIN FROM THE DISTANCE.

(Thomson)
Lieutenant - please wait for the lantern
Bring him with you, Lisbe - th.
THOMSON COMES TO THEM. HE NOTICES - GOODLAD MADE A SIGN WITH HIS EYES TO MORRIS. THOMSON UNDERSTANDS THAT THE SIGN IS ABOUT HIS WIFE. HE GETS A LITTLE NERVOUS AND TRIES TO GIVE AN EXPLANATION.

(Thomson)
Lisbeth would show the Moslin
She has received from the Rani of Dimlah to every guest Who comes to our house. --Ho--Moshalchi
These black dogs are so lazy and deaf,
That they don’t hear anything without an earthquake
- They don’t lift their backside from the ground.
I am going to bring them here.

THOMSON GOES OUT FAST. GOODLAD MAKES SIGNS WITH HIS EYE TO MORRIS AGAIN.

(Goodlad)
Lieutenant is a lonely young man, and in this Rangpur -
Not in Rangpur alone? In the whole of Bengal,
The white-bodied female is scarce.
I see you are tensed?

(Morris)
No, just, I was thinking.

(Goodlad)
How far will this matter go?
To kissing, at the best.

(Morris)
No, no, something else.

(Goodlad)
What’s that?

(Morris)
I already have two impressions in such a short time.
Which is correct?
The cobra? Or the lazy dog?
But the animal I have seen in the city of Calcutta
Whose most live organ
Hangs over its thighs,
That’s not the flared poisonous tongue of the cobra.

(Goodlad)
You just came to Rangpur in November. Didn’t you?
Not two months even; you haven’t seen anything.
Rangpur is much further from Calcutta than India is from England.
You have Fort William in Calcutta,
Here, you are the fort for yourself.
There, the native begs our kindness, our favour.
Here, the native rebels, if possible, right now.

(Morris)
Rebels?

(Goodlad)
Rebellion, Morris, rebellion.
You just came here? In this countryside of Bengal.
The native does not mean a Debi Singh
Who opens a bottle at your order, gives you the bribe of gold coins.

(Morris)
Collector sahib, I depend on your experience.
Only three days back, Debi Singh came to my _khuti_,
For a simple matter, nothing serious,
Just to inquire about my welfare and to wish my success.
With that a piece of Muslin, and a few gold bars.

(Goodlad)
No offense in that.
No loss to the company,
Moreover they get depressed if you don’t receive them. Then?

(Morris)
A strange matter. I have noticed
There’s strong rivalry between his eye and tongue:
His eyes are rigid ice
When his voice is liquid with criticism -
Again, when his eyes are bright with mystery -
His utterings are cold and serious.
I think, Debi Singh too is the same.
At best, he is with us for his interest, not more than that.
(Goodlad)
Dear Morris, Company’s Revenue Supervisor, we have our own interests too. To collect certain revenue.
From Thomson, you learn about the company’s khuti-factor - and also about the merchandises -
Cotton, Opium, Clothes, Gur [sugar type eatable made from the sugarcane], Sura [alcohol], and indigo.
If the interest is same for both the sides, then an archenemy even becomes a friend.
Because of the interest, he is our man.
Moreover, you must know,
He is also a favourite of our honourable Warren Hastings,
This Debi Singh, and also mine.
After a while, he will also be your favourite.
The hand of the native is more attractive to us than his eye or the tongue.
What’s important is what does that hand give,
If it gives, then how much does it give?
How much does it give to the Company?
How much does it give?
How much does it give to you?
(Morris)
Is not the personal-nazrana [bribe as gift] kept as Company’s property?
Should not I write into the realisation-account of the Company?
(Goodlad)
Stupid Morris. You and I are simply time-servers.
And poor.
We were born in the house of the poor. Who’s not?
All the employees of the Company were born to poor families.
Who are the owners of the Company? Who are they? Who?
(Morris)
The Baron, the Duke, the Lord.
(Goodlad)
And we
Come to this country
After a month-long journey of crossing the deadly rough seas
Round the Cape of Good Hope - good hope in name only. In fact, in the belly of a hopeless ship,
You chewed the salted meat and dried vegetables,
With chronic pain in your belly from the rolling seas
Who come to this country?
Not a Baron or a Lord; it’s you and me who come, and
Who are these you and I?

(Morris)

Those who are commoners.

(Goodlad)
And, where? In this hell of summer dampness.
We breathe in the air of cobra,
We bear the mosquito bites,
Blue flies fly all around,
Endless conspiracies,
Unknown motive amongst the natives,
Languages are difficult to understand.
We walk on a tight rope all the time.
Not a Baron, or a lord, it’s you and me who walk.
Not a Baron, or a Lord dies
From dysentery, cholera and fever; it’s you and I who die.
It is not safe to bring a wife here,
But the stinky black romony [female who can be sexually consumed] is repulsive.
And even if we do have to sow enter seed,
Then some of us get peculiar diseases.
Not a Baron, or a Lord, it’s you and I who suffer.
The Lord and the Baron?
I will fill their coffers with gold and valuables.
For me, it’s only a limited salary,
No, Morris, no.
Opportunity comes once, it never comes twice.
If I can, why shouldn’t I be a Baron?
Do you want to be a Lord?
Who does not want that, Morris?
Doesn’t Baralat [head] Bahadur [the successful] Warren Hastings want that?
Why don’t you ask him?
Take your Debi Singh for example, hasn’t this Debi Singh given him nazrana [the gift of bribe]? Hasn’t he accepted it?
Hasn’t he sacked him once? Hasn’t he re-employed Debi Singh when he found his palm quite oily? Are we angels?

(Morris)

Of course, not.
Simple human beings.
(Goodlad)
And poor.
No blue blood in the body, father has no wealth,
No fire in winter, there is no reality except the present.
Let the business, or the kingdom expand,
What heaven will there be for you and I?

(Morris)
The profit is only for the King and the Company.

(Goodlad)
God is all merciful.
If He hasn’t shown the gold mine once, who would have shown it?
God has ordained Morris, God Himself wants
The fast end to our poverty.
Therefore, tell me what is your duty?
Will you write the personal nazrana in the dispatch of the Company?
Will you do your personal business along with the Company’s?
Are you going back with empty hands after spending your life in this
God-forsaken Bengal?

(Morris)
No.
I too see in my imagination, I have gone back home again.
I have a luxurious palace in the countryside.
There is chimney’s smoke in the sky, the extended green field,
The sunshine is laid on the ground like a golden bar,
I am walking, my wife is beside me holding my arm
I too dream - of fox hunting,
Sitting with a gun on the back of a fast-horse.
The bugle is played again and again in the middle of the trees of the
afternoon fog.
I too hear, I hear.
I too sometimes wish to go to the Capital,
To sit in a London club -
Where there is wine, cards, and leisure. Bengal is only a memory, the
butler serves dinner.
I too want, I want my wife’s love,
I want to fill the hands of my son with a secure future,
I want my daughter to be invited for dances at the palaces,
Yes, I want, yes,
I want. If possible with the wealth and money,
I want to have blue blood in this body of mine,
I too want to be a Baron,
I want to live the life of a Lord.

THOMSON’S AGITATED VOICE IS HEARD FROM A DISTANCE.

(Thomson)

Goodlad, - Goodlad.

THEY LOOK AROUND IN SURPRISE, SEE THOMSON ENTER RUNNING WITH A PISTOL IN HIS HAND, LISBETH COMING BEHIND HIM.

(Goodlad)

Thomson? ?

(Morris)

Oh God! Sure, the lieutenant has been killed. Look, he is holding a pistol in his hand.

(Goodlad)

Oh, really?

(Thomson)

Goodlad, the news is not good.

(Goodlad)

Has Lieutenant Macdonald been killed, then?

(Lisbeth)

God forbid! He has just moved out.

(Morris)

He is alive, then.

(Goodlad)

Have you told him anything to make him leave without saying goodnight?

(Thomson)

The situation is very uncertain.
THOMSON TRIES TO SEE SOMETHING ALL AROUND HOLDING HIS PISTOL.

(Lisbeth)
Please be prepared without wasting your words.
The situation is not good.

(Goodlad)
I can see that.

(Lisbeth)
You can see? - Oh - ho
No, you cannot see that, Collector Bahadur.
I am really surprised to see the most experienced of our company, has such a low level of intelligence!

(Goodlad)
Lisbeth, I don’t have enough education,
To return and say something reasonable to a romony.

(Lisbeth)
Then not a lady, romony? Shonginy [the female accompaniment] ?
Shahachory [the female who roams with a male all the time]?
One who is no more than a lover in clear and unclear terms?
Good. We can talk about that later.
Time is very little and how unlucky the Company is that its fate depends on your hand at the moment,
the existence and honour of the Company depend on you.

(Goodlad)
What? I mean? - -Thomson, Thomson, the news is not good, you said.

THOMSON COMES BACK AND INFORMS AT THE CALL OF GOODLAD.

(Thomson)
Some persons have gathered at the boundary of the village. At least a few hundreds.

(Goodlad)
Reason?
Unknown. But the reaction among the servants was quick. The Moshalchi has fled away. Some of the Chowkidars [native guards] too.

This is the character of a native—
Does not move by news, but flies at a rumour.

Collector Bahadur. Please, listen carefully.
Can you hear anything?
Rumour? Or, the beat of a country-drum? Shinga? The hue and cry of people?

Yes, it is.

Coming towards us.

Maybe, they want to occupy the khuti.
Or, they come to capture the Collector,
Whom they might know will be found in the khuti tonight.
Or -

Rebellion.

Therefore, not clear,
Why does my husband hold a pistol?
Be a good chap. Forget jealousy and look after your health.
It seems, the noise is coming nearer.
My dear husband, please go to the front gate.
Most of them are native sepoys; you cannot trust them,
They may leave the main gate open—please go.

THOMSON RUNS OUT.

And, you?
Shall you go forward armed to the fray?
Or do you want to stand in the moon-shine and enjoy the pleasure of a romony’s company?

UNPREPARED FOR THIS, THE TWO LEAVE CLEARING THEIR VOICES. LISBETH LISTENS THE FAR OFF HUE AND CRY CAREFULLY. THE VERY FINE VOICE OF NUROLDIN’S CALL IS HEARD FROM THE FAR.

(Nuroldin)
Come brothers.

LISBETH GETS RESTLESS. SHE WHISPERS.

(Lisbeth)
Pistol. Pistol.

SHE RUNS OUT IN SEARCH OF A PISTOL. THE HUE AND CRY OF THE MASSES FALLS ON THE EMPTY STAGE.

Scene Six
THE COMBINED MUSIC OF COUNTRY-DRUM AND SHINGA. THE RED CHORUS GATHERS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF NUROLDIN. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHORUS CARRY STICKS AND polo on their shoulders. ABBAS AND DOYASIL ARE WITH THEM.

(Nuroldin)
Come, brother.
No more music,
No more gathering of mobs, form small groups.

(The Red Chorus)
Small small group small small group,
Small small group.
(Nuroldin)
But keep yourself nearby keep yourself nearby.

(The Red Chorus)
But keep yourself nearby but keep yourself nearby.

(Doyasil)
Small small group small small group
But keep yourself nearby.
Hold your stick and polo on your shoulder, Small small group.
So that no one can suspect, small small group.
As if you are going to catch fish,
Yes, yes, you are going to catch fish in the river at night.

(Nuroldin)
Yes, yes
You are going to catch fish.
Listen to the Dewan, listen to what he says
You are - going to catch fish.
But listen, if anyone comes and hits you -

(Doyasil)
Brother mine, if anyone hits you -

(Nuroldin)
Throw the magic polo,
Raise your magic stick,

(Doyasil)
Magic, magic -

(Nuroldin)
Jump on them.

(Doyasil)
Before that, pretend that -

(Nuroldin)
Going to catch fish in the river at night.

ABBAS TALKS TO HIMSELF AND STANDS FAR OFF.
(Abbas)
I don’t find any reason in this.
Why are the tillers, the weavers, and others called here
if you don’t want to attack first?
If you do, are you going to fight with sticks?
The *gora* has gun; the *gora* has pistol and canon, what has he not got?
With the fire of guns, the *gora* will turn everything into dust.
Has no sense? Has no intelligence? You are dancing-dolls with sticks
before the guns?

(Nuroldin)
Abbas, why are you standing aside? Don’t stand on one side, Abbas.
What are you looking for
in the lonely place all by yourself?
Open your heart, brother, open your heart.
The Collector came - I have heard in the evening,
Allah may not give me this chance again.
I have called you all suddenly for that.
I did not have time to ask you even.
Now what do you suggest? Won’t we go to the *khuti*?
Open your heart, brother, open your heart.
Do not stand silent; all the people
are looking at me like the birds -
Whom should I look at?
On whose intelligence, should I depend?
Yours, brother, yours, Abbas, yours.

(Abbas)
I know, I know all, brother, don’t I know that?
If you are set on the way, there is no going back.

(Nuroldin)
Do not break ranks, brothers; keep yourself beside me.
Look at the *khuti*-force, they gather and coming closer.

A FEW MEMBERS OF THE BLUE CHORUS STAND IN THE
DISTANCE. THE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS MOVE
TOWARDS THEM ALL AT ONCE. THE TWO GROUPS MOVE
FROM SIDE TO SIDE. NUROLDIN NOTICES SOME OF THE
MEMBERS OF THE BLUE CHORUS ARE WILLING TO DESERT
THE *KHUTI*-FORCE. NUROLDIN RAISES HIS HANDS AND
TURNS THE RED CHORUS BACK. AFTER THAT, NUROLDIN
CLAPS HIS RAISED HANDS AND UTTERS THE DIALOGUE BELOW WITH THE BEAT OF CLAPS. TWO MEMBERS OF THE BLUE CHORUS WILL THROW OFF THEIR BLUE DRESSES AND WEAR RED DRESSES AS HE SPEAKS.

(Nuroldin)
The people of the *khuti* have come here, look, what do they do,
Look, all of them raise their spears,
Raising the spears, they throw those off not even hitting us,
Look, look, they open the diluted indigo containers,
They open the diluted indigo containers, they throw off their dresses,
Throwing off the dresses, they take the stick and *polo* on their shoulders.
Hey - they are not *goras*, even if they dress like *goras*,
Look, they are my people within the blue dresses.

NUROLDIN GOES NEAR TO ABBAS.

(Nuroldin)
Abbas, why are you sad? Stand beside me,
Look, the *khuti*-folks join our party.

ABBAS SAYS WITH NUROLDIN’S RHYTHM POINTING AT THE MEMBERS OF THE BLUE CHORUS AT THE FAR.

(Abbas)
Look, look, there are some after them,
As if like the Gang Tittiri bird they notice you.

NUROLDIN GOES TO THE BLUE CHORUS.

(Nuroldin)
Why are you standing there? If you have drunk mother’s milk, then join please.
Please join the line, the milk is white,
The white of the milk is not meant to be blue with the poison of indigo.
Listen, listen, the mother cries and says,
Listen, your mother cries and says,
‘Where have you gone? There is milk again in my breast.
If you don’t drink my milk you’ll have to drink if you drink,
The milk that floods the Dugdakumar river.
That milk floats away; my child do not drink that,
That milk becomes salt in the sea.’
Saying this, the mother cries,
Such a deaf son who can’t hear that!
TEARS ROLL DOWN FROM THE EYES OF NUROLDIN. SUDDENLY, THERE IS NOISE OF A GUN-FIRE FROM AFAR.

(Doyasil)
Stand still! They shoot with the guns.

(The Red Chorus)
They shoot with the guns,
They shoot from the khuti of the Company
They shoot canon,
They shoot canon from the khuti of the Company.

(Doyasil)
Gun, gun brother, not the canon.

(The Red Chorus)
They shoot with the guns, with the big guns.

(Nuroldin)
Don’t be scared, brother, there is no danger from the guns,
The gun-fire will not come to the middle of us.
They try to scare me
They’re shooting blanks at the sky.

(The Red Chorus)
The gorā shoots with the gun.

(Nuroldin)
Oh, I know the motive of the gorā, let me tell you.
When they see the crowd, the gorā will not shoot.
Learn brother, the gorā will not fire at the crowd,
As the blind ferocious cat does not jump at the shadow of the ominous being.

(The Red Chorus)
Ha, ha, ha.

(Nuroldin)
Then, when you go back to your own house,
You think, brother, the gorā will grow cold inside the khuti,
That is the rule of the gorā, suddenly the gorā will appear breaking the crust of the land,
Killing everyone, burning all the houses in the village, The *gora* will diminish everything.

**THE LIEUTENANT’S SHOUT IS HEARD FROM THE FAR.**

**(Lieutenant)**
Stop, stop.

**(Doyasil)**
Listen, it seems to be the voice of a *Gora*.

**(Nuroldin)**
Seems to be the one in uniform

**(Doyasil)**
Seems to be a *gora* military Commander.

**THE LIEUTENANT IS VISIBLE NOW. THE BLUE CHORUS STANDS BEHIND HIM FORMING A FEW LINES.**

**(Lieutenant)**
Don’t move forward. Who are you? T-e-ll.

**(Nuroldin)**
We are the people.
People of the fields, people of the country, we are the peo-ple.

**(Lieutenant)**
What do you want? What is your purpose?

**(Nuroldin)**
Can my purpose be said from far-off?

**(Lieutenant)**
I can hear clearly. Tell me quickly.

**(Nuroldin)**
Whatever I would say, or I wouldn’t say, wouldn’t say to the other, Only if the Collector is present there, in his presence, I would tell him what I want to say.
The Bora sahib [big boss] Collector bahadur [successful] is present here.
He can hear everything. State what you want without wasting time.
Don’t come forward, stand still, the sepoys are all armed.

We are unarmed.

NUROLDIN THROWS THE COMMENT TO HIS COMPANIONS IN A LOW VOICE.

For the moment.

Ha, ha, ha.

So, shaheb, be patient, be still.

Be still, be still.

Be still.
One day, you came here crossing the black waters of the seas on the ship in search of merchandise.
Your colour is white, that I heard from my father and grandfather.
Before my father and grandfather could see you with their own eyes, then came my turn.
I could see you with my own eyes, I saw your colour is white, no doubt about that, but your heart’s colour is darkest black.

THE RED CHORUS GETS CLOSER. THOMSON COMES AND STANDS TO THE SIDE OF THE LIEUTENANT.

Be still, be still.

One day, you grabbed the biggest load of merchandise.
One day, I noticed with surprise, that, you had already bought me with all of my clans. And also noticed, that, though you are the same creation of Allah, you are sitting heavily on my chest.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

GOODLAD JOINS THE COMPANY SIDE.

(Nuroldin)
One day, I noticed. I pay you taxes, but this land is not yours. Noticed you have the power to order the Kazi [this is the position of a local judge under Muslim rule], judicial power. That Kazi is not meant to have judicial power on you. What justice that son of the Kazi will do? That Kazi’s son works for such a Subedar [the Muslim ruler] who feels sad if he cannot sit on the throne with your blessings.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

MORRIS JOINS THE COMPANY’S SIDE.

(Nuroldin)
Another day, I saw your friend Debi Singh standing in front of my house, I’ve never heard this before; he asks for four times more taxes, He asks in cash, he asks for fifty percent in the taka [unit of currency in Bengali] If I can’t pay he takes everything by force, Burns my house. We all cried in sufferings.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

LISBETH JOINS THE COMPANY’S SIDE.

(Nuroldin)
Accepting one taka interest on one taka,
I approached the *Mahajan*,
Signed away my land as I couldn’t to pay back the loan,
Sold clay pots, ploughs,
Sold my own son, sold my wife, they snatched my young girl.
Fled to the jungle, my great-great parents’ house became the *gurusthan* [the Muslim graveyard] and the *shashan* [the Hindu cremation spot],
My own yard, my land gone to the occupation of Satan.

(The Red Chorus)

Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)

After long thought, and consulting everyone, I am presenting this petition on behalf of everyone,
To the Company, Company’s Collector, through you.
I am telling you, my condition is beyond bearing,
I cannot put up with any more.
You must redress my condition.
Please take away Debi Singh from this area immediately,
And snatch away the whip of *Zamindar*,
And snatch away from the *Mahajan*, his compound interest account book.
Give back my land from the indigo cultivation,
So that I can work justly. Give back my house so that I can rest my head.
You must do all this.
You must do it in this month,
If not, we won’t be liable, for what my two hands will do.

(The Red Chorus)

Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)

That’s my last word.

(The Red Chorus)

Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)

That date is over.

(The Red Chorus)

Be still, be still.
(Nuroldin)
No response from you.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)
But?

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)
I understood for the last time, you have no intention to do anything.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)
No more justice or redress,
We want from you.
Say, brother, say.

(The Red Chorus)
No more justice or redress,
We want from you.

(Nuroldin)
Say, brother, say.
Say, everyone at a time, at one voice
- My right in my country.

(The Red Chorus)
My right in my country.

(Nuroldin)
Say, we kishan and majur [peasant and worker] we toil in the field
My soil produces gold
You have no right to that gold.

(The Red Chorus)
You have no right to that gold.
(Nuroldin)
I have closed your way.

(The Red Chorus)
I have closed your way.

(Nuroldin)
From now on, I act on my own responsibility.

(The Red Chorus)
I have taken responsibility in my own hands.

(Nuroldin)
The majur, the kishan, the jalua [one who earns living by fishing], and
the jugi [the ascetic person] are with me.
From now on, the law is in my hands.

(The Red Chorus)
Be still, be still.
Be still, be still.

(Nuroldin)
Hey, be careful, be careful.

(The Red Chorus)
Be careful, be careful.

NUROLDIN LEADS THE DANCE. ABBAS SPEAKS ASIDE AFTER MOVING AWAY FROM THE DANCE.

(Abbas)
Mad. The whole world will call him mad.
Seeing this act of Nuroldin,
The enemy - is a monstrous eater,
No normal person can dare oppose it.
He came in front of the monstrous eater’s court, and became bold with anger.
He became mad? He is not even a stupid!

(The Red Chorus)
Kutial, be careful,
Debi Singh, be careful.
Zamindar, be careful,
Mahajan, be careful.

(Abbas)
To do justice, or to seek redress, if you have to take it into your hand,
Why did you need to shout in front of the khuti?
Why did he need to come with all the people?
He is not even mad or stupid.
What is the purpose?
What does he want?

BY THIS TIME NUROLDIN COMES NEAR TO ABBAS.

(Nuroldin)
How was the idea, brother? What do you think?
As the gorā party is not willing to redress our problem,
There is no option left for me but to solve it myself.
You have to understand, it will not be possible for me to solve the problem myself;
I must have everyone with me.
Are we not all? We are not all the same -
Some are extra-courageous, some are hesitant, some are scared.
So I brought out every one without letting them know what I am going to do.
Think about that. I have pronounced in front of the gorā, after that, will the gorā spare anyone?
The gorā is quiet at the sudden appearance of so many at a time,
But it will not forgive anyone in the morning.
It will search for everyone who was in the group.
Then to survive or to die, everyone has to be united.
For this I had pull everyone out of their houses and close the door to disunity.
Closing that road, I have left one road open -
Take arms, be my companions.

(Abbas)
Understood. I have some questions still left to be answered.
Go home, I will come behind you.

(Nuroldin)
Home? - where is the home, Abbas Mondol?
From today, your and my home is - the field, the river-banks, and the wild forest.
Careful, be careful
Careful, be careful.

(The Red Chorus)
Careful, be careful
Careful, be careful.

EVERYONE LEAVES. ONLY THE COMPANY SIDE REMAINS ON THE STAGE. THE LIEUTENANT RAISES HIS PISTOL AND AIMS AT NUROLDIN. GOODLAD RAISES HIS HAND TO STOP HIM.

(Goodlad)
We are few. Let them go. Those dacoits will learn how dire is the consequence of this.

EVERYONE OF THE COMPANY LEAVES. ONLY A MEMBER OF THE BLUE CHORUS REMAINS ON THE STAGE. THE LIGHT IS BRIGHTENED ON HIM AND CREATES DAYLIGHT.

Scene seven

ONE MEMBER OF THE BLUE CHORUS IS ON THE STAGE. TWO MORE MEMBERS APPROACH PRACTISING HOW TO PLAY A DUL [THE COUNTRY-DRUM].

(The Blue Chorus)
The creation belongs to the Creator
The land belongs to the Badshah
The order is from the Company.

THEY PLAY THE DUL. THE FIRST MEMBER OF THE BLUE CHORUS WALKS IN A CIRCLE AND ANNOUNCES.

(The Blue Chorus)
The subjects of the whole of Bengal are hereby informed by this announcement,
That there remain some obnoxious persons within the society despite the limitless care and proper management of the country by the Company bahadur.
They are involved in limitless anarchy,
They are killing people and looting in the *porgonas* [administrative blocks of villages],
They are distracting the simple minded peasants and artisans from their vocations.
They are tempting the subjects to join the dacoit party with lies.
You must be informed, informed, informed,
That the Company *bahadur* is determined to save the peace, safety, and wealth of the subjects from those dacoits.

PLAYS THE *DUL* NOW, THE SECOND MEMBER OF THE BLUE CHORUS ANNOUNCES.

(The Blue Chorus)
The order, the order, the order,
It is in your own interest to inform us of the dacoits’ movements.
The order, the order, the order,
It is in your own interest to inform us of the dacoits’ movements.

PLAYS THE *DUL* NOW, THE FIRST MEMBER OF THE BLUE CHORUS ANNOUNCES.

(The Blue Chorus)
If it is known that the dacoits have taken shelter in any of the villages, then taxes will be imposed on that village indiscriminately.
If anybody hides news of the dacoits’ whereabouts, Then that person will be sold as a slave.
If any dacoit is caught, Then he will be hanged.
In his own village in broad daylight, he will be hanged.
His dead body will hang until it rots.

(All)
The creation belongs to the Creator
The land belongs to the *Badshah*
The order is from the Company.
THEY LEAVE THE STAGE PLAYING THE DUL AND MAKING THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

INTERMISSION

Scene Eight

THE MEMBERS OF THE RED CHORUS GATHER AND PREPARE TO SLEEP ON THE GROUND BEFORE THE INTERMISSION IS OVER. MIDNIGHT. MOONLIT. MOST OF THEM GO TO SLEEP. ABBAS ENTERS. SOMEONE GIVES HIM A PLACE TO SLEEP. ABBAS REFUSES QUIETLY AND LOOKS AT THE SKY, THE STARS, THE MOON. EVERYONE GOES TO SLEEP.

( Abbas)
The sky is blue, and the stars shine bright in the sky. No one can count them. Everyone becomes senseless, As if gold is scattered over the fields Through it all the moon walks.

NUROLDIN STANDS IN SILENCE FOR SOME TIME. NOW HE PLACES HIS HAND AT THE BACK OF ABBAS’S SHOULDER.

(Nuroldin)
Abbas.

(Abbas)
Nuroldin.

(Nuroldin)
Are you waking still? You haven’t gone to sleep? Everyone sleeps. You are the only one awake?

(Abbas)
You have also come out. Go to sleep. Your Ambia is alone at home.
This is an unknown place. If she wakes from a nightmare!

(Nuroldin)
Nightmare? The dream is of no other kind?
You said nightmare?

(Abbas)
It is nothing. Look, the moon floats in the blue of the sky.
If you look at such a moon, who can believe there is so much sorrow, so many sufferings in this world?

(Nuroldin)
Yes, brother, yes. The full moon walks
Overhead, does not look down.
The water of the Tista goes red with blood
The full moon tramps the blue of the sky.
My child cries alone in the deserted yard of my house
The full moon, what bothers her?
Nothing. The starving people
Want the fragrance of new rice,
The Child’s face lighted like the full moon
I want nothing more than that.
If you listen putting your ear on my chest, Abbas,
You will hear nothing other than that in every beat of my heart.

(Abbas)
I have not asked that.
Why do you give this sudden explanation?

(Nuroldin)
Explanation? Explanation? No, not that.

(Abbas)
You can’t even tell me?
What ails you in your mind?
We’ve lived like two brothers for a long time,
We share sorrow and happiness like two brothers for a long time.
Now you hide your mind from me, that hurts me.
Tell me brother, tell me, what ails you?

(Nuroldin)
I am not that happy with Ambia.
(Abbas)
Since when? Why? I am really surprised to hear that,
She is your wife, you are her husband, she takes so much pride in you,
You are not happy with her?

(Nuroldin)
Only who lives with her can understand; one who spends the days and nights under the same roof can understand her.

(Abbas)
Yes, yes.

(Nuroldin)
You don’t have a family, not a house, brother,
How can you understand?

(Abbas)
Yes, yes.

(Nuroldin)
As you are a bare tree, there is no sharmalota [the golden creeper] in your branches.
You can not understand.

(Abbas)
I don’t understand women, that is true.
But that’s not the present topic.
When I see my friend’s sorrow, when I hear him,
I feel an urge to understand his pain.
If it is not private,
Tell me, how did she hurt you, what pains you?

(Nuroldin)
I have fallen in danger by telling you.
How can I express it? - In a nutshell
It is this - if my wife Ambia does not understand me, then, whom do I expect to understand me?
The union of two souls is only possible when they are equal in everything.
Even the owner of all creation does weeps to break a union of two true souls.
(Abbas)
To break, why does the question of breaking arise?

(Nuroldin)
It does arise, brother, it does arise.
If the heart of the maji [boatman] is broken, then his boat breaks into pieces and floats on the water of the river.

(Abbas)
Tell me clearly, brother, tell me clearly, Why do you make a mystery?

(Nuroldin)
Ambia dreams that I am sitting on a kingly throne And she is sitting beside me as the queen.

(Abbas)
Ambia loves you very much.

ABBAS LAUGHS MILDLY FOR SOMETIME.

(Nuroldin)
I am not greedy to sit on the throne of the Nabab, No one else knows, but you must know this If you don’t trust me, then live with your own belief. Can you remember, Abbas? The dance in the wilderness in the moon-lit night? When people raised me on their heads? You came to me at the third part of the night after receiving my message through the Dewan. Can you remember?

(Abbas)
No, no, I can remember now, You asked me as soon as I came, Why you hadn’t seen me in the procession of the people.

(Nuroldin)
I remember too, in reply you asked me, Whether I had any brains riding on people’s heads? I also remember, Abbas, what else you told me, You said, people are making you dance, It is not Nuroldin who dances, the doll dances.
(Abbas)
Yes, yes.

(Nuroldin)
Now you can remember, what else did you say?

(Abbas)
Also I told you, brother,
The needle makes a small hole when goes in,
But makes a large one when it comes out.

(Nuroldin)
The company has ammunition, canons and guns,
And has trained *sepoys* [soldiers]
What else can you do except dance?
Sticks? Not all have sticks even.
Defeat
Is inevitable.
And what else did you say?
Those who dance raising you on their heads,
Will at the time of defeat blame you.
They will not even look back at your dead body.
- Abbas,
I know you as my friend, as my brother,
For that, even I was distressed at your words,
I was silent.
What else did you say?

(Abbas)
The rest of what I said, I believe,
The people want, what do they want?
Victory - victory - victory
The people want victory, not a dead body.
The people are not ready yet.
The people want victory right now.
They do not have patience,
They do not look far, beyond their own lives,
They fear the long movements.
And I told you, brother,
I doubt
If we will succeed in this life.
Therefore, instead of dancing at the people’s words,
Do not jump into a wild river.
Instead of dancing now
Getting everyone together,
Raise the child of the soil properly from the beginning,
Build all on such a soil
That they do not become the Zamindar, the Mahajan or the Nabab,
So that they share the produce of the soil,
The gora comes from a foreign land, brother,
But a Nabab, or a Mahajan is not a foreigner.
Like you and me, he is born here.
Is there any certainty, among us he will not be born an oppressor,
If we do not harden the soil at our feet, and be the part of movement
with patience?
Let it take, brother, one two three or more generations.

(Nuroldin)
Yes, yes, yes.
But, Abbas I can’t bear seeing the present and seeing all.

(Abbas)
Even think about that carefully – there’s no difference between outside
and inside the house.
Your Ambia wants to be the queen, why does she want that?
I have one thing to say, the people are not at all ready yet,
If they can only think about new kings and queens.
Because of that, Ambia dreams of becoming a queen.
In her dreams
She places you on a kingly throne.

(Nuroldin)
Allah is above my head
And I have fire inside me,
That fire burns the throne.
What does the world know about that?
What does Ambia know about that?

NUROL DIN WALKS AS IF HE IS RESTLESS. ABBAS APPEARS
DROWSY. SUDDENLY NUROL DIN HOLDS ABBAS AND SAYS.

(Nuroldin)
Can’t you remember, what did I tell you?
What does matter in the people’s umaly dhumaly dance?
We will convince everyone,
A king or a Nabab will bring the chain again.  
Place me in your heart, not on a kingly throne.

ABBAS WATCHES NUROLDIN IN SILENCE. IT SEEMS NUROLDIN EXPECTS A REPLY FROM ABBAS. BUT DOES NOT GET ONE. HE WALKS RESTLESSLY AGAIN.

(Nuroldin)  
Throne?  
Before building this abode in the jungle,  
Forming the forces of the kishan,  
Holding a gun in front of everyone  
At Fathepur, Kokina, Tepa, Pangsha  
In the last few months,  
The battles I have fought endangering my life,  
What did I hope for?  
A throne?  
Risking my life at the dead of the night, why?  
For what greed did I kill nyebs and gomosthas - with the dao [knife]?  
Nabab Nuroldin? Only Allah knows,  
The fire of the heart burns the throne  
The thrones that are there now and will be in the world.  
Throne?  
I want the throne?  
Holding the fire in my heart, I want the throne?

(Abbas)  
Listen, the human is such an unpredictable creature that no can survey its heart.  
Abbas’s vice of criticism is well known,  
Why do you ask him?

(Nuroldin)  
What’s your opinion? I want to know that.

(Abbas)  
How can I convince you that no one can say what does a human mind wants?  
Now it has one purpose,  
It may change to a new one.

(Nuroldin)  
You must be testing me.
Do you need to test me?
We lived together as friends and brothers for such a long time.
You know that the fire of my heart wants to burn the throne.
You know how long that fire has been burning?
Yet. I see distrust in your eyes.

(Abbas)
My eyes are collapsing into sleep, my brother.

ABBAS GOES TO SLEEP ON ONE SIDE. CLOSES HIS EYES.
NUROLDIN STANDS ALONE. THE FLUTE STARTS WEEPING FROM AFAR. THE MOONLIGHT GETS PALER.

(Nuroldin)
When, some time in the past, on a day,
On a day, not a moon-lit night,
When the sun throws fire on the head.
Then Nuroldin was only a boy.
An eight-nine-year-old, goes to the mokthob [a rural school for the Islamic learning]
Eats, plays and roams around.
Swims in the Tista for whole day long
Picks the fruits and eats
Breaks the branches of the tree and smashes the flowers and flees away.
At night, he sleeps in the comfort of his father’s bed.
On some nights, he dreams of flying in the blue of the sky like the white king storks.
One morning, he prepares his books to go to the mokthob.
His father calls him and says, ‘My boy Nuroldin, will it be fine if you don’t go to the mokthob today? Will you go to the field with me, my boy?’
Hearing this, Nuroldin gives three jumps at the fun of not going to the mokthob.
If you don’t go to the mokthob, that means no studies.
You ear is saved from the osthad [teacher].
Have as much fun as you can in the field for the whole day long.
He goes dancing in front of his bap [dad].
Carrying the plough on his shoulder, his bap reaches the field.
After reaching the field, he still remembers his bap’s voice; it sounded so strange. As if in someone else’s voice his bap says, ‘come here.’ He calls his son, ‘Will we not be able to plough the field? We, bap and beta [son] will plough the field today. Come my boy, come.’

‘Tie the bulls with the plough then, baba, and, show me how to plough, then I will be able to learn.’

So much fun, he can’t even bear a moment’s delay.

To push the plough seems to a great fun.

Suddenly, Nuroldin is surprised, he sees

His bap put the jual [the part of the plough to be tied with the neck of the bull] around his neck,

Slowly, his bap arranges the jual around the neck.

Nuroldin ask at the end of his breath, ‘How can it be? Where is the bull?’

‘Bap is the new bull for the plough from today.’

Again Nuroldin asks crying,

‘Bapjan [affectionate address of baba], why you? Where is the bull?’

‘I have no bulls now, sold the bulls to pay the taxes of the king.’

Till today, Nuroldin can see that scene clearly,

The sun throws the fire on the head,

On the branch of a dead tree, a vulture sits and looks at them.

Underneath, the sharp metal of the plough tills the soil of the field.

His hands shakes and stops the plough,

His bap turns and shouts, ‘Wretch,

If you stop again, I will break your bones.’

Again Nuroldin holds the handle of the plough tightly,

Again, pulling the jual, bap ploughs the field

Bap goes on ploughing bending the heaps,

The sun throws its fire at midday.

Suddenly, with the jual on his neck, bap falls on the ground.

He groans at the pain in his shoulders,

Then, raising his head, looking with his eyes at the blue of the sky, bapjan, my bap, cried out in the bull’s voice at the last moment.

The human cried out in the language of an animal.

The vulture looks with surprise.

On the ground,

Nuroldin sees,

Not his bap, but a bull groaning in pain,

It becomes still after a while,

Eyes fixed at the blue of the sky.

The vulture flies out on restless wings,

Such a still bull lying on the ground, not a human.

Nurol shouted, once,
He could hear,
His own voice change to the voice of a bull.
Then, then, the sun comes to his heart and throws the fire inside.
Suddenly, the vulture bites away the meat.
When? In the past, on a day.

NUROLDIN EYES THE SLEEPING FIGURES ON THE STAGE. HE SEES EVERYONE.

(Nuroldin)
Sleeps.
Everyone sleeps.
The sleep comes at night and makes everyone forget the day.
Memory, death, sufferings in the world
All being wipes away by sleep
With its rosy cotton.
Sleep cannot come to my eyelids.
Sound does not get rest in my world.
When everyone sleeps holding the silence.
The bull screams in my world.
I can’t bear any more
I can’t bear any more.
One cannot hear such a voice alone.
Who will be with me?

NUROLDIN GOES TO EVERYONE SLEEPING ON THE STAGE AND CALLS IN A WHISPERING VOICE. BUT NO ONE WILL WAKE UP.

(Nuroldin)
Abbas - Bhovani - Goribullah - Hareram
Who will hear with me?
Who will wake with me?
Mojibor - Neyamoath - Nurul Islam -
Who will wake with me tonight?

BY THIS TIME AMBIA COMES QUIETLY ON STAGE. NUROLDIN STAND AND SEES HER.

(Nuroldin)
Ambia.

(Ambia)
It is the third part of the night. Still, you are waking?
The owl called. I woke up, scared.
Saw the *chador* [unstitched cloth worn around the body] left on the bed, but my man is not there.
I felt so distressed, thought he is no more.

*(Nuroldin)*

I am alive, I am here.
In death or in life, I will be with you.
Ambia, you too remain with me.

*(Ambia)*

Leave my hand, please. People are all around.
Lets go inside, if I make air with the hand fan, you can sleep sure.

*(Nuroldin)*

Ambia, will you wake with me?

NUROL DIN LEAVES THE STAGE WITH AMBIA. THE SLEEPING FIGURES ARE NOW ON THE STAGE. SILENCE. SUDDENLY BUGLE IS HEARD FROM THE FAR. DEWAN DOYASIL RUNS UP THE STAGE. THE SLEEPING FIGURES WAKE FROM SLEEP QUICKLY. ABBAS MOVES LITTLE FORWARD TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION.

*(Doyasil)*

It is the music of the Company forces, sure.

*(Nuroldin)*

Do not form lines, brothers, move away to the jungle.
I do not suggest we attack the Company.
Move away, move away, to the jungle.

EVERYONE LEAVES QUICKLY.

**Scene nine**

THE BLUE CHORUS COMES IN SEARCH OF NUROL DIN’S GROUP. AT ONE PART OF THE ACTION WE WILL FIND THAT MORRIS AND THE LIEUTENANT COME AND STAND BEHIND THEM AS IF THEY ARE ACCUSING ONE ANOTHER.
(The Blue Chorus)

Search, search, search and look.
Search, search, search and look.
The dacoit Nuroldin must be somewhere around -
He must be somewhere, he must be somewhere,
He is not the korpur [gaseous element] that flew away
Not even the misry [meltable sweet] to melt away
He must be somewhere -
The dacoit Nuroldin must be hiding somewhere.

Who said that he is in the east?
There are more than one hundred human houses.
We set fire to the houses, so he can’t escape.
We have burnt everything to ashes, yet the man did not die.
Listen, someone blows the shinga in the west.

Search search search
Bring his body anyhow, dead or alive.

Who said he is in the west?
We hanged people in the west.
Hundreds of kishans hang at the four corners of the roads,
We have emptied the villages, yet we hear the noise again.
Look, someone plays the badya [war music] again in the south.

Search search search
Bring his body anyhow, dead or alive.

Who said he is in the south?
Nuroldin has raised the dhing khorcha\(^{29}\) from there.

We have closed the kheowa-ghat [ferry station].
We have stopped the grain supply and closed all the market places.
Listen, who makes a bazaar in the north?

Search search search
Bring his body anyhow, dead or alive.

Who said he is in the north?
In the north, we have the gora with us

\(^{29}\) The subscription for the war that Nuroldin collected from the peasants (Haq 58, my translation).
Have the canons, have the ammunition, and have the fast horses.
Chase him with the horse, he moves on foot,
He is not anywhere close by.

He must be somewhere, he must be somewhere,
He is not a bird that flew away
He is not a mantra [spiritual or magic power] that vanished away
He must be somewhere, he must be somewhere.

Search, search, search and look.
Search, search, search and look.
Search search search
Bring his body anyhow, dead or alive.

THE BLUE CHORUS EXITS IN SEARCH OF NUROLDDIN. THE DISCUSSION OF MORRIS AND THE LIEUTENANT CAN BE HEARD.

(Morris)
Do you think that the dacoits are here in Patogram?

(The Lieutenant)
I am certain.

(Morris)
Do you mean to say that the dacoits have their dera [Head Quarter] here as the jungle and the river are nearby? But, I think -

(The Lieutenant)
We have chased after your guessing game,
Mr Morris, we have chased in the last six months not after dacoits but a wild geese chase.

(Morris)
Wild geese? Wild geese?
The dacoits are not soldiers in uniform like you that you can identify them,
Lieutenant, ok they are krishak-grihastha [peasants with households and families],
Ok they are mullahs [Muslim priest], purohiths [Hindu priest], and the students of mokthob, and tul [Hindu religious place for learning] then the whole of Rangpur is now the dera of the dacoits.
Not only Rangpur. You have to take Kuchbihar and Dinajpur with that.
In the name of the King and the Company, Lieutenant, I have performed my duties, despite your sarcasm. And I have done my best with loyal duty.

(The Lieutenant)
Indeed, with loyalty,
As I am a soldier, I am not polished in using words. That was unintentional. Pardon me,

(Morris)
Modesty.

(The Lieutenant)
You mean?

(Morris)
I heard about your skill in using words and arms in that moon-lit night, at the *khuti*.

(The Lieutenant)
At the *khuti*?

(Morris)
At Thomson’s *khuti*.

(The Lieutenant)
Then pardon me once more. No joking this time, rather you may take it as intended. I have to say, I have not noticed your skill in performing your duties.

(Morris)
Lieutenant.

(The Lieutenant)
Let me explain, let me remind you, why the Company bahadur has created this new post in Bangadesh [Bengal] - Revenue Supervisor -- The post in which you are employed in Rangpur now.

(Morris)
To manage the affairs related to the collection of taxes.

(The Lieutenant)
That word ‘related,’ doesn’t that mean that your duties are not clear? According to the manual of the Company, your duties include, to keep track of those who are opposing the Company, and those who are obstructing the collection of taxes? To keep secret agents in the villages. In the *moujas* [administrative unit]. And if you receive any worrying news from the agents, then you are supposed to send more skillful agents to that place.

And is not that your duty? To help the Company forces crush rebellions by providing information ‘related’ to the Head Quarters of the rebels? As revenue advisor of the Company. Mr Morris, can you please tell me? Which of your information could help the Company in the last six months in this adventure ‘related’ to the rebellion?

(Morris)

Are you bringing any specific allegation against me?

(The Lieutenant)

No, Mr Morris, no.

(Morris)

Of course, you are. I will just say one thing, you send your complains to Rangpur, and I will send my reply to the Collector, Goodlad.

(The Lieutenant)

And by this time, this dacoit party will kill people indiscriminately. They will take away the Company’s due taxes. Do you want that? In the heated moment, getting hurt by our own sharp words if we take arms in the metaphoric sense against one another, then who will fight for the Company’s cause? The Company - is the mother in one sense, None of us are deprived of her milk. To keep this milk safe is our duty in our own interests. Goodlad too will say that.

- My dear friend?

AFTER LITTLE HESITATION, MORRIS SHAKES HANDS WITH HIM WITH A SMILING FACE.
(Morris)

Friend.

THE SMILE PLAYS IN THEIR FACES FOR A WHILE. THEN, RELEASING THE HANDS, AS IF THEY ARE IN A SERIOUS AFFAIR AGAIN -

(Morris)

You were talking about -

(The Lieutenant)

It is not at all possible to know the whereabouts of the dacoits from the natives. I believe, All of your secret agents have become the disciples of the man, Nuroldin by name. That is why -

(Morris)

I cannot understand this man.

(The Lieutenant)

The agents will not give any information. Even if they will, they will give only such an information that will mislead. I do not trust the native any more. I will follow the scorched earth strategy? I have seen for these six months by burning the towns and villages of Rangpur into ashes, They will lose everything. They will give their lives. Yet they will not give any information about Nuroldin.

(Morris)

I cannot understand this man.

(The Lieutenant)

Therefore, I have decided to increase the number of the Company soldiers at Mugolhut. Gradually surround them, to tighten the cordon, and to tempt the enemy to come out of hiding to attack our forces.
(Morris)
I cannot understand this man.
He is a Muslim, but he killed the Muslims as he killed the Hindus, at the same rate, sometimes in the same attack.
He is not a Hindu; he is a Muslim,
The Muslim considers the destruction of Hindu temples and idols as a good deed; that is what we are told.
But in reality, the Hindus worship this man as a God.
I cannot understand this man.
Why doesn’t he attack the Company *khuti* or the Company forces like the other rebels of Bangladesh?

(The Lieutenant)
I will not say that he is scared to do that - if he doesn’t do that, as a soldier I understand, he has some cool motive.
That is why he avoids the Company forces.
I do not know, how will it be possible to entice him to confront us?

(Morris)
So this is our new headquarter, Patogram.

(The Lieutenant)
No, this is Mugolhut.  We have some soldiers from the west scattered here.  Before that, we have to check the area.  Let’s move.

THEY EXIT.

**Scene ten**

THE STAGE IS EMPTY.  THE WAR DRUMS ARE PLAYED FROM FAR OFF.  AFTER A WHILE, ABBAS AND AMBIA ENTER FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.  SUDDENLY THEY ARE FACE TO FACE.

(Abbas)
*Bhavi*[^30] , where do you go?  Where do you go?

(Ambia)
Brother, in search of you.

[^30]: A sister-in-law is addressed as bhavi in Bangladesh.
(Abbas)
You could have called me by someone, I would have come at once.
Please do not go out in the jungle at night, bhavi.

(Ambia)
I can’t remain in doors. I am in deep anxiety.
Brother, only the mind of a woman knows how it feels if her husband
goes to war.
My own death will be peaceful than that.
As the mind always wonders what is going to happen, then if death
comes to me, at least I will die as a shodova\(^{31}\), as a bhagyabati\(^{32}\) I will
enter the grave.

(Abbas)
Yes, yes.
This is the only sign in our country -
The sat\(^{33}\) is very punyaban\(^{34}\).
This is why she keeps her eyes inside the grave instead of seeing the
outside.

(Ambia)
Do not laugh, my brother.
My scared heart shakes every now and then.
It torments me every now and then.
He has not come to the house for six days,
He has never been away for so long before
Outside in the war field, brother.
This is why, I look for you anxiously.

(Abbas)
There is some trouble at Dimlah. The Zamindar, Mohan Chowdhury of
Dimlah wants to recover his bedokhol [dispossessed] villages as the
commandant of his forces.
The Chowdhury moves with huge number of musclemen.
If he can win then other chowdhurys will be encouraged to recover their
lost land.
Therefore, to crush the Chowdhury with all his strength is required at
first. Understanding this, Nuroldin has marched with all his forces to
Dimlah, six days ago.

\(^{31}\) The woman with her husband alive.
\(^{32}\) The woman with good luck.
\(^{33}\) The pure woman.
\(^{34}\) The woman with religious virtues.
If the tree is very big, then it needs time to uproot it? You understand that, surely.

(Ambia)
You could have gone with him, I would not have so many worries. Why didn’t you go? You’re his brother, but you stayed back not going with him and told him - go, go.

(Abbas)
My dear bhavi, my heart is at the battlefield of Dimlah, though I am here physically. If you ask, why my hands and legs are here; why aren’t you there holding arms in hand? Nuroldin knows the reply. You ask him.

(Ambia)
I am a woman. I have nothing outside my home. My world is my home. I don’t want to understand the world, the war, politics, I don’t want to know--I want to see - the beautiful panshi\(^{35}\) boat floats on the water, How it floats, who has built that panshi, that is not the woman’s affair, brother -

(Abbas)
For that there is the pothidhan\(^{36}\) AMBIA PRETENDS ANGER SEEING ABBAS LAUGH.

(Ambia)
You’ve jokes all the time. You are really a fathra\(^{37}\). Go, I have forgiven you this time as you are my devra [brother-in-law] Its six days if you count, What you will know, my mind knows, what happens there?

---

\(^{35}\) The luxurious boat used to be for the zamindars in river cruise.

\(^{36}\) Husband is the wealth for a woman.

\(^{37}\) One who indulges in light laughter and jokes with others.
How is he? Is he wounded?
Oh my Allah, will this avagini Ambia be able to cool air for him with the hand fan again?
Will I be able to give him a glass of sweet drink?
When returning from the battle field, will he bring back the beauty of my shithy?

AMBIA STARTS CRYING LOUDLY. ABBAS BECOMES EMBARRASSED

(Abbas)
Bhavi, bhavi,
Please go home.
Shame, you float everything with your tears.

AMBIA DOES NOT STOP. ABBAS MOVES AWAY FROM HER AND SAYS TO HIMSELF.

(Abbas)
Tell me, then, Abbas Mondol.
This time? Tell me, is it right?
The woman is mad with crying.
The woman is mad with worries.
Who wins and who loses in the battle? Who can tell?
Knowing this can you give false courage to the woman, false encouragement?
Particularly, when you always said the right thing, Abbas. Yes, Abbas Mondol.
It is a real trouble.
What to do?
Yes, yes, every one says, the women’s tears are the pearls.
It is justified not to waste pearls.
In that case, lies can be told to a woman.
There is no harm in it.

ABBAS LOOKS BACK TO AMBIA WITH BRIGHTENED EYES.

(Abbas)
Bhavi, please control yourself, don’t swim in your tears. Wipe your eyes, please go home.
Oh my mad bhavi, will Mohan Chowdhury of Dimlah be able to fight with Nurol?

---

38 The unlucky woman.
Nurol must have beheaded him in the battle.  
[To himself: Have I exaggerated?]
Yes, yes,
Nurol made two parts of Mohan’s body and head.
Now he will break the stone of the Zamindar bari [the Zanindar's house]. Now he will sow mustard seed and beans in the yard of the Zamindar bari.
[To himself: Have I said too much?]
Please wipe your tears. I will take you home.

ABBAS STARTS WALKING WITH AMBIA. HE WALKS IN CIRCLES AND SAYS.

(Abbas)
Hey, the peasants fly the red flag of Nuroldin at Dimlah, Kakinay, Tepay, Pangshay, and his wife floats away with the tears?  
She can’t see,  
Hey, look at the far, bhavijan, your pathidhan, one who is my friend, it is his flag.  
He will come home soon, bhavijan.  
Please go home.  
He will be back now, he will so many things for you. 
Not only the beauty of your shithy but whatever available in the world?  
He will fulfill all your wishes.  
Yes, yes, yes bhavijan.

ABBAS EXITS. AMBIA STANDS FOR A WHILE. THEN SHE STARTS WALKING IN CIRCLES ON THE STAGE. THE LIGHT CHANGES.  
AMBIA MAKES A TUNE FOR A WHILE. THEN STARTS SINGING.

(Ambia)
My pathidhan goes to the battle at Dimlah,  
I am a lonely woman here in the lonely night.  
When will he be back winning the battle?  
Tears burst from my eyes with the sound of tuppush - 
Oh, is it with the sound of taplus or the sound of tuplus?  
Raja Gourmohan Chowdhury of Dimlah, 
Killed the peasants and artisans with the knife,

---

39 The sound of water/tear falling.
He snatched away the house, he snatched away the women.
Now we cut his throat with the sound of gochang⁴⁰
Oh, is it with the sound of gechang, or with the sound of gochang?
The king’s palace is the strong palace that the king has built.
The peasant-soldiers dig the trenches around the king’s palace.
After digging the trenches they set fire around the palace,
The king’s palace falls with the sound of hirim⁴¹
Oh, is it with the noise of hirim or the hararam.
The peasant-soldier flies the flag at Dimlah,
My pathidhan comes as the battle is over.
He comes and sits down,
Make air with the hand-fan with the noise of karoth⁴²-
Oh, is it with the noise of karoth or with the noise of kuroth?

NUROLDIN ENTERS AT THE MIDDLE OF THE ABOVE STANZA.
TIRED BUT VICTORUOUS NUROLDIN ENJOYS HIS WIFE’S SONG. BUT IN THE COURSE OF THE NEXT STANZA,
NUROLDIN’S FACE HARDENS GRADUALLY.

(Ambia)
Please sit here, my pathi, I will sit at your side,
What will you bring for me?
I roam around the home putting on the silver anklet you gave me,
Put on the silver anklet and with the noise of jhamar
Oh, is it the noise of jhamar or the noise of jhumur?

After winning the war my husband comes home
To celebrate so I need to wear a fire coloured sari When you are going
to bring a fire coloured sari?
I will visit the neighbours wearing that sari.
Oh, is it with the noise of gummur or the noise of gummar?

NUROLDIN TELLS HIS WIFE IN A VERY COLD VOICE.

(Nuoldin)
With pride?

(Ambia)
Yes, yes.

⁴⁰ It is the sound of knifing.
⁴¹ The noise of palace falling down.
⁴² The noise of air made by a hand-fan.
With pleasure?

Yes, yes.

Fire-coloured sari? The sari that is made of cotton thread?

Yes, yes. Just one fire-coloured sari, nothing else.

SUDDENLY, NUROLDIN SCREAMS OUT.

Fire, fire. Not in sari, in belly, belly. Fire, fire is burning, here, in my belly, in the belly of the peasant’s child. Who weaves that fire coloured sari is naked, he is naked, Not a single thread around the skeleton body. The fire coloured sari is snatched to the Company’s Khuti The fire coloured sari burns in the belly of the weaver. The fire coloured sari burns in flames all over Bangladesh. You see at your heart’s content. See, see, sitting idle, Ambia.

NUROLDIN EXITS IN ANGER.

I hold your feet, I hold your feet, Please don’t go away.

AMBIA RUNS AFTER NUROLDIN.
Scene eleven

(Goodlad)
No, Lisbeth, no. Don’t misunderstand me. I am not accusing anyone.
Neither Morris, nor Mcdonald, nor you. Once, I was young too.
I do understand the attitude of young people.
Youth does not want to imagine that an old person was young too.
When the young are becomes old, only then can he or she understands.
I was young once; will the young of today believe that?
What ever it is, I am not accusing anyone.
But -

(Lisbeth)
But?

(Goodlad)
But -

(Lisbeth)
I am waiting. But?

(Goodlad)
Due to the obligation of duty
I do have to utter a few words.
I hope you will not forget that Lieutenant Mcdonald and Mr Morris are
both hot-blooded youths, still unmarried. And as a matter of fact -

(Lisbeth)
I am afraid. I do not like you when you use hard words.

(Goodlad)
If I use one or two hard words, then it is not to show my credit as a
knowledgeable man but, because the matter is little hard.

(Lisbeth)
The matter is not hard at all; they are good friends and it is nothing
complex that you have to worry about.

(Goodlad)
There are things to worry about and that is why I came.
(Lisbeth)
And you have chosen such a time when my husband is away.

(Goodlad)
Really.
But, not in search of any other opportunity.

(Lisbeth)
So that my husband does not get hurt, to give me some advice in private, so that I must not give any chance to the hot-blooded employees of the Company that they may take it otherwise.

(Goodlad)
Or give way to some bitterness.

(Lisbeth)
Bitterness? As far as I know, they are both content and happy.

(Goodlad)
Maybe in your friendship.
How about in performing the duties to the company?

(Lisbeth)
They are equally happy, content and inspired. Aren’t they?

(Goodlad)
Lisbeth, you are not a child, nor a girl, You are beautiful undoubtedly, and - I am praising - as you have a male brain in a female head.

(Lisbeth)
I am taking it as a compliment. After that?

(Goodlad)
The company is facing a lot of troubles. To crush the dacoits in Rangpur a serious affair, you do know that. Morris and Mcdonald have this crucial responsibility. Is it justified on your part to make them jealous of each other?

(Lisbeth)
Has anyone complained? Morris? Mcdonald?
None of the two.

Anyone else?

Tomson? No, no.

He knows me pretty well. I am not thinking about him. Someone else?

No. That is my guess only. I have noticed something, not that. It is just my guess.

I was also thinking. - I say again. They are good friends. One is my old friend, and the other is my friend for last the six months. You just guess, from that you are so worried?

I have to worry, Lisbeth, if my worry is that they are involved in a competition after a beautiful illusion and neglecting the affair of the dacoits.

Mr Goodlad.

They are not successful still now against the dacoits. I have to worry, Lisbeth, You are also within the circle of the Company, In a useless emotional affair, only the Company will be the loser. I am equal to your father in age. My daughter must have grown as big as you. But in India, Softness is not for us, Not for us, who are the slaves of God in this God-forsaken distant land. That is why, not because I am of your father’s age, Lisbeth, In India
I am telling you as the East India Company Bahadur’s Dewan of the greater Bengal, and the Highest representative of the Company in Rangpur. Lisbeth, this kind of restlessness of the heart can do harm to the Company, not to anyone else. And, yes, Lisbeth, you are a negative influence on the Company, bad, harmful, at all levels undesirable too.

(Lisbeth)

When in this India, to Kingly persons of Britain, our stories will seem like fairy tales; when in India there will not be mosquitoes, flies, malarial fever, and dysentery; when there will be health, fat, and rosy skins, electric fans in summer, drinking fountain water, resorts, hunting, leisure, landaus. For the light-bearer-khanshama (cook) - Nukor (orderly)-Ghulam [slave-servant] serving this India in the near future, it will be like heaven on earth.

Then in our own country, in archives, libraries, India House, I know, some researcher will put aside the Company’s dispatch, reports, memos, Will search for some personal letters, diaries of whom? Those women Who came to this God forsaken land Not on anything else, but depending on God’s mercy Came here leaving their parents Came as wife, as sweetheart, came as lonely white-bodied female, As the only known flower to the company’s male tents. This white bodied female was involved in more serious affair than the politics and diplomacy. 

These white bodied females have saved the males of the Company from the embrace of the stinking black romony. Collector sahib, this foreign land would have become our own land for you and hundreds of Company officials like you if white bodied females came here.

If they were not here, then you would became habituated to life in Bengal like Job Charnok, using tobacco and black women. Those white bodied females, like me who boarded ships leaving my own country for the unknown.

The historian will write one day, that We were the foundation of the empire, The empire is built on our body and soul to support your success story. If we hadn’t come to India, Then the Ingraj would have become mogul, pulling the hooka, riding on the palki, breeding the sunset coloured children. That is why it would not have become the Indian empire.

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43 The Persian instrument for smoking tobacco.
44 The carriage that moves by the shoulders of men.
One day, history will discover that,  
History will write that - history will not take your permission of worries 
or good rules.  
Instead of spoiling the time like this, rather create history by crushing 
the rebellion, hurt on the chest of Nuroldin.

(Goodlad)

At once, at once.

THEN TAKING DEEP BREATH GOODLAD SAYS.

(Goodlad)

I am feeling thirsty for a little brandy, Lisbeth.

(Lisbeth)

Please come inside, immediately.

LISBETH GOES INSIDE. GOODLAD STARTS FOLLOWING HER 
AND STOPS AFTER A FEW STEPS AND SAYS TO HIMSELF.

(Goodlad)

I have thought about her for so long, while returning from parties in 
Bangadesh, I have thought so long, I think about her - can she be like 
this - the iron bird?

GOODLAD EXITS.

**Scene twelve**

THE STAGE IS EMPTY. THE DAK IS PLAYED IN A LONG 
SEQUENCE. GRADUALLY, IT SEEMS THAT HUNDREDS OF 
PEOPLE ARE MARCHING IN AND THEIR SLOGANS ARE 
HEARD.

(Slogans)

We want to be liberated, we want to be liberated, we want to be saved, 
we want to be saved.
THE DEWAN DOYASIL COMES IN QUICKLY. HE LOOKS INTO THE DISTANCE PROTECTING HIS EYES FROM THE SUN.

(Slogans)
We want to be liberated from the Ingraj
We want to be saved from Debi Singh
We want to be saved. We want to be liberated.

(Doyasil)
Hey, who are you?
Where do you come from?
Where do you want to go?

(Slogans)
We came from a far off place.
From Dinajpur - Dinajpur.
We came here to join the Nabab Nuroldin.

(Doyasil)
Nabab? He is not a Nabab.

(Slogans)
Nuroldin will give us liberation
Nuroldin will give us safety.
He is our Nabab. He is our Nabab Nuroldin.
Joy Nabab Nuroldin.

NEW SLOGANS ARE RAISED FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE. DOYASIL TURNS TO THAT SIDE.

(Slogans)
We want grain. We want clothes. We want grain. We want clothes.

(Doyasil)
Who are you?

(Slogans)
We want grain for the hungry belly. We want clothes for the naked bodies. We want grain. We want clothes.

(Doyasil)
Where do you come from?
Where do you want to go?
(Slogans)
We came from a far off place.
From Kuchbihar - Kuchbihar.
We came here to join the Nabab Nuroldin.

(Doyasil)
He is not a Nabab.

(Slogans)
Nuroldin will give us grain
Nuroldin will give us clothes
He is our Nabab. He is our Nabab Nuroldin.
Joy Nabab Nuroldin.

(Doyasil)
Not a Nabab, not a Nabab, he is a person like you.
He is a person like you.
He is a person like you.
Nuroldin is not a Nabab.
He is a person like all.

(Slogans)
See the people on all four corners
All say at a time -

THE SLOGAN IS NOW RAISED FROM ALL THE SIDES.

(Slogans)
Joy Nabab Nuroldin.
Joy Nabab Nuroldin.
Joy Nabab Nuroldin.

DOYASIL IS UPSET. HE SHAKES HIS HEAD IN DISAPPROVAL
AND MOVES AWAY.

Scene thirteen

THE MOON SHINES ON THE EMPTY STAGE. THE SLOGANS
ARE RAISED FROM ALL CORNERS AGAIN.
(Slogans)
Nuroldin will give us liberation
*Joy Nabab* Nuroldin.
Nuroldin will give us grains
*Joy Nabab* Nuroldin.
*Joy Nabab* Nuroldin.
*Joy Nabab* Nuroldin.

NUROLDIN WALKS IN SLOWLY WHEN THE SLOGANS ARE
BEING CHANTED. HE IS VERY SERIOUS, ANGRY AND
FRUSTRATED. ABBAS COMES BEHIND HIM WITH A PALE
FACE. NUROLDIN GOES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE STAGE, AND
STANDS PLACING HIS HANDS ON HIS CHEST, AND HIS CHIN
LOWERED. THE SLOGANS FADE AWAY. ABBAS HIS EYES
AND SAYS WITH SMILING AND TAUNTING EXPRESSION.

(Abbas)
This time? The *Nabab* Nuroldin.
Rangpur, Dinajpur, Kuchbihar - these are all your kingdom.

NUROLDIN TURNS HIS FACE AWAY.

(Abbas)
The *Nabab* Nuroldin - it makes a beautiful rhyme.
It brings honey to the ear.

NUROLDIN LIFTS HIS FACE TOWARDS THE SKY IN GREAT
PAIN.

(Abbas)
Change
The day changes
The time changes
That moon changes
That cloud changes
The flow of the Tista Changes
The human footprint on the grass changes.
The human changes
The human thought changes.
ABBAS SO LONG WALKED AROUND NUROLDIN AND WAS SPEAKING IN A LOW VOICE, NOW HE SUDDENLY GET HOLDS OF NUROLDIN WITH TWO OF HIS HANDS AND SHOUTS.

(Abbas)
Did not I tell you? Did not I?
You have no word? Can’t you remember?
The kingly throne?

SUDDENLY, NUROLDIN PRESSES ABBAS’S LIPS FIRMLY.

(Nuroldin)
Abbas, Abbas,
I am holding your lips now.
So that you can not utter a single word any time in the future, Abbas.

ABBAS RELEASES HIM IN NO TIME.

(Abbas)
Yes, yes.
If you really need to hold the lips, then why do you need mine?
There are people outside,
Go, hold the lips of the people,
Go and shake them, brother, hold their lips.
Go.
Why do you look at me again?

SUDDENLY NUROLDIN HOLDS ABBAS AND SAYS IN A BREATHELESS VOICE.

(Nuroldin)
You are right. People are not ready yet.
Abbas, Abbas, I don’t want to be a Nabab.
I don’t want any throne.
I want, what do I want?
I want to see, I want to see,
If Allah gives me a long life, if I survive long,
I wait to see -

WHILE UTTERING THIS, NUROLDIN LEANS DOWN ON THE GROUND LEAVING ABBAS IN THE GESTURE OF PRAYER
EXTENDING HIS TWO HANDS HIGH TOWARD THE SKY. HE LOOKS UPWARDS. FROM HIS SITTING POSITION, THE LIGHT WILL SHRINK AND ONLY BE FOCUSED ON HIM.

(Nuroldin)

I am waiting to see,
In every mind, the fire of mine is burning.
I am waiting to see,
Everyone’s fire burning all the thorns
I am waiting to see,
Again rivers flowing full with water.
I am waiting to see,
Again the Bengal’s chest is filled with alluvial soil.
I am waiting to see,
Again peasant ploughing the fields and sowing seeds.
I am waiting to see,
New rice filling the country.
I am waiting to see,
My cow is giving milk endlessly.
I am waiting to see,
People are building houses without fear.
I am waiting to see,
People have sweet soft dreams at night.
I am waiting to see,
Hundreds of red *shimul* flowers blooming.
I am waiting to see,
In my son’s hand there is future.
I am waiting to see,
My daughter has good dreams.
I am waiting to see,
My brother calls me brother.
I am waiting to see,
My sister’s house is safe.
I am waiting to see,
Every house has a brother of mine.
I am waiting to see,
I have a son.
I am waiting to see,
I have a daughter.
Everyone is united in sorrow and happiness.
The gold of golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh.
The gold of golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh.
The gold of golden Bengal remains in Bangladesh.

FIRE APPEARS IN NUROLDIN’S EYES IN THE PLACE OF TEARS AT THE END OF UTTERING THE PRECEDING DIALOGUE. HIS RAISED HANDS BECOMES FISTS AND HE STANDS UP. THE LIGHT EXTENDS AND MAKES ABBAS VISIBLE. NOW NUROLDIN IS CONFIRMED IN DECISION AND DETERMINED IN HIS PROMISE. HE UTTERS IN A TRANCE.

(Nuroldin)

Abbas.

(Abbas)

Nurol.

(Nuroldin)

Will attack Mugolhut.

(Abbas)

What?

(Nuroldin)

Will attack the Ingraj - this is my decision.

(Abbas)

Suddenly, why do you attack the Ingraj.

(Nuroldin)

Yes, yes.

(Abbas)

But the decision was not to attack the Ingraj. The *gora* has canons and guns,

It is nothing.

The more deadly weapon that the *gora* has,

It is the weapon - the *Mahajan* and the *Zamindar*.

Does the *gora* have strength if he has not the local swines with him?

(Nuroldin)

Yes, yes.

(Abbas)

You had this idea. You had this tactic.

Crush the collaborators to their dynasties and families,
When there will not be any collaborator in the country,  
The foreigner will be forced to cross the kalapan.  

(Nuroldin)  
Yes, yes.  

(Abbas)  
Then? Then why this sudden decision?  
Nurol? Nurol?  

(Nuroldin)  
Abbas, come near to me. Give your hand.  

(Abbas)  
Sure, you have gone mad.  
You lost your senses.  
Prepare the people.  

(Nuroldin)  
Abbas, why are you far behind? Where is your hand? 

(Abbas)  
Then the reason to attack the gorā is to be found in the gathering of peasants from far off villages like the current of the Tista.  
Thousands of peasants have gathered here and you can not hide your headquarters from the Ingrai.  
That is why, it is required to attack before the enemy could learn your whereabouts, no other alternative?  

(Nuroldin)  
Abbas, come here, you are my brother.  
Once - once -  
Touch my knee and feel, I cannot control the fire,  
It spreads on my body leaving my mind.  
The sun throws the fire on the whole of my body.  
Suddenly, the vulture eats away the meat,  
One day in the past, that day,  
The blood flows out of the mouth and a bull falls on the ground, not a human.  

45 The seas.
Nurol shouted once then,
Nuroldin heard then,
Then he heard
His own voice has changed into a bull’s one.
Abbas, come near to me,
Look in my head,
Here, touch and feel once,
A horn like the sharp metal butt of a plough grows, grows.
Look into my knee, strong muscles takes over,
Look the current of strength jumps in my body,
Goes, now it goes away,
The voice goes,
Not animal, in human voice -
‘Rise, brother, where are you, everyone.”

NUROLDIN’S UTTERANCE SPREADS FROM HORIZON TO HORIZON.

**Scene fourteen**

THE COMBINED MUSIC OF DAK, SHINGA AND THE HUMAN HUE AND CRY FROM ALL THE CORNERS. THE RED CHORUS, DOYASIL AND ALL APPEAR ON THE STAGE. THEY FORM LINES. NUROLDIN FORMS A DEFENSIVE HUMAN SHIELD WITH HIS FOLLOWERS.

*(Abbas)*

Still, you have time. Think again, Nurol.

*(Nuroldin)*

The full moon is very bright.
Look, it shines like the milk of a mother.
What should I think about, Abbas?
If I die, shall not be sorry.
If I die, the life-force will not die.
If one Nuroldin departs,
Thousands of Nuroldins will come to Bengal.
Yes yes yes yes.
My house in this country which has Himalayas on the north
Let the people be upstanding like the Himalayas.
My house in this country which has the Bay of Bengal to the south,
Let the people’s voice burst like the Bay of Bengal.
My house in this country which has the Brahmaputra to the east,
Let people’s blood jump like the Brahmaputra.
My house in this country which has hilly soil to the west,
Let the people’s fort be strong like the hilly soil.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes yes yes yes.

(Nuroldin)
The soil-made body dissolves in the soil.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes yes.

(Nuroldin)
The body is born again from the soil.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes yes.

(Nuroldin)
Again it goes back. But the soil remains.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes yes.

(Nuroldin)
My child stands up on the soil.

(The Red Chorus)
Yes yes yes yes yes
We hear the music-signal of the dak
Do we hear the music signal of the shinga
Do we hear the call to form lines
Do we hear the voice of Nuroldin
Yes yes yes yes
Yes yes yes yes.
MEANWHILE, NUROLDIN HAS BECOME THE DEAD BODY AGAIN, THE BLUE CHORUS GATHERS AT THE FAR. THE DEAD BODY OF NUROLDIN IS REMOVED SLOWLY FROM THE STAGE. THE BLUE CHORUS BREAKS INTO LOUD LAUGHTER.

(The Red Chorus)
Who laughs? Who laughs like an owl?
If you are a Mahajan, if you are an oppressor,
If you are a collaborator or a bad party,
Then you will not be spared, it is your last day,
Either you die or I live.
Joy Nuroldin.

THE RED CHORUS ATTACKS THE BLUE CHORUS WITH STICKS. AFTER A WHILE, IN SOME PLACES THE RED IS VICTORIOUS OVER THE BLUE, IN SOME PLACES THE BLUE IS VICTORIOUS OVER THE RED, IN SOME PLACES THE BATTLE IS UNDECIDED, IN SOME PLACES IT STARTS NOW - IN THIS SITUATION EVERYONE FREEZES AT THE FIRST TWO WORDS OF ABBAS.

(Abbas)
Have patience, everyone - make ulghullan [struggle] with patience.
Let it take, brother, one two three or a few lives.

ABBAS FREEZES WITH HIS HANDS RAISED.
ALL THE LIGHTS GO OFF AT A TIME.

3 AUGUST 1999
WOLLONGONG
THE DEWAN GAZI'S TALE
AN ADAPTED PLAY IN BENGALI BY ASADUZZAMAN NOOR
ORIGINAL:: HERR PUNTILLA AND HIS MAN MATTI
A PLAY IN GERMAN BY BERTOLT BRECHT
TRANSLATED BY KHAIRUL HAQUE CHOWDHURY
FROM BENGALI ADAPTATION
CHARACTERS

SUTRADAR

DEWAN GAZI: ZAMINDAR OF GAZIPUR

MUKTHAR: DEWAN GAZI'S FRIEND

MAKHAN: THE CYCLE RICKSHAW PULLER AND THE HEAD ORDERLY OF GAZI'S HOUSEHOLD

LAILEE: DEWAN GAZI'S DAUGHTER

CHAMELY: PROSTITUTE

LATA: PROSTITUTE

KUSUM: PROSTITUTE

1ST WORKER

2ND WORKER

ABED: DEWAN GAZI'S CLERK

POLICE INSPECTOR: WANTS TO MARRY LAILEE

KAZI: MARRIAGE

CHAIRMAN OF THE VILLAGE UNION
PRELUDE:: SUTRADAR'S SONG
(Sutradar sings outside the curtain)
Listen, listen my respected Ladies, and gentleman, listen
I am telling Dewan Gazi's tale, please listen.

This Gazi is Dewan Gazi, everyone knows him by one name,
Money is his life and death, he buys the world with money's name.

When he drinks and loses his senses
He speaks all sweetness
And after the money
When Gazi is back to his senses.

Always he is changing colour and difficult to understand his motive
Whatever he may bubble, two and two makes four he knows clear.
Dewan Gazi has many faces and he knows many tricks.

GAZI: Bugger started wa ak wa ak. Feel like putting a foot on his
throat--no I wouldn’t want to win this way, he is a bloody Mukhtar
[lawyer in a lower court]. Even after death, he may file a case against
me--attempt to murder. Oh man, just look at Dewan Gazi. So far I
drank, one, two, three .....hell with it, drank so many bottles couldn't
finish counting. Anything happened? Nothing, I can walk home. You
want to see? You see (falls as he tries to stand). Why to get up? Am I
your father's domestic servant to listen to you! I am not that stupid.
Here I am sitting, want to see who can move me! (Sees the bottle on the
ground) Oh all sweet dear spirits fall on the ground for running about at
others' commands. All sweet divine moistening the bosom of mother
earth. You can't understand; what is poison if one is not bitten by the
poisonous? But where to get a bottle now? Hey, anybody there?

Mukhtar: (drunken) Ah, calling whom again?
Gazi: Calling your dad.
Mukthar:: Oh..

( Makhon enters)
Makhon: (saluting) At your service, sir.
Gazi: Oh, pure Muglai [aristocratic] manners!
Makhon: Sir, you shouted proper Muglai; reply must be proper.
Gazi: Don't like a straight reply to my face.
Mukthar: Slap his face--

46 Aristocratic manners.
Makhon::: Dear sir, got to talk with the tongue, when no other way to reply.
Gazi::::::: Sharp words..
Makhon::: Pardon me, sir.
Gazi::::::: Who are you, my dear fellow?
Makhon::: I am your slave. personal orderly of your household, name Makhon.
Gazi::::::: Makhon? Personal orderly? No I don't have any personal orderly or servant.
Makhon::: Sir, you drank a bit more, so can’t recollect. Last evening you came by my rickshaw and asked me a lot of questions. Then after listening all my life history you said, “alright, from now on you are my personal orderly. Wherever I will go you will take me on your Rickshaw. You will get 50 taka salary per month, a pair of clothing in a year, bed and food free. From then on I am sitting here or one night one day here, forgive me, let me leave.
Gazi::::::: What’s the proof of your appointment?
Makhon::: You are in such a state if you eat everything diluted even then you will not understand anything. Better give my Rickshaw fare and I will leave. (suddenly getting angry) What do you think of me? Am I not a human being?
Gazi::::::: Now you’re really talking rot. Once you said you are a domestic servant and then again you are telling you are a human being. Think twice before you say something. Say one thing, a Gentleman never speaks two contradictory things at a time. Go and get a bottle from the room inside. What happened? Go go. (Makhon exits).
MUKTHAR:::(in a singing tone) I will cross the sea of spirit.
GAZI:;;;;;;;: You don't have to cross; boat will sink in the middle of the river.
MUKTHAR:::(in a shouting tone) I will cross the...
GAZI:;;;;;;;: Enough, don't irritate my ear by shouting.(enters Makhon) what’s up my dear....
MAKHON::: Makhon.
GAZI:;;;;;;;: Yes, Makhon, please sit.
MAKHON::: No.
GAZI:;;;;;;;: Oh come on, sit down. Pour a bit of spirit into your belly. You will feel better. Then I will exchange a few intimate words with you.
MAKHON::: O. k. I am sitting, now tell me what you are after, exactly?
GAZI:;;;;;;;: What I am after? Oh, now I got it, you don't trust me to drink with, isn't it? Oh that’s true--drunk with drinks, meantime
whole pocket is lost. That's happening these days. I also heard, by
making people smoke herbal poison and all that.....leave it, let me
tell you my particulars. I am Dewan Gazi, Zamindar of Gazipur, I
have abundant land and property, cattle-farms, rice mills, and I am
the owner of big farms. I am after nobody, you can rely on me.
Now pour some in your glass.
MAKHON:::: Good. My name is Makhon Ali, people call me Makhon.
I read up to class three. Now the victim of my fate, I am a Rickshaw
puller. Yesterday I was appointed as your Head orderly, no more
today. (starts drinking).
GAZI:..........: Why, no more?
MAKHON::::: How can I keep my job by drinking with the master?
GAZI:..........: Of course, you will remain employed, hundred times you
will remain employed. Why, are not you a human being? Don't you
feel like drinking alcohol? Why, has all your hopes and ambition
died as you became a servant? Everyone is equal to me, both the
servant and the master.
MAKHON::::: Since you are telling, then its true.
GAZI:..........: In fact Makhon, as a human being I am not bad, you
understand. But its true, sometimes I do too good things. Once you
know, I took a dead bat to the hospital from the road. People
laughed at that. Is there anything to laugh at?
MAKHON::::: That's true.
GAZI:..........: I dislike the difference people make between a servant
and the master of a house. Did I really kept you sitting outside
whole night? Pardon me brother Makhon.
MAKHON::::: O.K.
GAZI:..........: Slap me with your shoes.
MAKHON::::: I don't feel like it now.
GAZI:..........: Makhon, you are my brother.
MAKHON::::: No.
GAZI:..........: You, friend of my heart.
MAKHON::::: No.
GAZI:..........: Then what you are?
MAKHON::::: Your personal household servant.
GAZI:..........: And me? Who am I?
MAKHON::::: You (after eyeing a while) are a senseless drunk, a
gunny bag of meat, and the owner of huge amount of money.
GAZI:..........: Brother, you abuse me; o.k., abuse. But you haven't seen
my heart. You know, I've got a disease.
MAKHON::::: That, I could guess.
GAZI: You could? I knew, you would. I am alright, but sometimes I feel otherwise, my head gets lighter, takes on wind, I lose all the drunk feeling.

MAKHON: It's really something to worry about.

GAZI: Yep; what else can I tell you? Look here, two bottles, but I see one.

MAKHON: Really strange, you see one out of two, that means you see half of the world.

GAZI: Now you understand; I can see only a half of the whole world.

MAKHON: Then why don't you see some good Doctor?

GAZI: Sure, I take medicine all the time. That's why I am still alive (takes a bottle in hand). This is my medicine, to be taken orally without water as many times as one wishes. With this I'm fighting against the disease with my bare hands. But sometimes I get different. Otherwise how could I keep a solid golden man like you, waiting whole night, outside? Pardon me, please.

MAKHON: Once I did.

GAZI: Oh, you did, now tell me how you came here?

MAKHON: I was taking you to your house on my Rickshaw. You were in a good mood and I got the job.

GAZI: Why do you pull a Rickshaw? It's really a hard work.

MAKHON: I used to work in the household but when I lost that, I have started pulling Rickshaw.

GAZI: Why did you lose that job?

MAKHON: I used to have insomnia.

GAZI: You couldn't sleep at night and for that you have lost your job. Where did it happen?

MAKHON: At that time I was working at the household of the Head merchant of Fultholy. Only two dry roti [leaven bread] with boiled dal [lentil] was the food after a day's hard work. Hardly, I could sleep with my empty stomach. One night what I saw, you know; head merchant came out of his bedroom quietly, walked to Nani's Mother's [maid servant] room, then what happened you could guess. No difference in tongue and eye, everything was known to all. I was dismissed.

GAZI: Oh what a complex affair! Then it looks like you lost your work as you were underfed.

MAKHON: Yep, if you mean the other way, it sounds like that.

GAZI: If you work here, you will eat plenty of food. You don't have to wake at night and you will not worry about your job.

MAKHON: You mean I have not lost my work here?
GAZI: You remain in your job one hundred times, five hundred times remained. You and I are equal, one. Say, you are and I am equal.

MAKHON: As you said, then all equal.

GAZI: Say, high and low, all equal.

MAKHON: (raises hands) All equal.

MUKTHAR: Order, order.

GAZI: Oh my judge shaheb47, wake up, my baby. Don't have to go home? Won't you eat milk and rice, I bet your wife is going to beat you. I am saved, won't have to bother by any wife. Now if I get my daughter married, then there is no worry left for me. Then Makhon, brother mine, we two will go wherever our eyes feel like going. I will be a proletariat and distribute all my wealth. I will be as free as the south wind. Makhon, brother mine, please lift this beheaded drunk on your Rickshaw, I am just coming. Take the medicine box with you. [Makhon and Mukthar leave the stage. Gazi also moves to leave, suddenly turns back and starts speaking to the audience] Oh, I was talking about my daughter, Lailee; yes she is going to eat me. She is very hard-eyed, always keeps eyes on my movement. It’s not a big deal to walk around paddy fields as I am from a high family, don't I feel like walking around? Don't I feel like gossiping with women-workers? To cut jokes with them? No my daughter opposes, she says a man from high family loses his prestige this way. Prestige is not a glass bowl, will break if it falls from the hand. She won't listen and I have decided to get her married somewhere. Selected a son-in-law already. Not exactly selected, but testing. Would be son-in-law is the police inspector. But in-law has his aunt for a parent. That woman is a widow for a long time. But still with spirit, she says either write two hundred hectares of land in in-law’s name or marry me. Just see, the more I try to loose me from the world, the more it tries to tie me. But I tell you, though she is a bit aged, her body and curves are still...............oh no, I told you my heart. Now what should I do? To sell the land or to sell myself? [Starts leaving. Black out]

SCENE TWO

[Midnight, stage opens at the inner yard of Gazi's house. Gazi, Mukthar, and Makhon enter the stage. Makhon is seen carrying the box of bottles of alcohol.]

47 Bengali intonation of sahib.
GAZI: Any Body there, anybody home? Makhon take care, keep the box carefully. [Enters Lailee] Here, you are, my Lailee darling! just left the lovely party for you, dear. How are you?

LAILEE: Why did you hurry? You could have taken your time.

GAZI: Oh God, you getting angry! There was a little trouble on the road and we were delayed. Makhon, open my box.

MAKHON: Should I open?

MUKTHAR: Open it.

LAILEE: No father. You don't have to swallow all those now. Please go to sleep, now.

GAZI: You don't have to trouble yourself. We will just go to sleep after a few...

MAKHON: Let him, requesting so much.

LAILEE: Ah, you keep quiet. Tell me dad, will you ever have sense?

GAZI: Why, why?

LAILEE: You were away for two days! Leaving me alone at home, you invited them at the same time. Dad, tell me, where is your sense?

GAZI: Oh, in-laws came? Good, you had nice time gossiping with them?

LAILEE: Oh, it could have been better.

GAZI: Why; what was the problem?

LAILEE: Don’t be a fool, Dad. How can I gossip with a whore who had seven husbands [bites her tongue], and what can I gossip about with that foolish Daroga?

MUKTHAR: If she marries this time, then she will have eight husbands.

GAZI: Keep quiet. Ah, I just came so early for them. Don't I have to finalize everything before the marriage? What do you say Makhon?

MAKHON: Exactly, sir.

LAILEE:[Eyes Makhon angrily] Do you have to call them for that? I am exhausted, served them the whole day; all unwanted creatures.

MUKTHAR: Oh my daughter, did you have quarrel with Daroga? One round even before the marriage! [laughs at his own humour].

LAILEE: Better if I did. How to quarrel with that lovely creature?

MUKTHAR: Not a good sign; you cannot quarrel with a male. There must be something wrong.

LAILEE: Everything about your son-in-law is loose.

MUKTHAR: Listen, let me tell you a story of a court case. One woman complained against her husband. She has beaten her hubby
with a stick and even after that he said nothing. Therefore she wants divorce.

GAZI: That’s a woman. Is the Daroga like that? How did he become a Daroga? Do one thing, leave that bugger. Let him go to hell. What do you say Makhon?

MAKHON: One hundred times, sir.

LAILEE: You keep shut. I didn't say that. I said your son-in-law is a quiet type of person.

GAZI: Oh that’s not a good sign. The cat that cries less, steals more food from the kitchen. Leave that bugger. Look at him, he is Makhna, Makhon Ali, my personal servant, very good boy. Its pleasing to gossip with him. I enjoyed two hours of gossip with him. You better marry him.

LAILEE: Your word has no sense, Dad. I said your son-in-law is very quiet.

MUKTHAR: Would be son-in-law.

LAILEE: (to Makhon) What you are looking at? Take away the box.

GAZI: Makhon, leave one bottle, two bottles here.

LAILEE: What am I telling you?

GAZI: Oh yes, I must talk to you openly, my daughter. What did that Daroga tell you about marriage? Open the bottle Makhon.

LAILEE: Is it likely he’d talk openly about marriage? Didn't talk about that.

GAZI: What did that male-child do for two days? Could not even propose to a girl. I don't even need two minutes to propose somebody. Call Roshik's mother. I will show you how to propose marriage to somebody. Call that male-child as well. Let him see. O.K. Give me a bottle.

LAILEE: Now you don't have to swallow all those. Go keep it inside.

MAKHON: Oh, I am in a fix. (starts moving with the box)

GAZI: Hey, where you going with the box? My dear little daughter, do you have to punish your old Dad like that? Is it a crime to drop a few drops in the dry throat? Do you want your Dad to die of dry throat?

LAILEE: I don't like so much artificiality.

GAZI: Oh, where do you find artificiality? All right, leave my case. Look at your Mukthar Uncle, he is our guest. If he dies of thirst, it will be our sin. Don't commit a sin. Oh, stone-hearted woman.

LAILEE: You have done enough.
GAZI: I am giving my word. We three will lick the bottle and sleep in one bed. Telling the truth, I will not go to any maid-servant...
LAILEE: What a shame, for you! I will be beheaded by shame!
GAZI: Why, aren't they human beings? Don't they feel like making love? Leave it then, call your aunt-in-law. Wait, I am calling.
MUKTHAR: Hey, what am I to do?
GAZI: To hell with you. Go to sleep. Makhon make him sleep.
LAILEE: You are in such a state, it won't be wise to go to a female child of a noble house.
GAZI: Female child of a noble-house....it does not sound bad. All right, since you are telling, I won't go. Do one thing; send that new girl you have taken for household work. Let me spend rest of the night talking a few words with her.
LAILEE: Hey, I am telling you, take the box inside.
MAKHON: Should I go?
GAZI: Should you go?
MAKHON: She is telling.
LAILEE: Go.
GAZI: Listen Makhon, you leave one, half a bottle pour here.
LAILEE: Dad, I will break all the bottles then.
GAZI: Makhon you go then.
MUKTHAR: Quick.(Makhon and Lailee leave the stage).
GAZI: What an enmity! Is this the way a daughter behaves with her father?
MUKTHAR: Times have changed.
GAZI: Caste of pal.48 (Mukthar mimes asking to be forgiven) Friend of my heart---
MUKTHAR: Tell me brother.
GAZI: Let’s go.
MUKTHAR: Where?
GAZI: Look at the male-child's I.Q. Where should I go? Just seen with your eyes, how my daughter misbehaved with me, not even a bottle she gave me, you are asking, where? There, where everyone will give me everything, flood me with alcohol.
MUKTHAR: You’ve gone mad. Tell me, who is going to wait with alcohol for you at midnight? Moreover it is illegal to sell alcohol at night.

48 A low-caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy.
GAZI: To hell with your law. You show me law? I am going now. Who can stop me? (enter Makhon and Lailee.)

LAILEE: Where you going?

GAZI: To the fireplace.

MAKHON: Not a bad place to travel to.

LAILEE: I’ve served the dinner. Go and have some.

GAZI: Ah, served the dinner? what should I eat? Rice cannot go down through my throat, can it? I should die of starvation, that’s what you want?

LAILEE: You cannot go out now, father, I am telling you.

GAZI: You cannot go (repeats his daughter). Everything will run at your words. What do you think of me? This is the house of Gazi dynasty. The master of the house can’t get to eat, guest of the house goes back without a proper treat. Do you want me to stay here? Tell the aunt of the Daroga, even my foot won’t cry to go to her place. Lots of young girls wait for me. Hey, who’s there? Beat the drum, hoist the flag, here goes Dewan Gazi! (exits).

MUKTHAR: Stop him.

LAILEE: Let him go. It happens every day. He will be back as soon as his throat will be dried.

MAKHON: What’s the use in getting into trouble at midnight?

MUKTHAR: What should I do now?

LAILEE: Please go home.

MUKTHAR: O.k. Going home. Just inform me, when your dad is back.

MAKHON: I am in trouble again. Who knows, how long he will be away?

LAILEE: Mind your words. Do a bit of work for your food. Sit here. Keep an eye out for when dad comes back.

MAKHON: Are you feeling sleepy?

LAILEE: Why should it bother you?

MAKHON: I am not feeling sleepy, that’s why.

LAILEE: (changes the topic) My dad is very soft hearted. Everyone takes the advantage of his softness.

MAKHON: In fact its good for everyone if he is drunk. His mind is as free as the sky.

LAILEE: Don’t cut jokes with your master. Never forget, you are a servant.

MAKHON: Yes madam. Personal Orderly.

LAILEE: And listen, no one should know what has been discussed about the Daroga shaheb.
MAKHON::::: What? Oh, that Daroga is not even a human being? Oh no. Can a servant judge who is a human and who is not?

LAILEE::::::: That sounds intelligent. Listen to everything with intelligence.

MAKHON::::: It’s also dangerous to listen too much.

LAILEE::::::: Why?

MAKHON::::: Take for example, when I was a household servant at Kasimulla’s house of Hajiganj, serving the eldest wife of Mullah Shaheb. One night, the eldest wife called me to her room and ordered------what did she order, I don’t want to utter that. On the following morning I lost my job.

LAILEE::::::: What do you want to say?

MAKHON::::: Nothing madam, I am telling a few words as you are here.

LAILEE::::::: In fact, Daroga sahib is a good soul, everyone respects him. He will shine in the Police department. He has lot of intelligence in his head -

MAKHON::::: Good.

LAILEE::::::: In fact he is a bit serious, soft, simple. I mean--

MAKHON::::: Why you want to convince me? For a goat of the sacrifice, it is all the same, whether it is black or white.

LAILEE::::::: What did you say?

MAKHON::::: No, I wanted to say, no defect can disqualify a male. Take for example, Mallik’s daughter of our village, cried and wailed not to marry a fat, middle aged dark looking man. Her father got her married to that man by force. But her heart is quiet after the marriage when she found abundance of gold and silver. She became very fond of her husband, as if she rolls on her husband’s feet. What happened you know, she delivers a kid every year.

LAILEE::::::: What a decent way to speak! Learn to speak politely. You came to work in a noble house.

MAKHON::::: I’ve already started to, madam. Just came to this noble house; wait a few days.

LAILEE::::::: I like Daroga shaheb very much. He likes me too. He loves me very much. He cares a lot for me, he knows what is good and what is bad for me. After all, he serves in the Police Department. That’s why he watches everything. But he never beats his drum to make it known to everyone. (Makhon gets sleepy) You are feeling sleepy?

MAKHON::::: No madam, just enjoying your words with my eyes closed. Go on, my dear sister.
SCENE THREE

(At the opening of the scene, three prostitutes enter the stage carrying three flat placards and stand behind the flats. The Three placards suggest three houses. One reads, “Family house-No Entry,” The second flat reads, “chemist shop,” and the third reads, “Milkbar.”)

GAZI: Dewan Gazi is out in search of alcohol. Who stands before him I want to see? (Suddenly sees a coconut tree in front of him) You’ve got the courage to stand before me? Don’t you know Dewan Gazi roams around? Don’t you know how to behave with him? You saw the dove but not the dove trap, now you will understand how much rice from how much paddy! But I excuse you this time.

CHAMELEE: (Slides her head through the window) Here, this way dear. Waiting so long. Making the house lighted for you dear, my beloved.

GAZI: Oh bliss of my heart, listen girl of pleasure, I have given my heart at your feet the moment I saw you. Oh beauty, I am burning, I can’t bear heart’s pain any more.

CHAMELEE: Oh no, who hurts the man of my heart?

GAZI: Above all my dear, I want a pint of alcohol, Pure Bangla [alcohol made in Bengal].

CHAMELEE: What? Your heart is burning for alcohol!

GAZI: Don’t call it alcohol; call it honey. I am tired of searching.

CHAMELEE: Call it alcohol or honey, I have it all at home. If you don’t believe, you can try.

GAZI: Does that make one drunk?

CHAMELEE: Full of drunkenness.

GAZI: Does that alcohol bring colours to one’s mind?

CHAMELEE: It brings colour to every fold of one’s mind.

GAZI: Body gets lighter?

CHAMELEE: Flies on air like a butterfly.

GAZI: Does that alcohol have license?

CHAMELEE: It can’t be seen with eyes, that’s why it has no license.

GAZI: Oh, oh, stop, stop! Sit there quietly

I will not drink illegal alcohol, even if you insist.

Don’t honour the dishonourable, where are your manners?

Those who don’t abide by the laws are enemies of the society.

I am Dewan Gazi, leader of the society, everyone obeys me.

CHAMELEE: Why are you here then? Go and drink law-washing water.
Big big people show big big laws.
I also know mustard seed is the abode for the Ghost,
Line is at the loophole of law line
Hitting the law-stick on our head you go beyond the law.
We who are weak count the days to die. Laws apply only us.
Law is like the salt a leech’s head for big people,
Law-joke is the greatest joke, ha, ha, I will be killed by the laughter.
GAZI: Though your words are sharpened, you are good at heart.
Come to my house to illumine it. I will give you affection.
CHAMELEE: Now you are big-throated pigeon singing bakum bakum in the forest. Tomorrow with white eyes you will show me the street - then where shall I go?
GAZI: This Gazi is Dewan Gazi, no tricks in his words.
CHAMELEE: Agreed, give me the wedding ring.
GAZI: Given my heart, who needs a ring?
This Sunday, next Sunday, your and my wedding day,
The Groom will come putting a tupor [a kind of cap worn for wedding] on his head, tak duma dum,
The merriment of wedding day. I am leaving now. This Sunday, next Sunday, you come straight to Dewan Gazi’s house at Gazipur. Tak duma dum, the merriment of wedding day started.(Chamelee goes inside) Oh forgot, got a girl, but what about the alcohol? ( Goes in front of the Chemist shop and starts calling, Lata comes out.)
GAZI: What’s your name, dear?
LATA: Lata.
GAZI: Lata, Banalata, you know Banalata, I am dying.
LATA: Oh no, don’t say that, how old are you, sixty? How can you die now? Its the time for pleasure’s juice to be matured. What are the symptoms of your disease?
GAZI: Symptom is not good, chest feels empty, right foot goes before the left, throat is wooden dry, vision getting blurry. Now I see Banalata and at the next moment I see Radha.
LATA: Symptom is critical. It’s very difficult to get medicine for such a disease. Let’s see what’s there in your fate (brings out a bottle and shows). This will do?
GAZI: Yes it will do. Everything will do. But one question, does this medicine have license? I will not drink illegal alcohol, they might say bad of me. I am afraid of people’s criticism. If they say bad things about me who will sing my praise?
Leaving the law aside and getting the license made this chemist shop.

Whatever you say, you say. But you’ve got a nice heart to fill the shop with Bangla alcohol.

I don’t bother with my heart; just think of rice only. Selling medicine fills the tummy. I lock the door of my heart.

Let me listen - the words of your heart, in my soft heart. There is turmoil of pain for you.

Some nights, master comes to my house, throws money for the pleasure, then I get happy. But days get unhappy when he turns to other houses for a change of taste.

Aha, very sad, to be alone at your age. Get married and absorb the juice-pool of pleasure.

Your words are sweet-sugar; fill ears with honey. All adulteration in the juice of happiness, spit on my fate.

Lata, my Banalata, a lot of time has passed. Now your pain is over. I am Dewan Gazi of Gazipur, I am a big man, I will marry you. Now forget your pain.

Life is not a film-theatre, it’s very difficult. After enjoying a few days, will you throw away the fibre after relishing the flesh of the mango?

My name is Dewan Gazi, no tricks in my word.

Agreed, give me the wedding ring.

Given my heart; who needs a ring?

This Sunday, next Sunday, your and mine wedding day, The Groom will come putting a tupor on his head
Tak duma dum,
The merriment of wedding day--I am leaving now--this Sunday, next Sunday, you come straight to Dewan Gazi’s house at Gazipur. Tak duma dum, the merriment of wedding day started. (Lata goes behind the flat) Tak duma dum dum--the merriment wedding day.

What a man you are! What do you want at midnight?

What’s your name?

Kushum, everyone calls me Kushi.

Kushi, my heart’s Kushi, I love you dear.

Oh my paramour, go away or I will call everyone.
GAZI:...........: Oh why you get angry? Did I tell you anything wrong? I am Dewan Gazi, I am in search of a wife.
KUSHUM:: Oh my paramour, do you think wife is a commodity; or oil and salt of the grocery shop or hot gelepi [a kind of sweet]?
GAZI:...........: Not that, you make the opposite meaning of everything. You tell to hold the right tightly, then you hold the left tightly.
KUSHUM:: When hungry, the meaning of one’s every word changes, eyes can’t see properly, right then becomes left.
GAZI:...........: Hungry? With such lovely lashing curves of your body, dying with hunger? Get married.
KUSHUM:: Your brain is like your elephant-body. What will one gain marrying me? Who cares? You are valued when you have money, otherwise you are a cow or a goat, no-one cares to know your name.
GAZI:...........: Oh, words are double-edged knife. You are full of fine qualities. Tell these ladies and gentlemen, tell me, let me listen.
KUSHUM:: Lot of things to be told, as you are requesting, I will tell everything to all. Do it justice.
GAZI:...........: Yes, yes, do it justice.
KUSHUM:: I leave bed before dawn, for the whole day, milk the cows, sell milk, don’t get time even to breathe, burdened with a thousand works. At night, I eat one or two dry roti, eyelids shut with exhaustion. Not spared even then. If Big master cares, spends the night at my house, leaves before the dawn. Again work from the morning. How should I feel? Love and marriage escape through the window.
GAZI:...........: You cannot sustain such hand work at your age. Marry me, you won’t have any want. I have land, I have a palace, I have money beyond count. Only I don’t have a loving, lovely looking wife of my choice. You have stolen my heart. Tell me my wife.
KUSHUM:: Now you see everything coloured, when night will be over, calling me a bitch you will kick me out. Don’t I know you?
GAZI:...........: Its Dewan Gazi. No tricks in my word.
KUSHUM:: Agreed, give me the wedding ring.
GAZI:...........: Given my heart, who needs a ring?

This Sunday, next Sunday, your and my wedding day,
The Groom will come putting a tupor on his head
Tak dum dum,
The merriment of wedding day - I am leaving now - this Sunday, next Sunday, you come straight to Dewan Gazi’s house at Gazipur. Tak dum dum, the merriment of wedding day started.(Lata goes behind the flat)Tak dum dum dum - the merriment of wedding day. Tak....(leaves)
(Chamelee, Lata and Kushum appear in front of three flats and see Gazi leaving the stage.)

CHAMELEE: Did you see?
LATA: What did you see?
KUSHUM: Did you see?

(Song and dance)

Chamelee, Lata and Kushum’s song
You saw Dewan Gazi’s rang-baji [playing tricks]
When drunk, he is ready to marry us even.
Oh loving Paramour, we know you to the backbone,
Whatever loving words you whisper making love with caressing tone.
We are getting deaf with love talks.
We have known the world, the greatest of burning is the burning of the stomach
Too much light at daytime,
Too much dark at night-time,
Hate at daytime,
Throw money at night-time.
We know, you are the dove, Kazi [doer] of works
Ready to marry us when drunk and alcohol works.

SCENE FOUR
(Inner Yard of Gazi’s household, one bathroom is visible. Makhon and two workers enter with a few paper-boxes.)

MAKHON: Keep the boxes there, hey take care, those are Boro shaheb’s [eldest master] boxes. If one is broken you’ve had it. He will abuse you to the fourteen generations.
1ST WORKER: What’s in it?
MAKHON: Medicine.
2ND WORKER: Medicine? Is Boro shaheb seriously ill?
MAKHON: Seriously ill means, he has the king of diseases.
1ST WORKER: But he does not look like.
MAKHON: It can’t be seen with eyes. It is the disease of the mind - it is called heart-disease.

(Enters Shakina)

SHAKINA: Now you are coming back from shopping?
MAKHON: Yeah.
SHAKINA: :Having good time. Roaming, eating, drinking with the master. Now all you need is a bed in his bedroom. (Two workers sit in a corner and smoke biri [country made cigarette].)
MAKHON::::::: Why, feeling jealous?
SHAKINA::::::: No, feel pity. You don’t know our master, he will take away the ladder, once you are at the top of the tree. Then he’ll break the branch.
MAKHON::::::: Enough! You don’t have to lecture on that. Go away.
SHAKINA::::::: Of course, I will go away. Why do you show your temper? Telling for your good, you show me temper.
(Enters Gazi)
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Here you are. My shy, moon-face, I haven’t seen you for so long.
SHAKINA:::::::(backing off a little) Bubu (Lailee) is looking for you. The Daroga shaheb is waiting for you a long time.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Oh, is the Son-in-law here? Good, hey Shakina, is Abed leaving?
SHAKINA::::::: Yes sir.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Why, what happened?
SHAKINA::::::: You told him to leave and he is going.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: I told him to leave? Makhon, what she is talking about?
MAKHON::::::: Yes sir, she told the truth. That day Kazi sahib told you that Abed belongs to the Jhanda party, Abed says to workers, there will be no class system of high and low. After hearing all this, you were angry.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Got angry? Why should I get angry? What wrong Abed has said?
MAKHON::::::: Kazi shaheb says, these are sinful words.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: There won’t be any high and low class with humanity, where is sin in it? Take for example you and I.
MAKHON::::::: Leave me -
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Good, look at Shakina, don’t I feel her as my own? Don’t I have a few pleasure-talks with her? Don’t I want to...
SHAKINA::::::: Lailee bubu is sitting for a long while.
GAZI:::::::::::::::: Coming. In fact, you know Makhon that Kazi is the root of all evils. Yes, I will throw him out of the village. He says to throw Abed out of the village? Makhon, you call Abed right now.
MAKHON::::::: What’s the point?
GAZI:::::::::::::::: It is needed. Oh what a shame! If someone speaks good, can he lose his job for that? Is it a Mogh’s [lawless] territory? Nothing of my honour remains. Shakina what do you do?
SHAKINA::::::: Whatever you order. I do everything.

49 Political party.
GAZI: My forehead! Then why these scandals? Call Abed right now. Listen, give these two fella something to eat. They will work on the land near the pond.

SHAKINA: Oh my mother, what do you say? You are not selling that piece of land? You said, you will give all the money to your son-in-law as dowry.

GAZI: You must be out of your head. Taking away the rice from so many mouths, I will sell that for a son-in-law? Hey, what do you think of me? Am I not a human being?

SHAKINA: Yes sir, you are a great big-hearted man.

GAZI: Oh, listen to my moon-face! Isn’t the great man a human being? I won’t sell that land. My son-in-law will get my daughter as dowry. That half-fed Daroga is getting my entire daughter; what dowry is required? What do you say Makhon?

MAKHON: Yes sir.

GAZI: (to two workers) Brothers will you be able to do my work? I love you poor fellows. I am not a burjoa [bourgeoisie].

1ST WORKER: What joa?

2ND WORKER: What’s the meaning of burjoa?

GAZI: Look, they don’t know even the meaning of the word. That’s why they say one can’t make a human out of a donkey by beating? Oh donkey, burjoa means big people. You can’t understand the meaning if you don’t become a Big people yourself.

1ST WORKER: Then, how we will understand?

MAKHON: Sir, isn’t it better to fix the rate of wages with them before they start work?

GAZI: Why to fix rate? Are they cows and goats?

MAKHON: You said they are ass. What’s the difference between an ass and a cow-goat?

GAZI: You are an ass yourself, can’t you see the difference? Look ass, you can eat cow-goat, but can’t eat ass.

MAKHON: You are right. They are working people, run the belly by work. They need to look for work somewhere else, if they don’t get work here. So before time runs out...

SHAKINA: You are talking on the face of our master. You will lose your job.

GAZI: Why will he lose his job? Let him speak. Are not we all equal?

SHAKINA: The grandson of Pir [spiritual leader] kills the elephant by words.(exits)

GAZI: Makhon, what did she say?

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50 Expression of disbelief.
MAKHON: Leave it. Sir what I wanted to say was, I don’t think they will serve your work.

GAZI: Of course they will serve the purpose. They are very willing to work. I understood that from their eyes.

MAKHON: You have seen the eyes or teeth, these skeleton weaklings will not be able to work.

1ST WORKER: Whether we will be able to work or not, how do you know?

GAZI: Makhon, why you are talking like a Burjoa? He is not a cow-goat that I have to check his meat before purchasing. He is a hard-worrying worker; he has to be paid his due.

MAKHON: Pardon me sir, who pays the due these days? As far as I have heard, due to be taken away.

GAZI: What did you say?

MAKHON: What I heard. You don’t have to believe all I heard.

GAZI: You stop! You have started talking rot now. (to the workers) You stay; I will be back after the bath. Shakina (shouts, not seeing her) Shakina--

SHAKINA: Yes sir.

GAZI: Give me a cup of tea.

SHAKINA: Yes. (exits).

1ST WORKER: You are really a third-class man. You almost tried to beat us to hunger. You don’t understand the sorrow of the poor even though you’re poor yourself.

MAKHON: How can I beat you to hunger? Those who beat the poor to hunger all along are doing that. I was talking for your good.

2ND WORKER: What’s that good?

MAKHON: Our master has gone for wash. After wash, he will have tea. Hangover of alcohol will be off. All coloured balloons will be busted; you will lose the job.

1ST WORKER: What type of rule is that?

2ND WORKER: I don’t understand anything.

MAKHON: You will understand soon. Do what I tell you. Leave the place, quick. Soon his wino-mood will be over.

2ND WORKER: He drinks alcohol?

MAKHON: Drinks mean; booze keeps him human. He becomes a son of a bitch as soon his wino-mood is over.

(enters Abed)

ABED: Hey Makhon, how are you?

MAKHON: You will never be smart. Now his wino-mood is almost over and you came.
ABED: He called me to come, how can I keep away? Who are they?
MAKHON: Our Master has brought them to work.
ABED: To work? Then they are done.
   (enters Gazi)
GAZI: Here brother Abed, please forgive me.
MAKHON: Saved, still under the booze.
ABED: What do you say sir? Why do you ask pardon for nothing? What have you done?
GAZI: What have I not done? I told you to leave the house, Makhon, give him fifty taka.
ABED: You look very happy, you became half of your actual age.
   (enters Shakina with a cup of tea)
SHAKINA: Excuse me sir........
GAZI: Here comes flower girl with tea. Flower girl, sit beside me. Sit everyone; let’s gossip.
MAKHON: Sir we better fix up with them.
GAZI: Sometimes you irritate me, Makhon. They will work here isn’t it? I am telling them to sit and gossip. What’s the harm? Flower girl, bring the bottle please.
SHAKINA: If you want to drink that then why tea?
GAZI: You are telling not to leave it. Makhon--
MAKHON: Sir.
GAZI: Did you tell them today's story?
MAKHON: Which one, sir?
GAZI: That happened on our way to the hut.
MAKHON: Oh, the quarrel with the goat...........
GAZI: Yes. You listen, then you will understand what type of man I am.
MAKHON: I was taking our master on my rickshaw to the hut. All of a sudden, in front of a house, he said, ‘Halt your Rick’. I halted, and after going down from the rick, he ran towards a house. One goat was tied with a rope in front of the house. It was bleating at the top of its voice. It was damn hungry. As soon as our master unroped it, ran away with a ba, ba.
SHAKINA: Shaheb did the right thing. It’s not good to be cruel to animals.
MAKHON: Owner of the house and the owner of the goat was sitting at verandah. Seeing what our master was doing, he was so angry, seeing his face I felt like laughing strongly. Oh I can laugh now...ha.. ha
   (Makhon goes on laughing. All laugh with him except Dewan Gazi.)
GAZI: Shaki, give little more tea.
ABED: That man had a good lesson.
MAKHON: Yes he had.
ABED: Who was that fella?
MAKHON: Not an ordinary folk. The Union Council's chairman.

2ND WORKER: Oh my God, Chairman, he is a real son of a bitch.
GAZI: Give, little more tea.
1ST WORKER: That Ramizuddin chairman brought money from Government for digging canal for the irrigation, done nothing. His house became two storied...now he wants to open a maktab [a school for religious education] in his late-mother's name...bastard wants to earn soob [good deeds for the reward in after life].

2ND WORKER: No other place than the Habia [the worst of all the hells] hell waits for him after death. Bastard criminal.
GAZI: Hey, give me little more tea.
MAKHON: Whatever you say Abed bai [brother], I was so happy to see that big man insulted, as if salt before a leech.
ABED: Don't be carried away so early. Big people are always big people; cobras by nature, bite in time.
GAZI: Give little more tea.
MAKHON: Fight between the kings, Gazi shaheb has insulted the Chairman. If anything goes wrong, it will be between them. Why should I be bothered?
ABED: You are number one stupid. The saying is 'king fights king, ulu khagra [wild useless creeper] dies'.
MAKHON: Leave it. The naked person has no fear from a cheat.
GAZI: (suddenly stands up) Shut up bastards! Got fun here?
MAKHON: Only our master could, who else got guts to talk to the Chairman?
GAZI: Shut up Makhana, don't utter a word! I'll kill you bastard, step on your throat. Mind it, you are a servant; live like a servant.
MAKHON: Sir, I mean...
GAZI: Why didn't you stop me while I was talking nonsense to the Chairman?
MAKHON: Sir, how could I understand that you don't know the Cheerman?
GAZI: Look at the son of ghulam's [slave] IQ. When could I recognise a man when I am under the booze - hey (kicks) son of a

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51 Bengali colloquial intonation of Chairman.
ullooki [base she animal]? I say a lot of things under the booze. Do you think I will give my daughter to marry you?

MAKHON::: How can I..

GAZI:.......... Shut up, you son of a ghulam. I thought I would get the road surfaced from my house to the main highway...all lost. I won't get that money even selling you!

SHAKINA: Sir, I bring little more tea.

GAZI:.......... Who asked you to talk so much? Go inside the house, where you’re supposed to work! (exits) (to Makhon) Just roaming around and having cold air on your body, paying so much money every month. Son of a bitch!

MAKHON::: Don't call me names for nothing.

GAZI:.......... Shut up. I am telling everyone...who are these?

1ST WORKER:: Sir you called us to work...

2ND WORKER: You told us to clean creeper from the marshy paddy field near the pond.

GAZI:.......... Oh brothers of my wife, come to save me! Get lost..

1ST WORKER:: Sir we won't get any work anywhere now.

GAZI:.......... If you don't get work, go hang yourself - what’s that to my father?

2ND WORKER: Sir, just allow us to work for today only. Holding your feet, we will not come for work again.

GAZI:.......... I am telling! Won't you leave this place, you sons of bitches........?

ABED:.......... Gazi sahib, you are being very unjust.

GAZI:.......... Never try to teach me just-unjust. I gave you a job, but didn't tell you to sit on my head.

MAKHON:..... You told me to call them.

GAZI:.......... If you utter a single word more, I will pull out your tongue.

(Shakina enters with food)

SHAKINA:..... Come on, take (to the workers).

GAZI:.......... What’s that?

SHAKINA:..... You told me to give them something to eat.

GAZI:.......... Aee, told to give them food. (Kicks the food) You’ve made my house a longor--khana [charitable centre]? Call my dog, Baga to eat. Thu...thu..Baga......athu..

ABED:.......... Do you have anything human in you?

GAZI:.......... Human for a human, beast for a beast. All of you are children of beast.

MAKHON:..... Be careful, don't call me names. I won't work here!

GAZI:.......... Just take a step from here, your dead body will be found in the marshy land tomorrow. No one will utter a word.
ABED:.............: But........
GAZI:.............: Enough, everyone will go his way within three seconds.
I don't want to see anybody when I am back.(exits)
ABED:.............: Makhon(Makhon looks, does not reply. Abed and two
workers leave the stage).
SHAKINA:....: I told you, don't meddle in all the master’s affairs, now
you got it?
MAKHON:.....: Leave me, don't bark here.
SHAKINA:....: What a temper! Such temper is not good for a poor
fellow. You'll get stomach upset.
MAKHON:.....: Look Shaki....
SHAKINA:....: If you’ve got guts, go tell a few words to the master.
Show some manliness. How could you digest abuse without feeling
shame? Now you show me red eyes. Spit, spit . . .
(starts leaving, comes back again) You will eat something or just
stand here?
MAKHON:....: (turns around) Now you will really get beating!
SHAKINA:....: If you don't eat, does that bother me? Roaming around
from early morning, that’s why I told you. Come if you want to eat,
I kept food in the kitchen. (exits)
MAKHON:....: (tauntingly) Come if you want to eat, kept food in the
kitchen.

SCENE FIVE

LAILEE:....: Hey Makhon, I was looking for you.
MAKHON: Me?
LAILEE:....: Yes, I think you will be able to do that. How much
intelligence do you have in your head?
MAKHON: Not bad. My belly may be empty, not my head.
LAILEE:....: Don't twist your talk, please. Listen, I am in deep trouble.
MAKHON: In trouble. Why talk to me? Go to the Daroga shaheb.
LAILEE:....: Ah, he’s the trouble.
MAKHON: You mean?
LAILEE:....: Yes, I won't marry him.
MAKHON: How come? Everything is arranged.
LAILEE:....: So what? That Daroga may be a good man, but I cannot
marry him.
MAKHON: Wait, wait, let me cool my head. Good man but I cannot
marry.
LAILEE:....: A tamed dog will be better than him. He’s not human.
MAKHON: Yeah, now it’s bit clearer. Clear it more.
LAILEE::: He doesn't want to marry me, wants to marry my father's money.
MAKHON: Nothing wrong with that. Your father wants to buy the Daroga shaheb.
LAILEE::: Daroga may be a cow, or a goat, to be bought. If he is, I will be sold to a beast (starts weeping).
MAKHON: Ah, look, you started wailing!
LAILEE::: No, I won't cry. I am not a human being. All of you are trying to kill me off? (weeps more).
MAKHON: OK, you don't have to weep any more. Tell me, what do I have to do?
LAILEE::: You will do what I will tell you to do?
MAKHON: Ah, tell me.
LAILEE::: You will do?
MAKHON: How can I, if you don't tell me?
LAILEE::: This is it – let's convince that Daroga that you are with me. Got me?
MAKHON: Eh?
LAILEE::: Yes.
MAKHON: I am not in it.
LAILEE::: Ah, it's not for real; we will just act we are in love.
MAKHON: No I will feel different if I act with you. I will feel that I am a Master. I can’t.
LAILEE::: You can do that very well. Such scandals are common in big people's house.
MAKHON: I don't want really to be in a scandal...
LAILEE::: Aha, for that we will just act that we are in love.
MAKHON: I saw a film like that, Big moneywallah's [rich] daughter – poor man’s son. But do I have to do that?
LAILEE::: Why?
MAKHON: Why to do that?
LAILEE::: (goes to a corner of the stage) I have not thought about it. (ponders a little) Come, listen (Makhon goes to her). If you do what I say, then I will give you a lot of money. One hundred taka.
MAKHON: Oh no.
LAILEE::: Two hundred taka.
MAKHON: Not enough.
LAILEE::: Alright, five hundred taka.
MAKHON: Fail.
LAILEE::: Even five hundred taka won't do?
MAKHON: Look, my name is Makhon Ali. I eat with my labour. You can't buy me with money. You keep with your money's heat, I am going.
LAILEE:::  Makhon, are you angry? Pardon me for this time.
MAKHON:  I can't.
LAILEE:::  (starts weeping again) You are leaving me in such a predominant. You men have no mercy in your heart. You could be so unjust to a helpless female.
MAKHON:  You raised the question of injustice, so I am staying. Tell me what I have to do?
LAILEE:::  Why ask me? I asked for your suggestion.
MAKHON:  From me? OK. Take the scene like this; the Daroga Shaheb is coming in. I will pretend that I haven’t seen him and will say, Lailee meet me near the ghat \(^{52}\) under the Kadam tree in the evening.
LAILEE:::  It won't work. He is very greedy for money. Think of something better.
MAKHON:  Rougher than that? OK. I will say from the back, ‘Lailee, why you are leaving? Take your blouse, dear’. I will have your blouse in my hand.
LAILEE:::  Not bad. Think of another one.
MAKHON:  Got it! But it will be very strong.
LAILEE:::  So what? Tell me.
MAKHON:  We two will enter into the bathroom together. Then when the Daroga shaheb comes in, we will come out. What will be more clear?
LAILEE:::  Tell me what you are after?
MAKHON:  If you say that, then I am undone.
LAILEE:::  OK, agreed. But you are going to lose your job.
MAKHON:  I have almost lost that alreday.
LAILEE:::  Then, start quick, I’ve been here for a long time. The Daroga might come inside to look for me.
MAKHON:  Wait, I am coming with a few sticks of biri. I might have to sit inside for a long time with you. (exits, Gazi and the Daroga enter)
GAZI::::::::  Here, my mother, Lailee! I am looking for you. Son-in-law was telling...
LAILEE:::  Dad, I have headache. I will come after my bath. (enters the bathroom)
DAROGA::  I am planning to go to District Headquarters after our marriage, to meet boroshahеб [superior officer]. I will ask him for a transfer to Gazipur. I’m thinking of taking Lailee with me, as she will have a trip.

\(^{52}\) Stairs in a pond.
GAZI: That’s not bad. Have you invited your boroshaheb to the marriage ceremony? You must get him here.

DAROGA: He gave his word.

GAZI: Its better to be on good terms with him.

DAROGA: He is very fond of me. He says, he’s seen lot of Darogas in his life, but Nafar Ali is fire itself. I expect my promotion this time.

GAZI: Good, I have invited the Chairman. He told he will come.

(enters Makhon)

DAROGA: You did a good thing. I made the list of dowry. You’d better have a look, please.

GAZI: (to Makhon) What, you don’t have anything to do? Just roam and have air in the body? Go away!

MAKHON: Ok, I’m going.(enters into the bathroom, Gazi at his wit’s end, at first, cannot decide what to do)

DAROGA: The list is not that long. In fact, everything will be required for your daughter.

GAZI: Did you talk to Lailee openly about the marriage? It’s better to have open talks. After all she is a woman. Moreover she is my only daughter.

DAROGA: Yes we did. She has not said anything very clearly. Woman do not express themselves clearly. But she is agreed, that’s clear. Why, did she tell you anything?

GAZI: No, but it’s better to have open discussion.

DAROGA: Don’t worry, now I understand her feeling. I will be able to manage her.

LAILEE: (laughs, inside the bathroom) No, leave me dear now. What are you doing in broad daylight? Don’t tickle me, dear!

DAROGA: That’s Lailee’s voice?

GAZI: No, no, it’s must be some other girl.

LAILEE: Oh dear, what you have started? Leave me now please.

MAKHON: I got you after a long time. I will not leave you today, darling.

DAROGA: It seems to be Makhon’s voice.

GAZI: Lets go somewhere else.

MAKHON: Whatever you say, I am not leaving you today.

LAILEE: No, no, not now.

DAROGA: Its Lailee truly.

GAZI: Lailee (enters Lailee) what were you doing in the bathroom?

LAILEE: What else could I be doing? I just started washing myself and you started calling.

(Makhon comes out from the bathroom)
GAZI: You think I don’t have eye and ear, nothing? Why did you take him in there?

MAKHON: Bubu told me to fill the buckets with water, that’s why...........................

GAZI: Shut up bastard! I will kill you! What a shame? The end of all scandals. How can I show my face to him?

DAROGA: No, no, there’s nothing wrong. Filling the buckets with water, what fault in that? Lailee, let’s go to some other room.(exits Lailee. The Daroga wants to go too)

GAZI: You wait. I am not leaving it be. (to Makhon) If I see you doing monkey-game again, I will cut you into pieces. You will be a feast for my dog.

DAROGA: Father, you don’t be so angry, please. Your blood pressure will go up.

GAZI: Mind yourself.

DAROGA: Leave it, let’s go inside (both exit). They’re all children of lower caste people.

MAKHON: Daroga, brother-in-law, son of a boar! Downright shameless! He won’t see and hear anything now for the greed of money. Couldn’t do anything worthy, lost my job. To hell with it!

AT THE END OF SCENE FIVE: SUTRADAR’S SONG

_Thaire naire na thaire naire na_,
This world is zoo-_khana_ [place]
The rule is strange-factory-_khana_.

Time, time, out-of-tune time,
What a time, Gazi’s daughty’s time,
Makhon Ali’s life _fana fana_ [finished]

Dewan Gazi lost his sense,
 Wants the _Daroga_ as son in law, that makes sense,
Bird may fly away; don’t see any sense.

The _Daroga_’s name Nofor Ali,
Cotton- in-ear, closed-eyed Ali,
He can’t hear with ear,
He can’t see with eyes.
SCENE SIX

(Light on the stage. Lailee is sitting. Enter Daroga.)

DAROGA:: I wanted to tell you something.
LAILEE::: What’s that?
DAROGA:: Have I said that you are so angry with me?
LAILEE::: Why should I be angry?
DAROGA:: No, not angry exactly - I heard that you are not willing to
marry me.
LAILEE::: I don’t like a female-type male.
DAROGA:: That’s correct, eh what you said? You mean, I am a
female-type........Oh, you are joking? That’s OK. you can joke with
me. We have a joking relationship.
LAILEE::: Yes, joking relationship, sis-in-law and brother-in law.
DAROGA:: Did I say wrong?
LAILEE::: No, not wrong, you are correct.
DAROGA:: No, you understand I mean, emotion - didn’t you read in
novels or plays? I mean I lose my head when I come in front of you.
LAILEE::: Lose head, seeing me or seeing my dad?
DAROGA:: Seeing your father, why?
LAILEE::: Not exactly seeing Dad; seeing Dad’s money.
DAROGA:: Look, you have started joking again.
LAILEE::: I am not joking at all.
DAROGA:: What do you say Lailee? I don’t understand the joke.
LAILEE::: You could have succeeded. But you have lost all your
senses to the smell of money.
DAROGA:: Why are you talking so angrily? Am I not your love with
all my heart and soul. You are mine, you are mine.......Lailee...Lalu.
LAILEE::: Nonsense, I don’t like such an obliging nature. I won’t
marry you, go.
DAROGA:: You said go, but I can’t go. Our marriage is fixed.
LAILEE::: So what?
DAROGA:: They will say bad things about you.
LAILEE::: Let them.
DAROGA:: Your father’s honour will suffer.
LAILEE::: Let it, even then I can’t marry a beast.
DAROGA:: What, I am a beast?
LAILEE::: Less than a beast. What do you know other than paisa
[coin Bengali currency]? You had education, became a Daroga but
could not become a human. Look at that house-servant Makhon,
even a servant is a thousand times better than you.
DAROGA:: You ought to be better behaved. A girl of gentle family having an affair...Do you think I don’t understand anything?

LAILEE::: Knowing this, you still don’t want to understand. If required, I will marry Makhon but not you.

DAROGA:: You will marry Makhon?

LAILEE::: Yes. He is really very human when you get to know him.

DAROGA:: You have to marry me.

LAILEE::: I won’t.

DAROGA::: Check your tongue!

LAILEE::: Shut up, I am Nofor Ali Daroga.

DAROGA::: Don’t show me your Darogagiri [showing power of the position of a Daroga].

DAROGA::: Listen Lailee, stoop playing around. Obey me, otherwise.....

LAILEE::: Otherwise what?

DAROGA::: I will put Makhon in jail.

LAILEE::: Beast.

DAROGA::: I will circulate it that he was caught making love to you...and send him to jail.

LAILEE::: Son of a bitch!

DAROGA::: I will have your father accused of murder.

LAILEE::: What did you say?

DAROGA::: I will have your father an accused of a murder case, burn your house at night with hired criminals.

LAILEE::: What a loving man you are. You don’t even understand jokes. I was just joking with you. Whom should I marry if I don’t marry you?

DAROGA::: Oh really? Marry me, you will find happiness. In fact the reason I want your father’s money, Lailee, is that for me - all will be yours. Think also, your father will be benefited if he gets a Daroga as his son-in-law. I am going now dear.

LAILEE::: Bye.

DAROGA::: Bye.(exits)

LAILEE::: Daroga, my brother-in-law. You saw dove but didn’t see the dove-trap. I am also the daughter of Dewan Gazi. I do know how to make a dog’s tail straight.

SCENE SEVEN
(Enter Lailee and stands at a corner of the stage)

LAILEE::: My marriage is tomorrow. What can I do now? That bugger Daroga, he is after my Dad like a leech. How to get rid of that? How about marrying Makhon? Good looking, has studied a
bit at school. His only fault is he is poor. He will be upgraded in class if he gets my Dad’s money. Then nobody will call him a servant. It will be much better for me to marry Makhon. He will stand up and sit down at my words; won’t be able to show temper like that Daroga. If I can make Dad agree when he is drunk then the fort is mine. Now I have to make Makhon agree to my proposal.

(Makhon hears the last word of Lailee and comes forward)
MAKHON: What happened to you? (Lailee looks raising her face)
    You were just saying something. What happened?
LAILEE::::: What’s that to you? Mind your own work!
MAKHON: Exactly, I have to mind my own work. Going to see if the milkman came with the milk . . . (starts moving).
LAILEE::::: Makhon.
MAKHON: What?
LAILEE::::: Tell me please, what should I do now? Nothing comforts me, Makhon.
MAKHON: Nothing to worry about. Dress like a new bride wearing banarasee sari. Sit there; the Daroga will come and take you. Then all over, you don’t have to bother for anything.
LAILEE::::: Even you want to say that, Makhon?
MAKHON: Why you are pulling me into it?
LAILEE::::: I’m not pulling you. What’s written in my fate is written.
MAKHON: Oh, you have to tell me what happened.
LAILEE::::: You know what.
MAKHON: Don’t tell me that. Tell it to the right person.
LAILEE::::: I told him, but it didn’t work.
MAKHON: How?
LAILEE::::: I told that Daroga yesterday straight, I won’t marry him. He threatened me. He will put you in jail if I don’t marry him, have Dad accused of a murder case, burn the house.
MAKHON: That brother-in-law is a real son of a bitch.
LAILEE::::: Even after that, you tell me to marry him?
MAKHON: What can I say? Your father cauught him after a long hunt.
LAILEE::::: My Dad has not bought a groom for me, he bought a strong post to make himself stronger.
MAKHON: Then what? Just hang on him, closing your eyes and ears.
LAILEE::::: Makhon, don’t you have a heart?
MAKHON: Had, but it was crushed by the pressure of big people.
LAILEE::::: Makhon, please marry me.
MAKHON: What did you say?
LAILEE::::: I am saying the right thing.
MAKHON: You must be out of your head.
LAILEE::::: I am speaking with a clear head, after thinking a lot about it.
MAKHON: Please don’t count on me.
LAILEE::::: Why? What’s the problem?
MAKHON: Look I am a poor bloke, I will lose my job anytime. I don’t want to get killed.
LAILEE::::: Your job is greater than my life?
MAKHON: Not that. You want to change the natural system? The marriage of a big-monied man’s daughter and a poor man occurs only in the film.
LAILEE::::: Makhon, if I marry you, leaving everything behind?
MAKHON: Oh no, I don’t like jokes early in the morning.
LAILEE::::: Believe me Makhon, I’m not joking at all. Don’t you like me Makhon?
MAKHON: Yes I like you. But I lose my tamper if you speak like that.
LAILEE::::: Makhon, tell me truly, can’t you love me from your heart?
(enters Gazi)
GAZI::::::: Hey, what’s going on?
MAKHON: Nothing.
LAILEE::::: Nothing.
GAZI::::::: Nothing. What you think? You will do whatever you feel like? This sister fucker, wants to...
MAKHON: Why are you calling me names? What’s my fault?
GAZI::::::: No, not your fault, my fault. I won’t get peace if I don’t kill you, brother-in law. The day after tomorrow my daughter will get married. You are taking your chances, isn’t it?
MAKHON: I swear upon Allah, I am not taking any chance. Work is done at the Master’s wish.
GAZI::::::: Shut up, you don’t have to lecture here. Go to your work. Mind out, I don’t want to see you here again. Son of a bitch, bustard. (Makhon exits) Lailee, don’t you have any sense? That day you came out of the bathroom with the house-servant Makhon in front of Nafar Ali. To cover that scandal, I had to agree with the long list of dowry.
LAILEE::::: That dowry list will make him forget everything. He won’t see anything, he won’t see anything now.
GAZI::::::: If he would have been here now, then what would have happened?
LAILEE::::: The list would have been longer. Dad, I will not marry him.
GAZI::::::: Why won’t you marry? Spending so much money to get you married to a noble family, and you are not liking it! Having fun with the house servant!
LAILEE::::: That day you told yourself, marry as you like. That’s not human.
GAZI::::::::: Again talking to my face? That became gospel truth, whatever I said when I was drunk? Forget it. I am getting you married spending so much money. That old piece of land, gold grows there. I’m just selling for your happiness, you get a place in a noble house.
LAILEE::::: What noble house are you sending me to?
GAZI::::::::: Isn’t the Daroga noble? How noble is that bastard Makhon? What a shame, with a servant you....
LAILEE::::: Why be ashamed? You have also gossiped with Makhon, thrown your arms around his neck.
GAZI::::::::: Oh bitch, when I am drunk! Did you see any other time? Don’t raise, what I do under alcohol. A servant should remain like a servant? Did you ever hear that a dog could digest ghee\textsuperscript{53}? Go, tell the maids to serve food. Nafar Ali will come now. I will be in the office.
(Both exit. Light gets dimmer. Male and female servants turn the empty stage into a wedding house by decoration.)

SCENE EIGHT
(Enters Chamelee)
CHAMELEE: Anybody home? Please come and see, your guest came.
(enters Makhon)
MAKHON::::: Whom do you want?
CHAMELEE: Want to see Dewan Gazi, call him.
MAKHON::::: He went inside for lunch. After lunch he will have a nap. What, meeting at this hour? Go away!
CHAMELEE: What do you say? You are telling Dewan Gazi’s bride-wife to go way. Will your job remain after that?
MAKHON::::: Bride-wife?
CHAMELEE: Yes, what else I am telling? That midnight, he went to my house, wanted alcohol. I said, don’t have that alcohol, but can give you my heart’s alcohol. Gazi said, “I will marry you.” This Sunday, yes he said this Sunday. That’s why I came so early.
GAZI:::::::::::: (off-stage) Talk again on my face. Once I told you marriage will be with the Daroga, your marriage will be with the Daroga, OK.
CHAMELEE: That’s master’s voice. Tell him to come.
MAKHON::::: Now I’ve got it. That night he went out for alcohol, not getting it at home, you took his heart.

\textsuperscript{53} An eatable made of milk.
CHAMELEE: Why should I win him? He won me with his sweet words.

(enter Lata)

LATA: Where is dear Dewan Gazi r? I am here, receive me, dear. Oh, the house is decorated. Lovely. I like it. (sees Chamelee) When did you come here?

MAKHON: She is Dewan Gazi’s wife. Not yet; would-be wife.

LATA: Oh really, no gentleman’s honour will remain. That bitch sells her body for her belly, now wants to be gentry. I can’t help but laugh, I can’t help but weep.

CHAMELEE: Oh my daughter of the big Nawabwhatever I do I do it openly. I don’t play hide and seek. Don’t I know your khemta - dance behind your veil.

MAKHON: Shaheb gathered a good bunch, Oh brides, if you start quarrel at the groom’s house, what they will say?

(enters Kushum)

KUSHUM: Where is Dewan Gazi dear? (Shows her irritation when she sees Lata and Chamelee)

MAKHON: Who are you there?

KUSHUM: I am Dewan Gazi’s bride-wife.

MAKHON: I am lost. Where to keep all these pitchers of pleasure? What do you want?

KUSHUM: What’s your problem? Go, tell Dewan Gazi, Kushum is here. He will run to me.

(in a singing tone)

Kala would not be bound in love,
Knowing love-pain is the greatest pain--
MAKHON: What a mess! Tell me exactly, what do you want?

CHAMELEE, LATA, KUSHUM: My marriage is with Dewan Gazi.

MAKHON: Is there any proof that our master wants to marry you?

CHAMELEE: Who needs proof?

LATA: Marriage with me is fixed.

CHAMELEE: He also fixed with me.

KUSHUM: He also told me - told several times. That’s why I came.

CHAMELEE: Three are telling one thing, what more proof do you want?

MAKHON: That’s true. If it was one, it could be blown away. You three are telling - that means popular demand. It has to be resolved. But what can I do?

---

54 Princely person.
55 Vulgar dance.
56 The Hindu God of love.
KUSHUM::::: He has promised himself.
LATA:........... Yes, he told me himself.
MAKHON::::: That promise was at night; at daylight all void.
CHAMELEE: How’s that? Is this the word of a noble man?
KUSHUM::::: Your manners are also not good. Is this your hospitality?
MAKHON::::: I won’t be short in treating if I can present you in front of
our master. Ah, don’t I feel like serving you! After all, you are the
mistresses of the house.
CHAMELEE: We want to eat good dishes.
LATA:......... Want to live in comfort for a few days.
KUSHUM::: Want to spend a few days resting one leg over another.
MAKHON::: Ah, I’ll try to arrange that. If I can present you in front
of our master at the right time, he will lose his head! Who to keep,
who to leave? There will be beating of dul in Dewan Gazi’s
bosom; dang da dang dang da dang.
CHAMELEE: We will eat good dishes?
LATA:......... We will get good dresses?
KUSHUM::: Will give us place to live in?
MAKHON::: Ah, these are your demands. Shout as they shout in
processions, ‘Revolution ---zindabad! Our demands.........’
THREE::: Must be granted.........(laughter)
(One person passes them with a pitcher of curd and went
inside the house.)
CHAMELEE: Here goes the curd.
(one person passed them with sweets)
LATA:......... Here goes the sweet.
(One person passes them with meat.)
KUSHUM::: Here goes the meat.
CHAMELEE: Oh the food will be lovely.
LATA:......... I am so hungry.
KUSHUM::: Bring some food, brother.
LATA:......... I will enjoy myself when I’m married; I won’t need to
sell alcohol at night. I’ll eat all day, sleep all night. Noble man’s
wife got to be heavy in body.
CHAMELEE: Will be very good. Won’t have to look for clients day
and night. Life will be finished with one client. I will have a lot of
work to do, looking after the house, serving the husband, I’ll have to
manage everything. Oh what a trouble! But peaceful.
KUSHUM::: Yes. Me, I became a cow-goat spending the whole day in
the cow-shed. Now I want to be a little human. Want to enjoy life
as Dewan Gazi’s wife.

57 A drum type musical instrument.
GAZI: Why so much noise? Hey who are you? (to Makhon)
You brought them here?
MAKHON: Whom Allah gives, he gives in abundance. They came to you.
CHAMELEE: Oh dear, you forgot already? We are your bride-wives.
LATA: How you won us with sweet words - said you will marry.
Now you’re asking, ‘who are they’?
GAZI: Got fun here? Got no place to fun! Makhna, throw them out by the neck!
MAKHON: Hey, go away!
KUSHUM: Take care! Don’t you touch my body. I’m telling you!
LATA: Oh dear, tell me truly, can’t you remember us?
GAZI: Makhna, what do you see, son of a bitch. Throw these bitches out. Story - came to tell story in my name?
CHAMELEE: Why to circulate story? What’s our interest?
LATA: We are poor. We are happy if we can eat bellyful.
GAZI: Shut up, bitch. You run your belly selling your body, want to eat in a noble house? Hey, how many heads on your neck?
KUSHUM: Just one. The poor have one head on each neck.
Knowing this, they put it under the knife every time.
CHAMELEE: Look, didn’t we know, you won’t marry us? We knew it in our bones, but thought you would give something to eat. At least we would eat our bellyful for one day.
LATA: No hope, we heard on our way, tomorrow is your daughter’s marriage ceremony. There will be lots of food; hundreds of people will eat. Why are we to be deprived?
GAZI: You’re joking! If I treat the women from the market, everyone in the society will spit on me...Makhna!
KUSHUM: You don’t have to call Makhna, we are leaving on our own. We thought big people’s heart would be big – that we would see the same person at day as we saw at night. Now we see it is the kingdom of deception.
GAZI: Makhna, hey bastard, what I am telling you? Throw them out of the village. If there’s any trouble, then I will...Now I am going to nap. I don’t want to hear any noise. (starts leaving, comes back again.) They’ve got loose moths. Give them two taka each.
(exits)
CHAMELEE: (laughter) How about it? Bribed us. Two taka each to keep our mouth shut.
MAKHON: You saw with your own eyes. For nothing, I had to digest all for you.
KUSHUM::::: Oh Gazi shaheb, you show many a dream at night, at daylight all balloons fot -fot -fotash.
LATA:....... Noble people have many colours, change colour every moment. Gazi shaheb, my salaam on your feet, its not our job to understand you.

(sing around Makhon)

KUSHUM::::: Makhon bai.
LATA:....... Makhon bai.
CHAMELEE: O, Makhon bai.
MAKHON: Tell me what you want to say?

SONG
We are already dead, but you won’t be spared, bai,
Bai re bai Makhon bai, bai re bai Makhon bai.
Show motion, there’s no difference between me and you,
bai
You me, me you. Run the belly selling the body, bai
Want to be a gentle-folk?
Try hard but you’ll never be gentry, bai
You are washerman’s donkey; you carry other’s burden, bai.
Washerman’s donkey wants to be human, that’s your Mistake.
After day’s toil, mustard flower at night, bai
To the big man, the small man’s is not worth a paisa.
We are already dead; you don’t have any value.

SCENE NINE
(wedding house)
KAZI:......... You know Chairman sahib, they speak bigger than their mouth. What do the boys think of them, reading a bit at school-college? They demand big and small has to be equal.
CHAIRMAN: Leave them, all infidels.
KAZI:......... Country has so many droughts, floods, epidemics. All are curses from Allah. If they have belief, how the country can suffer like that? Look here, you are a believer, did you ever have the want of rice or wear torn cloth? You donate to public at Allah’s wish, isn’t it?
CHAIRMAN: I became Chairman and can serve the people by your blessings.

KAZI: Yet those misfits say you became a crocodile of money by smuggling and hoarding. Hell with them.

CHAIRMAN: That’s their only fault. Can’t stand anyone’s good. They can’t do anything themselves. If others do, they can’t stand it. You know, they are the enemies of the people.

KAZI: You said the truth. Rich and poor will remain in the country at Allah’s wish.

DAROGA: I don’t understand why boro-shaheb has not come yet. May be, his car broke down on the way?

MUKTHAR: Your father-in-law was asking about him. He understands the honour of the upper classes.

DAROGA: Yes sir, the honoured understands the honour of the honoured. Take for example, Chairman shaheb; he never goes to everyone’s place. My marriage and it’s with the girl from the Gazi-bari [house], that’s why he came.

MUKTHAR: No, no more delay. Let’s finish the main function of the marriage. Food to be served after that. Gazi does not look all right. Why is he sitting with a serious face?

DAROGA: Girls of our country, you know Mukhtar shaheb, everyone is a bag of cloth. If a simple little thing happens, she will spend the whole life tying a stone on her bosom. You know what’s the name of that bugger? Yes, Sharatchandra; all girls are becoming widows in their blossoming youth reading that bugger’s novels.

MUKTHAR: Gazi must have drunk already. I told him, don’t drink today. Today is your daughter’s marriage. Did he listen? Who knows what trouble to follow?

DAROGA: You know Mukhtar shahib, I told Lailee I do not like burkha 58. She will see all the latest films and learn the manners, then she will find happiness in life. You know, I don’t need to pay for seeing films at the cinema houses.

GAZI: Chairman shaheb -
CHAIRMAN: Yes please.

GAZI: Can you like that fellow, I mean, would prefer to get your daughter married to him?

CHAIRMAN: Which fellow?

GAZI: That bugger, laughing like a clown and showing his teeth.

CHAIRMAN: That’s, your son-in-law.

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58 Veil worn by the women.
GAZI: To hell with that type of son-in-law. Say, you like him?
CHAIRMAN: Why? Good, quite good. But why are you telling me this now?
GAZI: Just word has no time. That clown, gossips the whole day about films, and where is money that’s his main concern. Never bothers to pick money from the toilet. Chairman shaheb, tell him my daughter’s marriage can’t be with him.
CHAIRMAN: Please stop.
DAROGA: What’s the matter? Who are you talking about?
GAZI: Who do you think? How many fellas came in the groom’s dress? Yes, I’m telling you. My daughter’s marriage can’t be with a clown like you.
MUKTHAR: It’s happened; what I was scared about...take care. I am leaving.
GAZI: Hey where you going? You are leaving when your friend is in danger. My daughter would have gone to a greedy scoundrel’s house, you were watching that?
MUKTHAR: Don’t speak rot. Our son-in-law is quite a fine man.
GAZI: Shut up, you bribe-eating Mukthar. How much has that bugger bribed you?
(enter Makhon and Shakina)
DAROGA: No I can’t bear any more. I am not leaving. Marriage is not child’s play.
GAZI: If you not then your father will go.
KAZI: What a trouble!
DAROGA: You see, I am a Daroga, I get angry very quickly. Once angry - you know. If police touches, you will have eighteen types of infections. Think about yourself.
GAZI: What to understand? I will not get my daughter married to a sister-fucker like you. That’s my clear decision.
KAZI: I don’t understand what’s going on.
GAZI: You got very little brain in your head, you will never understand.
MUKTHAR: You know, Gazi shaheb having a little high temper now. You better leave now, I will inform later.
GAZI: No, no, you stay, nothing happened to me. What I am telling, I am telling in my cool head. I don’t get anything if I drink alcohol.
KAZI: Allah forbids.
GAZI: But I can’t stand that bugger anymore. You will leave or I will get hold of your neck?
KAZI: Going, going.
GAZI: didn’t I tell you, stand here? Let me get rid of that son of a she-horse.
DAROGA: Now I am truly, truly getting insulted.
GAZI: Still getting? Won’t you be fully insulted before you get beating with my shoes. Get out, son of a bitch!
DAROGA: Alright, I am leaving. But I am also Nafar Ali Daroga. I will also see you.
GAZI: Out. Why so slow? Run...catch, catch that bugger........
(runs after Daroga)
CHAIRMAN: Ah, what you are doing? What you doing? (after him)
KAZI: Gazi shaheb, please cool down. (exits. Makhon and Shakina also run after the Daroga.)
MUKTHAR: Now there will be big trouble. (enter Lailee)
LAILEE: I heard so much hue and cry, what happened?
MUKTHAR: Don’t be upset, ma’am. Your father took a bellyful of Bangla; after that chased out the groom.
LAILEE: Chased out! Are you sure?
MUKTHAR: Looks like that. Don’t be upset.
LAILEE: I am alright. You don’t have to worry about me.
(enters Kazi)
KAZI: Oh, oh everything lost, oh, oh.
LAILEE: What’s up?
KAZI: I don’t understand, why your father suddenly became so violent. He’s thrown a shoe at the groom.
LAILEE: Oh really? Did you see really?
KAZI: I saw it clearly.
LAILEE: Did it hurt him?
KAZI: He just got away.
LAILEE: OK then, I think that Daroga bugger will not come here again.
MUKTHAR: What you are talking about?
(enter Gazi, the Chairman, Shakina and Makhon)
GAZI: Oh, it came to me just in time. I only just managed to save my daughter from going into that clown’s house. Oh my daughter you are just saved from becoming a martyr. Kazi shaheb, please get all the papers ready, I will get Lailee married tonight.
MUKTHAR: How come, where is the groom?
GAZI: Why, here is Makhon. Mohammed Makhon Ali, my orderly. Read up to class eight, good appearance, good mannered and got a good heart. Son of a pure human being. It will be done tonight. Oh, I am feeling so good.
CHAIRMAN: What you are talking about, Gazi shaheb? You will get your daughter married to a servant? Shame, shame!
GAZI: Why shame? Are you better than him in any respect? You are a thief, dacoit, pickpocket. People say ‘bastard’ before uttering your name.

CHAIRMAN: You are doing a grave injustice.

GAZI: Showing me just-unjust? You are depositing the public-money in your account, not in public works, is that just? My leader of the just!

CHAIRMAN: You know who am I? You can be legally punished if you insult me.

GAZI: Don’t show me law! Those laws are in my pocket. You may go now.

CHAIRMAN: You saw, Mukthar shaheb, Kazi shaheb, be witness to this. If I can’t take that Gazi to Court, then I am not a brother-in-law’s Chairman.

GAZI: Go away. Election is coming up, all in-laws will have to come to me. Get out.(Chairman leaves in speed)

MUKTHAR: No Gazi, you are too head-strong today.

GAZI: Why not? I am getting my daughter married to son of a real human being. We will celebrate, will celebrate. Makhon, bring the box of bottles.

(Makhon goes out) Please sit, Mukthar. Shakina, sit beside me.

GAZI: Why, don’t you like Shakina? You should kill yourself by tying a rope around your throat.

KAZI: No. I’m simply saying there’s still a long time to go before the marriage. I want to lie down in the next room for a rest.

GAZI: Why you will roll? Bottles will roll here. We will roll with the bottles.

(Enters Makhon with the box of bottles)

KAZI: Allah forbid, I am leaving.

GAZI: If you want to go, go. It would have been better if you have stayed. We could have enjoyed more.

KAZI: I am not leaving all together. I will go after the marriage is done. (to Makhon) Hey I will be in the next room, send some food for me. (exits)

MAKHON: Sir, letter to me. Couldn’t you have drinks privately instead of drinking in a crowd?

GAZI: Makhon, you are my son-in-law; don’t call me sir. Oh my Lailee, see Makhon is still calling me sir.

LAILEE: No Makhon, you are not doing the right thing.

GAZI: Makhon, tell me what do you want? Paddy fields, betel-nut gardens, cash –money. I tell, what do you want?

MAKHON: Sir, I want to be excused.

GAZI: What do you mean?
MAKHON: Leave me, let me go.
GAZI: No, no you are not going anywhere before marrying my daughter.
LAILEE: Makhon, wherever you go, I will go with you.
GAZI: Good, that’s like my daughter.
LAILEE: Lets go, Makhon.
GAZI: Go, go my daughter.
MAKHON: To which fireplace?
LAILEE: Why? To your house where your parents live.
MAKHON: Baba died long back, Ma will not last long if I take you home!
LAILEE: What you are talking about?
MAKHON: My mother is old. If I take a big-man’s daughter like you then she will die of heart-failure. We are very poor.
GAZI: Why you are calling yourself a poor? Isn’t the poor man a human being?
MAKHON: No sir.
LAILEE: It won’t bother me. I will be able to manage.
MAKHON: Its easy to say, but it’s difficult to do.
GAZI: Makhon, you are seeing the tiny things. Tell me the truth, do you like my daughter?
MAKHON: Should I tell you the truth?
GAZI: Yes, the truth.
MAKHON: I don’t like her. (Lailee starts wailing)
GAZI: Quiet. Why? Why you don’t like her? Maybe her complexion is a little dark. But her appearance, figure--
MAKHON: Ah, not that. In fact, your daughter cannot be my wife. (Lailee wails louder) Don’t weep, don’t weep. This will be dried if you go to my house.
GAZI: You speak scary words. Alright, Makhon, you test my daughter.
MAKHON: Test her? What test?
GAZI: Try her, to see, can she be your wife?
LAILEE: Yes, test me.
MAKHON: OK. Get ready. Suppose, after the whole day’s work I come back home at night. What you will do? Suppose I just came in.
LAILEE: (runs to Makhon and hugs him) ‘Why are you so late dear?’
MAKHON: No, fail. After day’s hard work, no one be in a lovig mood. ‘Take it.’ (Gives his cloth)
LAILEE: Oh, what a smell!
MAKHON: What did you expect, perfume? ‘What you are looking at? Serve my food.’
LAILEE::::: ‘Is there anything to shout at? You can speak nicely.’
MAKHON: There can’t be sweet words after day’s hard work.
GAZI:::::::: Lailee, you work carefully.
SHAKINA: Should I show her? I know what to do.
GAZI:::::::: Then marriage will be with you. Go ahead, Makhon.
MAKHON: It’s night, suppose I have eaten. Since you are a housewife, you are eating after everyone. What follows after that?
LAILEE::::: I will be able to do that. ‘You go to bed dear, I am coming with betel leaf and nut after I finish eating.’
MAKHON: Fail, there is no betel leaf or nut at home. Moreover you just cannot come after the food. You have to clean the plates and utensils; you have to wash my only shirt. I have to go to work wearing it on the following morning.
LAILEE::::: All these to be done at night?
MAKHON: Yes madam, otherwise how can you be a wife of a kuli [a day-labourer]? Suppose there is a call from the master’s house at midnight, what will you do?
LAILEE::::: I will tell them. ‘Not now. No, no he can’t go at this hour of the night. He just went to bed after dinner, when you started calling. Go, go.’
MAKHON: Then it is done. I will lose my job. Look, kuli and day-labourer has no night or day. Has to go whenever called for. Suppose I lost my job for you, I’ll be in a bad mood (starts beating Lailee holding her hair) ‘Dirty bitch! For you I lost my job.’
LAILEE::::: Take care! What’s going on?
MAKHON: The poor man’s wife frequently gets beaten like that.
LAILEE::::: No, no I don’t like raising hands on woman at all.
MAKHON: You see sir, how your daughter qualifies?
GAZI:::::::: Oh no, Lailee, you have just ruined my name.
MAKHON: In fact sir, one cannot become a kuli-majoors’ wife. One has to be a kuli-majoors’ wife by birth. You see, can I be a Dewan Gazi if I want to? I have to be born here at Gazi’s house.
LAILEE::::: Baba, I will never be able to do that. I can’t marry that village-ghost...
GAZI:::::::: You have to, otherwise I will disinherit you.
LAILEE::::: I won’t. I am feeling sleepy. I am going to sleep.(exits)
GAZI:::::::: You saw, all of you, what she did? Go to hell. I don’t want have a daughter like you. Can’t be even a poor man’s wife! Tell me Mukthar, why is my daughter like that?
MUKTHAR: How can I say?
GAZI:::::::: How can you say that? You know only how to drink and be drunk with a friend’s money.
MUKTHAR: Why are you abusing me? Enjoy now.
GAZI: Makhon, I've got no one else than you. Wife-son-family, who is mine, whose am I? Come brother Makhon let's be off to some foreign land. Let's go.
(exits with arm around Makhon’s neck)

MUKTHAR: (to Shakina) Come to me baby, sit beside me.

SHAKINA: Old haggard, will you never die? (exits)

MUKTHAR: All gone. Why should I sit like a jackal in the cemetery. I am also leaving.(exits)

SCENE TEN

(Dewan Gazi sitting on an easy chair and groaning with headache. Shakina is massaging his forehead softly.)

GAZI: Oh, my head! It’s being torn to bits. Hey girl, take care, its not your head, it’s mine. Uhu.....!

(enter Makhon)

MAKHON: Sir, Kazi shaheb came to see you.

GAZI: Tell him. I’m not at home. Oh, Kazi came last night. I behaved very badly. Send him inside. Where is Lailee?

SHAKINA: Still in bed; had real tough time last night.

KAZI: Hello, Gazi shaheb, you alright today?

GAZI: No. Last night too much drink.

KAZI: Nauzubillah [God forbid]. What about your daughter's marriage?

GAZI: Sent for the Daroga, it will be done as soon as he comes.

KAZI: You called back your son-in-law?.

GAZI: Yes. Last night I told him many things as I was bit tipsy. I told him to come today. He has begged pardon himself. He is a good boy.

KAZI: That’s an understatement. What I wanted to say...

GAZI: Tell me, why do you stop? Oh, your fees for conducting the marriage?

KAZI: No I mean...

GAZI: I've got it; I will give you two days' fees.

KAZI: No, not that.

GAZI: Not that, then what? Why are you not telling me?

KAZI: I saw Abed still roaming around your house. He belongs to the Jhanda party, stays at your house and stirs up the folks against you.

GAZI: Why? I have sacked him!

KAZI: You sacked him yet he didn't go. You see what a scoundrel he is. He will ruin you.

GAZI: Hey Shakina, why didn't Abed leave?
SHAKINA: How can he leave? You called him back and gave him *taka*, affectionately. You said, he didn’t have to go anywhere.

GAZI: You do whatever I say when I am drunk and when I’m not, you won’t listen, isn't it? Go, get a cup of tea for me! (exits Shakina) Cursed woman!

KAZI: I am leaving now, sir. You are very kind-hearted, everyone takes advantage... Just kindly be a little careful, sir. I am going, sir. (goes and comes back again)

GAZI: What again?

KAZI: Your personal orderly, Makhon. His movements...

GAZI: You don't have to tell me anything more. I will throw him out too.

KAZI: Your are very intelligent, sir. (Goes out, meets Mukthar, gets the smell of alcohol from Mukthar's mouth.) *Nauzbillah.* (exits)

GAZI: What a scene I created last night. It became a legend.

MUKTHAR: Hello my dearest friend, how are you?

GAZI: Don't say that. My head is splitting.

MUKTHAR: Take a tab. Last night you drank too much.

GAZI: Yea, I create such scenes when I am drunk. I must ask you friend, were you dreaming at that moment? Couldn't you stop me?

MUKTHAR: You ask me to stop you!

GAZI: I have insulted the *Daroga* last night for nothing.

MUKTHAR: Don't be upset. I have heard you called for our son-in-law. Very good, very good. Now finish the ceremony peacefully. Don’t touch alcohol today.

GAZI: Why today, I will never touch alcohol again. Election is coming up. If I’m not careful from now on then, I’ll lose the lot.

MUKTHAR: You don't have to worry about that. We will keep everything under control.

GAZI: No I won't touch alcohol again.

MUKTHAR: Alright, you take a rest now. I will come in the afternoon. (exits)

GAZI: No, no more alcohol in this life. (calls Shakina) Shakina... (enters Shakina) Bring all my bottles. I will crush them all into dust now.

(Exit Shakina, enter Makhon)

GAZI: You, brother-in-law, you will ruin me.

MAKHON: Servants are not supposed to be called brother-in-law, it changes the relationship.

GAZI: How dare you? I will send you to police - bugger communist.
MAKHON: You are right in one sense, I have done less harm in life than you.
GAZI: Shut up, you made me to do things as you liked as I was drunk. I will...
(enters Shakina with box of bottles)
MAKHON: I am your slave. Whatever you ordered, I have done.
GAZI: You won't play tricks. Dewan Gazi has promised not to drink again. I will crush all the bottles into dust.
MAKHON: Give those to me, I will crush.
GAZI: You want to play tricks? You will drink yourself...(takes a bottle) Oh, very costly drink. Just came day before yesterday.
MAKHON: Throw it, throw it away, sir.
GAZI: Off course, I will throw. You will never be able to make me drink again. I am Dewan Gazi, the Zamindar of Gazipur, a man of his word.
(Unmindfully opens a bottle and pours a little in the throat)
SHAKINA: What are you doing, sir?
GAZI: It’s a Bilayethi 59 drink, just tested a bit. Testing and drinking are not same. Whatever you say dear, it’s a lovely drink.
(pours again)
SHAKINA: If you drink more, you will get drunk.
GAZI: You make me laugh. I don’t get drunk so easily. If it is so easy to get drunk then people would not have to sell Zamindari for addiction? (drinks the whole bottle and gives the empty bottle to Shakina) Take it, crush into dust. (exits Shakina with the bottle)
You know Makhon, I thought a lot and found you are not a bad soul. You are very good hearted. Money is not everything in the world, heart is above all.
MAKHON: Your saying is equal to one hundred thousand sayings, sir.
GAZI: Yea, I said.
MAKHON: Salaam sir.
GAZI: You are a polite man. Oh, no you are still not holding a glass in your hand? Come on take a drink.
MAKHON: Sir, if you kindly allow me to leave. My home is far off.
GAZI: Don’t say that, it’s hurtful. Why do you want to go leaving me? Am I not your kin, Makhon?
MAKHON: We were taught at school once, ‘big’s love is the sand dam; rope in hand at this moment and moon in the next’.
GAZI: Forget the childhood rhyme, Makhon. Life is much bigger. What’s your pay now?
MAKHON: Fifty taka.

59 Made in England.
GAZI: From today your pay is one hundred taka. I beg your pardon, Makhon.
MAKHON: What again?
GAZI: No nothing, what I feel Makhon sometimes, you know?
MAKHON: What?
GAZI: I cut open my chest before you. My love for the country, love for the people of the country. How much I love, I want to show you.
MAKHON: You don't have to show that, I understand.
GAZI: You can understand, I knew you would. You know Makhon, I feel sometimes like going up a hilltop with you and showing what a beautiful country we have.
MAKHON: Don't have to climb a hill for that. I can see that from here.
GAZI: You can? Then see, (closing eyes) the green paddy fields, the sweet cool breeze, the cow boy's flute tune, housewives and girls going to the pond. There they go, can you see, Makhon?
MAKHON: I can see clearly, sir.
GAZI: See, see clearly. All my property as far as you can see; it won't finish even after whole day's walk. That paddy field, that betel-nut garden, the fish-pond - all mine, my property.
MAKHON: It would have been better if the entire country was your property.
GAZI: Are you joking? Don't you like me?
MAKHON: Yes I do.
GAZI: Don't you love the country?
MAKHON: Yes I do.
GAZI: Then what's your problem if the whole country becomes my property?
MAKHON: Yes there is the big problem, dangerous problem. We are all dying.
(Black out. Gazi exits in the darkness. Light comes back suddenly)
MAKHON: Yes there is the big problem, dangerous problem. We are all dying.
(enter Shakina)
SHAKINA: What happened, What you are talking alone?
MAKHON: My dear Shaki. There's no time left. They are going to devour all.
SHAKINA: What they are going to devour? Who are you talking about?
MAKHON: Look around, the paddy field, the betel-nut garden, the fishpond, the rice-mill - they are going to devour it all. We don't have any place left. They are taking all. No air left to breathe. I want air, a little air. I want to breathe a chest-full of air. Have to stand erect. We have to break this darkness. Otherwise we can't survive. I am going. (Wants to move)
SHAKINA: If you’re going, go. But where to? Where is a place to go?
MAKHON: There must be somewhere. If not, have to make one.
Otherwise we can’t survive.
SHAKINA: You are a male, you can say that. But what can I do? We
are female beings - if hungry then tie stone on belly; if sad, tie
stone on our chest. But we never die. My mother was a slave-maid
in this house. I don't know who was my father. It may be Dewan
Gazi. My mother was a slave-maid, I have became a slave-maid
too. Can you tell me why I am not Lailee instead of Shakina? I
know why I am not a Lailee. I cannot become Lailee, we are not
supposed to be Lailees. OK. You said, field after field, fish-pond,
rice-mill, there - there it almost touches the sky, can't those be
broken into pieces? Then it won't stop our breathing. Can we talk
to them face to face? Can you tell me, where can I go? How can I
survive? (exits)
MAKHON: (after a pale smile) You see female intelligence! Instead
of asking you all, respected ladies and gentleman, she asked me all
those questions? Where can I get the answer? If I known all the
answers then I would not have to serve in another's house. Whatever
she said is all true. OK. I could have told her, come with me. You
know pretty well why I didn't ask her. No gain in increasing the
number of travelling beggars. It’s better as long as she has the body,
toiling with body; selling the body, she can eat sometimes. Ladies
and Gentleman, I don't know the answers to all her questions. If you
know, kindly let her know. Her name is Shakina. Her mother's
name is Kulsum. No one
knows her father's name. Her address; Gazibari of Gazipur. Please
answer her questions.(exits. light gets dimmer. Enters Sutradar)
Sutradar's Song
Let me tell the true story of our master
Please lend me your ear,
The Poor will remain poor
Big man’s fame goes higher.
Big and small cannot mix
So oil is with water
If I don't know anything
Know this clear.
If you want to be a master
Be a master of yourself,
Or you will never get your due.
If you want to get your due
Understand your due first
Or you will not get your due.
FOOTFALLS

A POETIC PLAY IN BENGALI:  *PAYER AWAJ PAWA JAI*

ORIGINAL BY SYED SHAMSUL HAQ
TRANSLATED BY KHAIRUL HAQUE CHOWDHURY
CHARACTERS

MATHOBBOR: The Village Headman
PIR SHAHEB: Religious or Spiritual Priest
MATHOBBOR’S DAUGHTER
PYEK: MATHOBBOR’s Muscleman
THE VILLAGERS
ADOLESCENTS
FREEDOM FIGHTERS
SETTING: The Stage-Director has the liberty to turn this poetic-play into a creation of his own. A play cannot attain perfection in the pages of a book, but on the stage. In writing a play, a playwright also sees his creation from the point of view of a stage-director; hence I am presenting a few lines. I imagine three sides of the stage are closed with black curtains. A chair is placed at the middle of the stage, very old chair, oily and smooth due to overuse.

The number of villagers on the stage is to be decided according to the requirement, but there must be male and female villagers of various age groups. At least, twenty will be an ideal number on the stage. I imagine at least one female villager who is nearing 100 years and another one who is at least ninety. Though the dialogue of the villagers is in long sequences, yet the director might feel the necessity to break it for the groups of villagers. The role of off-stage-sound and the regulated lighting on stage is important as the characters in the play. The off-stage-sound must start to rise in scale with the entrance of Mathobbor’s Daughter and must reach the climax. If interval is required, then it maybe given just after the entrance of Mathobbor’s Daughter and after the first dialogue of Mathobbor. After the dialogue, all the characters to be freezeed with their individual actions, curtain will fall and after the interval when the curtain is lifted, then all the characters will appear with their frozen action and after a few moments they will start movements. Pir Shaheb’s dialogue may be delivered at the top of the voice like religious hymns. The director and actors may kindly discover it themselves. The flag as mentioned at the final part of the play must be one fourth of the stage in size.

The stage is to be open from the very beginning of the show, and a dim light to be on the stage with a brighter light to be focused on the chair. From back of the curtain there will be a musical sequence of flute and country-drum, it gives the effect of beats of a heart or the footfalls of many nearing gradually. The capable director may ignore the above and arrange the stage as he, or she wishes.
(Groups of villagers appear on the stage from every direction.)

THE VILLAGERS: From Kaliganj and Hajiganj, people are coming
From Fulbari and Nagesharri, people are coming
Like the waves of the Jamuna, people are coming
Like the dusts of Moharram, people are coming
By sip, Dinghy and Shalti -vela\(^\text{60}\) people are coming
Leaning on sticks and barefooted
Children, house wives, widows and sisters,
No mangoes on the mango trees, hailstorm caused fallen all,
No rose in the rose garden, withered away all,
That flower, that fruit that human fair
Get to evening before its evening clear
Where to go? What to do? Nothing in order
One direction, no other direction in order
Putting the nipple of a dry breast into the hungry baby’s mouth,
With only a pair of eyes, standing.

(PIR Shaheb enters. He chants religious hymns at the top of his voice, a long, black stick in his hand. He wears a cloak-type Muslim priest’s dress and the Holy Book tied on his chest.)

Pir Shaheb :  \textit{La - I}\textit{Lah\-a\-Lah\-a\-llah\-a\-lallah\-a\-lallah\-a\-lallah\-a\-lallah}.\(^\text{61}\)

(PIR Shaheb goes to every group of villagers, look into their faces closely.)

Hey, what’s up? Hey
Standing in pairs, men and rundy [women], you
Standing like clownish horses, you
No sound of your breathing, nothing
No words from your mouth, nothing
What’s up, what’s up?

THE VILLAGERS:: We want to see Mathobbor Shaheb
We want to see Mathobbor Shaheb

\(^{60}\) Kinds of boat in the rural Bangladesh.

\(^{61}\) Allah is one. The Prophet, Mohammed is His messenger. This is the foundation of Islamic belief.
We want to see Mathobbor Shaheb
We want to see Mathobbor Shaheb
Where is he?
Where is he?
Where is he?
Where is he?
He knows we are coming
He heard we are coming
He has seen we are coming
His senses know we are coming
Where, where is he?
Where, where is he?
Where, where is he?
Where, where is he?
Tell him to come out
Tell him to come out
Oh father, as our spirits' leader we obey you
For cure, we bring our ailing children to you
Last drop of water must we drink before death from you
Oh father! As our Spirits' leader we obey you
Tell him to come out.

PIR:: Must he come, Must he come?
The branches of the bigger trees sense the imminent storm,
Boal fish of the Jamuna senses the imminent flood,
Kite vulture senses the imminent drought
And Python knows the whereabouts of Tzar.
Must he come! He cannot keep him away.

THE VILLAGERS:: For God's sake, tell him to come.

(A Group of youth enters)

A VILLAGE YOUTH:: Why so much request, why?
   Why so much appeal, why?
   If he does not want to see us
   Not by hand, not by feet
   But pull him out by the neck.
   Why to spend words
   Why to request so much?

PIR :: Why are you so much excited?
   You must obey the respected figures.
If you axe down the Banyan tree, you will not get shade in summer.

A VILLAGE YOUTH :: We must see him.

PIR :: He never told that he would not see you
He never told you that
Like a fox he will flee from you
From his own village, from you?

A VILLAGE YOUTH :: You will understand the meaning of the word
As you mentioned the word
Like a fox he fled away
We suspect,
He fled away truly.

THE VILLAGERS :: Mathobbor Shaheb, are you at home?
Open the door, come out.
The sun is baking our body
The thirst is drying our chests
Our time is running away
Mathobbor Shaheb, come out, quick.

(PYEK comes out holding a long stick. A deadly weapon is hidden inside the stick.)

PYEK :: Move from the door, move away
Mathobbor Shaheb coming. Make room, move away,
Don’t crowd like goats,
Two three can stand nearby,
Move, move, all of you.
(Enter Mathobbor enters sits on the chair.)
THE VILLAGERS:: Salamalekum, Salamalekum
No one can sleep in peace.
The wind is blowing away the fields
Quite a few of them are telling
‘Look the Freedom Fighters marching in from the east
Swimming through the Jamuna.
They will come today or by tomorrow, definitely.’
Inside deep in every one's heart,

62 Be peace with you in Arabic.
Something like a blind animal jumps in everyone's heart. 
Eats their hearts
No one can abstain from looking around,
All the youths, olds, wives and peasants of all the villages came to you. Tell us, what do we do?
We obey you as our father and mother.
You told us, ‘Keep away from the freedom Fighters,’
Though they are our children and brothers dear
Yet they are the agents of our enemies.
You told, ‘keep no relation with the Freedom Fighters. 
They want to hand over this country to our enemies.’
What do we do now?
Today or by tomorrow they will march in.

PIR :: *La  ILaha  ILLaLah, La  ILaha  ILLaLLaLah.*

THE VILLAGERS :: Some are telling, ‘all the district towns
All the markets, ports and towns
All the places they have liberated.
New flags are hoisted in the places they have liberated
We have not seen with our own eyes,
Bush fire breaks out itself, all we heard.

MATHOBBOR:: You have not seen with your eyes that I understand
Ear travels more than the eyes.
Have not you heard the death cry?
Have not you heard fire has broken out?
Have not you seen the red sky appear before the morning?

THE VILLAGERS ::Our ears were waking.
When grown-ups become children, life and death
Stands on a very fine thread
Physical strength has no bread.
Then can one close the ears?
We have guarded the darkness with ears last night.
Have not heard, heard nothing
Have not heard, heard nothing,
Have heard nothing, but wind crying, heard nothing.
As though whole universe is a new pregnant woman
Having labour pain in a poor peasant's house
In a dark, dark night,
Every one had the same feeling at the core of their heart.
As you ordered in all seventeen villages
We kept our eyes open all through.
We brought the suspected persons before you
We have heard some of the blood-blackening Death cry
As though a huge Shiite black cloak of Karbala
Has covered all, villages, houses all
Even we have not uttered a word as you ordered.
Holding Allah's hope tightly we slept as ordered
We were like the dead
When life does not differ from death
Waking or sleeping has the same breath
The season's new spinach differs not from poisonous herbs.

A YOUTH :: Mathobbor Shaheb, you have no word.
You were never lost for a word!
What an art of words you had
Even the old groom filled the bride with gold
Koi63 fish jumps out of water at your words!
I wonder word or branches full of mangoes made
The branch of the tree to break down.

MATHOBBOR:: Oh shameless creature, you speak so in my Yard!
To my face? I will not spare you.
I will cut you into pieces with a knife
Make a grand feast for my dog with
The pieces of your tongue.

A GROUP OF YOUNG MEN :: We stand to see.

MATHOBBOR:: I do want to show you too.
Hey, hold him. Tie him up.
All standing like statues
All became deaf? I order you.
Bring rope and tie him up

---

63 A variety of sweet water fish.
What happened to so many strong young men?
You faced the mad bullock all alone
When the Jamuna gets youth and floods all
You pulled down the rope of storm,
Like a long black lock of hair of young
Maid at the grip of a Satan.
You came back home.
Today there’s not a single spirited man in the
Middle of so many.

PIR:: *La ILaha, ILLaLLah, La ILaha ILLaLLah.*

MATHOBBOR:: What does that hymn hold?
(talking to himself)
Unknown becomes the known words.
So long I have seen things with eyes
Someone snatched my eyesight with a slap
As if a parrot
Has broken a palace with a bite.

PYEK :: If you order me,
I will go to the camp of Military.
Just hand him to them when they come.

MATHOBBOR:: Don't you have courage, call others?
(to himself) In fact, he is frightened.
Fear entered into the Iron bed of Behula
Like a small poisonous snake.

THE VILLAGERS :: Mathobbor *Shaheb*, try to understand his
Words.
You get angry or in return what maybe your words
He is like your son.
Though worthless he maybe.
Anger is like a layer of dust
On a piece of Mirror
We are like a half-*jobai* 64 cow
By a wooden Mollah's 65 knife.

---

64 Half throat cut.
65 Apprentice priest who has not matured in learning religious rules.
MATHOBBOR:: I’m surprised to hear all excuses.  
   I have not lost my memory yet,  
   Even yesterday, you felt like whole world  
   Is in the darkness if I’m unhappy.

Pir:: If mango seed is sown, mango tree will grow from it  
   If blackberry seed is sown, blackberry will grow from it  
   People look for a boat always  
   To cross through water and try not to cross on foot.  
   Sometimes, rivers can be crossed barefooted,  
   Sometimes, fruit tree does not give sweet fruit  
   Sometimes, fruit tree gives fruit of one’s action.

MATHOBBOR:: Are you telling me? Pir Shaheb.

PIR:: What? Human words are so fleeting  
   No one has copy right on his words.  
   If one voice raises a slogan it becomes all’s slogan  
   Words should be like words with no class of the user.  
   If one's leg is tied with a rope  
   Then he can feel when it is pulled.

MATHOBBOR:: You speak often whatever you feel like saying.  
   Please give me a bit of time.  
   All of them came with a very serious affair.  
   The Spiritual world is your domain,  
   I am the worldly man.

THE VILLAGERS:: We cannot spoil the time in passing words  
   We want to survive in the precise and simple  
   Words.  
   Water only with fire is unable to boil the rice  
   Like incense the smell of death devours the villages  
   Hundreds of shovels making the grave-digging sounds  
   Equal the hundreds of canon sounds  
   Like kutub [strange person] strange unknown people  
   Appear at the doors  
   Five and half feet tall figures are standing at  
   The doors.  
   A strange aching at heart wonders when the bird will  
   Fly away.  
   And darkens everywhere with its black cloak.
MATHOBBOR:: I understand all. You don’t have to spend a word more.
I’ve known these words from my grandfather’s time.
Don't you remember, that year, on a dark moonless night
We started to walk home from Hajiganj that night
First to cross a watery land, then a
Cremating ground for the dead, that night
A few shopkeepers accompanying me on that fearsome night
They said, ‘Mathobbor Shaheb,
Something, unearthly is following at our back,
More I tell them ‘that’s nothing, walk fast
More they give fear to engross them’.
They whisper one to the other
‘Look here, a sky-high being stand on the chest of a skeleton.’
They show one to the other.
They were at the point of losing their senses.
No one was standing with courage other than me.
Now you tell me, tell me the truth.
More you get weaker, more the fear of evil Spirits within overpowers you. Is not it the truth?
The Fearing mind creates the fast running ghost-horse.
Fear is like a drum
Once you beat that drum you can't stop beating that drum
It goes on with Dum Dum rhythm.
Fear is a strange manufacturing Factory
Millions of statues are manufactured in the Factory with a blink of an eye.
If a virus gets into human blood
Comes out of the body with blisters.
Fear travels more and more leaving Imprints footprint on the heart. Fearing heart
With the blink of an eye gets tattered old, that fearing heart.
You understand me?
Parasite, unknown creeper
Farmer leaves in the field
Grains, the God's blessings brings from the field
Exactly tell me, what do you want to tell me?
THE VILLAGERS :: We want to know
   We want to know
   We want to know
   We want to know.

MATHOBBOR :: Oh tell me.

THE VILLAGERS :: We want to hear
   We want to hear
   We want to hear
   We want to hear.

MATHOBBOR :: Oh tell me.

THE VILLAGERS :: We hear rumours.
   Are these untrue?
   We want to know, we want to understand
   We won't be in the holocaust. We want to understand.

PIR :: LA ILaha ILLaLLah, La IaLaha ILLaLLah.

THE VILLAGERS :: We want to understand
   We want to understand
   We want to understand
   We want to understand.

MATHOBBOR :: Tell me, where there is no danger.
   Show me an effort, which is not dangerous.
   And greatest of all is to save the country.
   It is not like ploughing field with bullocks.
   It is not like fishing with a bamboo basket.
   Saving the country is like standing in the water
   Hundred times difficult becomes the defense of the
   Country when decay starts inside
   It is too difficult.
   Spit on the cruel time.
   Then misfortunes comes in flock
   Then leaving the sense of save thyself
   Stand in the field with hard, hard footing.
   Or to lose seven coloured boat underneath ten feet
   water.
PIR:: In the field of Karbala, in one's own interest one dies
   For the others another dies
   One who repents for not getting wealth for oneself
   Allah will never forgive him.
   Oh poor soul, that’s the point to ponder.
MATHOBBOR:: Exactly, you told the truth.
PIR:: True words have biting sharpness
   See all with the equal biting sharpness
   Sometimes one becomes the victim of his own words.
MATHOBBOR:: At the end, I want to tell you, my dear brothers
   Whatever you hear my dear brothers
   All baseless untrue.
   All false and untrue.
   In the Holy Koran Allah has described
   “No one can kill you if I protect,
   Don’t you remember the seawater divided into two
   And Moses walked through that divided two.
   Who bestowed power on Moses?”
   As we are on Allah's side we have
   No fear, nothing to fear, the enemies
   Will be finished by themselves and
   Allah's grace will save us.
   If you become dependent on Him, in your true faith
   Dark house will be illuminated.
   Fear will flee like a fox to the jungle.

THE VILLAGERS:: You made Allah responsible for everything
   As if human has nothing to do in the world.
   He gave us hands, intelligence and conscience

   And told to “create thy own fate.
   Never confine to the house,” said Prophet Mustafa 66
   “Resigning from own efforts,” said Prophet Mustafa
   He migrated to Medina from Mecca, Prophet Mustafa
   “One will endeavour,” said Prophet Mustafa.

MATHOBBOR:: Shut up,
   Do you doubt Divine Grace?
   Satan's disciples
   You forgot the Divine Grace
   Saved you from thousands of dangers

66 Prophet Mohammed of Islam.
How can you forget the Divine Grace?

THE VILLAGERS:: Mathobbor *Shaheb*, you turned the words other way.
For everything you bring Allah.
You may not be aware but Pir *Shaheb* knows
Twenty thousand people live in seventeen villages
Maybe involved in worldly activities
Yet face the west five times a day.
Pray for Allah's Grace five times a day.
In the field, in the flood on a rafter five times a day
Prayed to Almighty Allah, five times a day.
Lame, orphan, blind wherever we found
Gave handful of alms whenever we found
Even we could not have dry rice and vegetable everyday
We’ve not classified the helplessness.
When the roof of our village mosque blown away by north-westerly storm
We have repaired with our ribs.
When rain flooded our floor through broken roofs through the night
Our floors are flooded by rain through the night.
With the burning sun on head, standing in the field all through the day
Sown paddy all through the day.
All of a sudden
Pest attacked our paddy fields.
Our dreams of rice died within the bud
Hundreds of dead were taken through road
Few went in search of herbs or leaves to survive
Roamed here and there in search of food to survive.
At the end of day we ate whatever we got by the grace of Allah.
Prayed for a handful of rice by the grace of Allah.
(Pir *Shaheb* chants the religious hymns like wailing.)

PIR :: *La ILaha ILLaLLah, La ILaha  ILLaLLah.*

THE VILLAGERS :: By the name of Allah at your home
You have never want of anything
You have fair of perennial flowers in twelve Months at your home.
We cannot understand the grace of Allah. 
What is Allah's grace? What is Allah’s Justice? 
Those endowed with animal's life receive Allah’s Grace, 
On those bestows nothing, only belief in Allah, 
On those bestowed everything to have the right 
To measure world's belief.

MATHOBBOR (talking to himself):: This is the disadvantage 
With common, simple 
Creatures. If they get angry, 
everything burns 
Nothing meditative with them 
Jumps around the bank of the river 
Never understands one who 
goes to the middle of the river 
What does he face there? 
They won't try to understand.

PYEK:: My master, I need to tell you something. 
A section of crowd is excited with something. 
A few longhaired, unruly youths create 
A wave of turbulence in the crowd. 
Something unhappy may happen anytime. 
There is still time left to inform the captain of the Military, 
I'm sure if Captain comes with a few of his troops 
Everybody will be quiet. 
Shall I go now? Shall I go now?

MATHOBBOR :: You want to go? No, no point in going now. 
When there is itching in some limb 
One does not bother to use anything to ease that. 
Even one does not hesitate to use cobra's tail 
When he feels, he is already killed by the cobra for the tail 
There is no way out? 
Nothing left? nothing left? 
(Mathobbor tries to listen something suddenly) 
What, do I hear the flooding noise of the Jamuna? 
Suddenly coming, breaking dams and flooding the fields
The Jamuna playing with her wave-fingers
Eroding the soil underneath our floors with her wet fingers
Beware, beware. Am I wrong in hearing?
What's happening? Where?
What am I hearing?
Keep quiet, keep quiet, let me hear,
Let me hear.

THE VILLAGERS:: Where is the Jamuna and where is water?
It has water like the cotton during the rains
A handloomer made thread out of the cotton
Drying it in the summer sun
Look there, far off!
Where is the tide?
As far as eyes can see two banks standing
Sands everywhere, one or two kites flying, two banks standing
No sound anywhere, only to hear
Hot wind blowing, it threatens, it weeps, only to hear.
Across the fields
Only the dry wind dances around.

MATHOBBOR:: Keep quiet! What’s that sound about?
From far off, through the fields, huts
And villages
Riding on the wind
Fleeing convict coming like a mighty stallion
Haven't you heard? No one heard?
Listen carefully. Listen carefully. Listen, can you hear?
You can hear? Tell me can you?

THE VILLAGERS:: Where is the sound? Where is the stallion?
Taken whom on its back? Going where?

MATHOBBOR:: I must have heard with my ears?
How come?

THE VILLAGERS:: No, no, no, there is no sound.

MATHOBBOR:: Don't lie. I don't believe you. Still I hear
Yet you say, there is no sound.
I ask you Pir Shaheb?
Didn’t you hear anything? From far off places?  
Can you hear now?  
Try to listen again. Guess what?  
Tell me, please tell me, I want to know  
Do I hear the sound alone?

PIR:: No.  
MATHOBBOR:: No?  
PIR:: I was also a companion in your listening.  
MATHOBBOR:: Tell me the truth.  
PIR :: I told you.  
MATHOBBOR:: You hear what I hear?  
PIR::: Mathobbor Shaheb  
Though simple question, answer is angular.  
In fact, I got the information before you  
Appeared here, before you.  
Very little time left, in every moment  
Darkness darkens further even at daylight  
Won’t take much time, explain precisely  
My answer to your question.  
Whatever we see with our eyes  
Whatever we see with our mind's eyes  
Have Twofold meanings, twofold images, they have two births  
Pairs crowd the household of the wrong.  
One is beyond our reach  
In another we dig our ditch.  
When one's self is not within one’s own grip  
When one’s kite's thread is not within one's control  
Then one loses it in the air  
Crossing own boundary self goes out of control  
From the truth's light to the chaos of darkness.  
Now your words, in your case  
Now in your mind you hear  
This moment, the flooding sound of the Jamuna you hear  
Next moment, the footfalls of stallion you hear  
Making the world upside down  
You listen. That's true.  
These folks do not hear any thing. That's also true.  
An incident appears with twofold meanings  
Each belongs to the seer.

MATHOBBOR::: Everyone's station is my station.  
I have never counted all seventeen villages as not my own.  
Never thought as not my own
Never thought they live far from my yard
All were my family members.
Yet I only hear the footfalls
No one else hears them.
How come? How come?
Tell me.

PIR:: Ok. I'll tell you a tale.
   Tale of Karbala,
   Could you remember?
Who does care to remember?
All the children of Prophet embrace death, one by one
Abu Hanifah appeared to avenge the death as the deadly one
On horseback, with the open sword he charged
The enemies with valour.
Hanifah's horse moves like the wind
The sun embraces darkness scaring him
Whole creation will be destroyed scaring him
Mountain moves quickly to stop Hanifah
Mountain stands to stop Hanifah
If you give your ear to the mountain
You can hear yet.
That was Hanifah's war
To avenge the children of Prophet.
Yet the world is not running short of evil killers
No difference between the Prophet's children and my children
Say the teachings of Allah.

THE VILLAGERS:: A farmer ploughs field for the food grains
   He reaps food grains or sorrow's grains
The fisherman who catches fish in deep waters
Fish or own life he catches in deep waters
Mother with a child on her lap
The child or an earthen lamp blows off her lap.
The handloomer who makes picture with thread
Picture or his own fate, he sees in the thread.

PIR:: In short anything in the world
   This cry
   Shakes the seven heaven. That cry
Make the earthen children to strike the Heaven
With axes. One's self wonders at the moment
Where is Hanifa?
The deaden field's Loo wind asks, where is Hanifa?
Drought -water of the Jamuna asks where is Hanifa?
Every breath asks where is Hanifa?
Where is your valour? When will you free us?
Mathobbor Shaheb,
Then one hears echo of footfalls
Like the footfalls of the horse of Hanifa.
One hears the approach of floodwater of the Jamuna
Nothing, in fact, the end of evil.
It is the first chapter.

(Mathobbor looks at everyone's face and tries to listen again)

MATHOBBOR:: Where? Not here. That sound does not exist, gone.
   Everything runs as it was.
   Everything stands
   As it was.
Say whatever you want to, everyone knows
A Folk writer has the insanes and goats as his capital
He uses the tools of fantastic stories and couplets.
You listen to folk tales after the day's work
You listen to Hanifa's war and the tale of Karbala
But the poet flees
Seeing hard times approach
Its time to plough the hard soil
With iron-butt.
No poet's lyric can plough the hard soil
A poet is nowhere
In the dry harsh world.
Listen brothers mine, listen peasants brothers
Listen inhabitants of seventeen villages, my brothers
No fruit
Man reaps by being restless.
The intelligent man never breaks the branch he sits on
Coin loses value if other metal sits on it.
Keep your mind clear.
But I must tell you
One who tries to cower you with lashes of fear
He is the Freedom Fighters' kin dear.
With the help of the darkness of night
Entering villages with the night's help
But by the blessing of father, great grandfathers
If I have lit candles at their graves everynight
Then I will light courage-candle everynight
I'll cross the stormy river for sure.

PIR:: *La ILaha ILLaLah, La ILaha ILLaLah.*

MATHOBBOR:: I don't fear. You want to scare me?

Then listen clearly as water
War must have results
But one side dreams of winning
When each side is equal,
Can earthy peasants defeat trained soldiers?

PIR:: *Alamthara kaifa fala rabbuka bias ha bil fil* 67

Don't you remember the cane mashing the elephants?
All creation's Director made the aftermath?
Didn't he send the birds *Ababeel*?
They threw thousands of stones at the elephants
With the blink of an eye, the elephants became pieces of grass.

MATHOBBOR:: Who do you talk about?

PIR:: What do I see with two eyes?

MATHOBBOR:: Then tell me.

What do you see with your two eyes?

PIR:: What you see with your eyes?

Shut your eyes, then.

(Mathobbor closes eyes.)

MATHOBBOR:: Dark?

PIR:: Dark.

(Mathobbor opens his eyes.)

MATHOBBOR:: Whose, what dark?

PIR:: Whose eyes are closed.

MATHOBBOR:: I understand everyone's motive

But I don't understand your motive

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67 A line of the Koranic verse which draws attention of the believers to the victory of the apparent weaker soul force over the stronger evil.
It is difficult to guess whom you favour sometimes
You seem to be a kin of my belief sometimes
Like a pair of armlets
I doubt sometimes
You are truly against me.

PIR:: In short, where is the destination?

(A very thin smile appears on Mathobbor’s face.)

MATHOBBOR:: In heart, you are in favour or against me
You are not the soul
To deny the fact, everyone knows.
They also know
For three generations your father, grandfather
All being sustained by my family.
But, must I tell you
As always I looked after your worldly existence
You have also looked me after.
Is it true?
The religious and spiritual priests of your family
Have bestowed their blessings on our generations
Is it true?
Taken-given, given-taken.
Now at this dark time
We two are under one umbrella
All others have no umbrella.

A YOUTH:: Now, what our father says? Lets hear his tale.
Very, very old umbrella. Like lotus flower, his tale
Mathobbor had a canon. Quickly finish
It is difficult to save head in the storm.

(Pir slowly lowers his head on his stick and rests his forehead. He stands like a statue.)

THE VILLAGERS:: O spiritual father, they are kids
We beg your pardon for the kids.
Please do not take offence.
But all the happenings, all around us
Your sudden silence, appear at this very dark dangerous time
All around us.
As though during a court's proceeding
People get to their wit's end
Like them you are at your wit's end.
We are simple souls, only know how to plough the field
Understand the clearly expressed than signs.
Please tell us, what's happening?
Simply, O spirit's father.

(Mathobbor moves closer to Pir.)

MATHOBBOR:: To convince is your duty, rest is mine
Tell them, we will be victorious.
No doubt about it.
It is the highest truth, no doubt about it.
Yes, as there is no bigger elephant than the king's, no doubt about it
Rumours contain no truth
Yes as magic basket contains no rabbit
In fact it is the mirage net, a big black net
Yes, as fisherman catches big fish in his net
Human wants to catch the rumour net
You must convince them
In fact no village is in the grip of the Freedom-fighters
Convince, convince
Make sermon call as in the storm.

(PIR stands silent even then. MATHOBBOR starts to talk to THE VILLAGERS himself.)
Brothers mine, you go home at the sun down
Your eyes are tired to sleep, everyone sleeps everywhere
Your bullocks, trees, your households
Then worries, to safeguard all
Is my responsibility, on this hand of mine
You sleep. I wake at the dark.
But mind it, I am not alone.
You are not supposed to know so much;
There is another, he is the head of state
Sixty four thousands villages sleep
Leaving their safety on his hand, they sleep
He takes all the weight on his head
He stands like a mountain with weight on his head
Head of state, he knows all, which port is having deep water
Who are the creatures enter at dark like burglars
Who are the creatures with the blink of an eye disappear
with valuables
His eyes are always alert.
Brothers mine, he knows all, understands
Measures he has already taken
Long back. Freedom fighters will never be able
To break the slightest part of silver-pitcher.
More I tell you, as you are so restless
Full of canons and guns, all villages, huts, ports, towns
Military and Armed forces are
Alert in all hidden places, in jungle, in border, everywhere.
More I tell you, Fleets of Flying Planes 10/ 20/ 25 thousands
Roams around in the sky, if they start bombing
All the Freedom Fighters will die like ants
More arrangement of wireless is there
To send urgent messages of help to friends
All over the world.
With the blink of an eye, crossing ocean and mountains
They will come hundreds and thousands
This district is not alone; whole country is behind us
This country not alone, friends all over the world.
But the Freedom-Fighters have no place
To flee and hide, have no place
No place in the world.
What do they know about politics?
They don't understand, with the crack of a gun or two
They feel, they took whole country's fort.
Let them crack as much canons and guns as they can
Let them burn a few courts and offices
Let them get hold a few of my men after dog-chase.
Then we will see how much they can jump up and down.
Over-couraged they slip hand into cobra's hole
And then will strike our country's forces
And clutch from all four sides our country's Military.
Iron smith's one hammer is equal to many hammers of others.

THE VILLAGERS:: Can we be free of worries, Mathobbor Shaheb?
MATHOBBOR:: No gain in lying?
They are prepared.
Now with free unconcerned mind you go home.
(MATHOBBOR wants to move away.)
THE VILLAGERS:: One word more.
   We are coming from far off places
   We had talks with many a villagers
   About one thing -

MATHOBBOR:: What’s that? What bothers you again?

THE VILLAGERS:: In a nutshell, since last Friday
   There is not even the smell of a single Military
   Anywhere in the village.

MATHOBBOR:: Who says? Tell me his name.

THE VILLAGERS:: Name is everyone of the village.
   Whom should we name? Everyone has a bit of
   Sense. Soon after the war has started inside the country
   Quite a few Mathobbors of some areas
   Joined the Freedom-fighters' side with flags
   All stopped paying taxes to the Government
   Then Military cracked down on seventeen villages
   Put Military guard everywhere
   Situation turning more –

MATHOBBOR:: Briefly, finish quickly.

THE VILLAGERS :: In brief, all of a sudden machine-cannon-guns
   appeared beside the pond.
   All of a sudden, front yard of the farmer's house is full of
   Military-tents.
   Line of trenches are made all through the bank of the river
   Overnight.
   Wherever we looked khaki, khaki\(^{68}\)
   And khaki everywhere.
   Outlandish faces, machines, all around, live in fear.
   All fields in topsy-, all vegetable-gardens finished
   number of cattle decreased. Even then you said we are
   secured because of them.
   Agreed,
   But now they have totally disappeared
   Disappeared all cannons and tents, military fled away.
   We hear, as the war is not to be in their favour

\[^{68}\text{It is the colour of the uniform of the West Pakistani forces.}\]
They fled away with troops and might in fear.

MATHOBBOR:: All lie. All fictions and lie.
They are here.
They are around us
With new tactics at new places.

THE VILLAGERS:: Whomever you talk to
He says, they are no more here. Have not seen them.

MATHOBBOR:: Have not seen them?
THE VILLAGERS:: For seven days none of them came here.
MATHOBBOR:: None came here?
THE VILLAGERS:: That's we hear.
MATHOBBOR:: If I turn that rumour false?
If I say the opposite?

THE VILLAGERS:: We hear a lot. But we can see nothing with our eyes.

MATHOBBOR:: Military is still around us.

THE VILLAGERS :: We don't hear any sound.

MATHOBBOR:: They are till guarding as before.

Villagers:: We don't see with our eyes.

MATHOBBOR:: Even yesterday the Captain came here.

THE VILLAGERS:: We don't believe it.
Tell the truth.
Tell the truth.
Tell the truth.
Tell the truth.
MATHOBBOR:: Telling the truth, my brothers.

THE VILLAGERS:: All lies
All lies.
All lies.
All lies.
Telling lies.
Telling lies.
Telling lies.
Telling lies.

(MATHOBBOR’s daughter runs in. THE VILLAGERS are stunned, because she is never seen out of doors.)

DAUGHTER:: Please be quiet. I beg you be quiet.

MATHOBBOR:: My daughter, you? My daughter.
DAUGHTER:: Yes.
I am telling you all present, believe me.
My papa is telling the truth
Military came to this house yesterday.
There is no mistake in it
No doubt about it
That he himself came yesterday.
As human leaves footprint on the path
Like that there is the foot-print.
As flood-water leaves alluvial soil on banks
Likewise there is alluvial soil.
As cold winter night leaves dew on the leaves of tree
Likewise there is dew.
There is not a single letter lie that he came yesterday.
But you ask
You ask my Papa
Why did he come last night?
MATHOBBOR:: My daughter. Oh my daughter.

DAUGHTER:: Who calls me, ‘my daughter’?
Ask, ask,
Why Military Shaheb came yesterday?

MATHOBBOR:: Keep quiet. Keep quiet.
Go inside the doors, quick.
Shameless, not even a borka 69 on
Standing in the middle of unknown males.
In fact I have not told anyone that a spirit lives
In your guise for a long,
Long time - Telling everyone
My daughter is like your daughter,
My shame is your shame too
When I am ashamed, alas, whole world is dark.

69 It is a traditional clothing as veil for a rural Muslim woman in Bangladesh.
(No one responses. Terror takes over MATHOBBOR's face.)

DAUGHTER:: No one wants to leave the place, Papa.
   Why, you want to know?
   You just look at your face once.
   What do you see?
(MATHOBBOR is at his wit's end. He stares around. No-one moves, rather they came one step forward and MATHOBBOR moves one step backward.)

MATHOBBOR:: I beg you holding your feet. Please go inside.
   Whatever you got to say
   Tell me at your wish afterwards.
   Listen to me once. You are my child. My blood.

DAUGHTER::: If the child does not see, who else is there to look after
   the father?
   I was fated to hear the same words once before, Papa
   - Could you remember? - Last evening?
   When ducks were coming back from the pond,
   I've taken them inside the hut myself, closed door properly
   So no fox could get inside. After the evening prayer,
   Mum said standing on the yard. ‘Bring the vegetable-basket
   My daughter, its getting dark and if cooking is not finished
   now
   Then it will be midnight before we finish dinner.’
   Sizing vegetable alone in the cook shade. Alone, all quiet in
   cook shade
   All of a sudden the moon appeared in the sky
   Like a long piece of pumpkin.
   Don't know why my heart ached scaring something.
   Once I thought someone's shade at the door
   Someone standing at the cook shade's door?
   Found you, you’re standing like a statue.
   ‘Can I help you? What do you need, Papa?’
   Not answering me you asked
   ‘Where is your Mum?’ and entered into the living room
   You told Mum, I heard from the cook-shade,
   ‘Military wants our daughter.’
   Also told, ‘No offence in it,
   He has agreed to be our son-in-law.’
   Papa said, ‘My daughter will be married by the
   Islamic law, may not be a son of this soil
I don’t repent. You will see he will wrap the whole of your
House with gold when the war will be over.’

When this marriage was solemnised?
The marriage of your daughter was fixed
With the school master to whom your daughter was a
student,
You have shifted the date of marriage
For the war, what happened to that?

MATHOBBOR:: Where is the schoolmaster?
    Every one knows he went to join the Freedom Forces.
    You want me to bestow my daughter in his hand?
    I, who want to save the country from the enemy, above
    all.

THE VILLAGERS:: Save the country or you want your own
expansion?

MATHOBBOR:: Expansion of your name and fame
    Expansion of your families
    Expansion of happiness all over the country
    Nothing else I have wanted.

DAUGHTER:: And the happiness of your own daughter? Tell, what
happened to that?
    --Ask him, after a night
    Why his affectionate son-in-law is not at home?
    At mid-night
    Why he has left my life
    Like the suddenly eaten duck by a fox?
    Ask him.

MATHOBBOR:: Keep quiet, keep quiet. - All hopes like
    Floating bullocks on the waves of the Jamuna
    Make cyclone by the huge current of the north
    Underneath, underneath.
    Hold your tongue.
    Where something deadly erecting head
    Fells a larger shadow on my shadow
    All my intelligence floating away
    Like the kites of summer
Even though the thread is still within my hand,  
Nothing, nothing, nothing left.

THE VILLAGERS:: Mathobbor Shaheb, we want to know  
everything clearly.  
Strange, strange this discovery---  
One who encourages others to have courage  
His own household being eaten by the time-mouse.  
When fearsome darkness is approaching  
When head of the state can save all  
When all eyes on him  
If he fails to assure of safety with courage  
If he can’t utter nothing than empty words.  
Then the empty sandy shores of the Jamuna emerges  
In everyone’s mind. Then all of a sudden if we hear  
Our head is shelterless himself  
That pleases our mind  
If not in good luck but in bad luck  
We are equal.  
Tell us clearly.  
When it happened with your daughter?  
When did the Captain flee with your honour and chastity?  
When did the marriage solemnised?  
Who has conducted it?

(PIR raises his head. Without looking at anybody he says.)

PIR:: Though all eyes on me, no, I’ve not.  
I don’t know anything about this marriage.  
I’ve not uttered the religious hymns at the marriage of  
Mathobbor’s daughter.

THE VILLAGERS:: Who has conducted?  
Who has conducted?

(After a little hesitation for a while MATHOBBOR says)

MATHOBBOR:: Me. I have given my daughter’s hand to him,  
myself.  
I know Allah will accept this marriage at the day of Final-Judgement  
Accept this marriage as true one. I know in true faith  
muddy water
Becomes the clear fountain water
The Koranic lines are all powerful
Sinners, Priest, Mad, Blind and lame
Whoever utters with tongue
Allah accepts it. No power on earth
Can undo it.

THE VILLAGERS:: Who wants this excuse?
Everyone knows, everyone has the equal right on
The Koranic lines.
You want to deny?

MATHOBBOR:: You are denying that.
You are eyeing me as if
As if Allah's unseen lashing
Falling on my back,
Imprinting itself on my
Back. Like Habil I have no place on earth
To hide myself.

THE VILLAGERS:: Habil, who is Habil?
PIR:: Habil
And Kabil were two brothers, yet Habil
Killed his own brother Kabil
That was the first murder on the earth.
Then scaring how to hide the dead-body
Scaring how to hide, he
Ran all over the world.
No place on the earth
Where to flee - to flee.

THE VILLAGERS:: It was difficult for us to tell it more clearly
Mathobbor Shaheb. We had no doubt left
From this morning, none of your activities
Are hidden.
Nothing hidden.
The human heart breaking has blown veil away
breathing
No tree above, a dead-body lying on forsaken land
uncovered.

DAUGHTER:: That's the dead-body of my life.
THE VILLAGERS:: The dead-body of our lives.

MATHOBBOR:: My brothers.

THE VILLAGERS:: The dead-body of all families
   The dead-body of all our dreams.

MATHOBBOR:: Listen, brothers mine.
THE VILLAGERS:: The dead-body of our village.
   Sixty-four thousand dead-bodies
   Who is the murderer?
   Who is the murderer?
   Who is the murderer?

PYEK:: (to himself):: Deadly weapon inside my stick
   Has to be kept out of sight
   If anyone sees that.

THE VILLAGERS:: Who is the murderer?

DAUGHTER:: Ask him, who, who is the murderer?

MATHOBBOR:: What else I could have done, could have done?
   Oh my daughter, try to see with my eyes dear
   Tell me what else I could have done
   Any alternative?
   After a few days’ absence, the Captain's Jeep appeared on
   our road
   That fearsome colour, auto-gun fixed on it,
   Like an unknown teethy animal
   Blind, with sharp pointed teeth
   The Jeep stops at my yard. The Captain alone
   Jumps down and said, 'I have a word with you.'
   What word again?
   Wondered all the rumours that Freedom-Fighters have
   clutched from
   All sides are true?
   He said as soon as he enters my sitting room,
   'How can I trust a man who has handed us his own
   people
   To be killed, so long?'
   Suddenly I felt my whole body is shivering in fear.
   My senses are failing, what he says, whom he says
Why he says, don't find the reason.
Again he said 'But before leaving-
After listening his words
What my mind cried out, how could I express it now?
No time left.
I said, Captain Shaheb
I have never disobeyed your words,
Never protested if you remember
You remember certain. Your interest always
I have considered my own interest, always. Thus
I have left nothing unturned to give you.
When roads were unknown I showed you the roads
When you failed, I handed over Freedom Fighters to you
When you had shortage of ration, I arranged your food
I gave you more than I could afford to give.
Holding his hands I said, Captain Shaheb I beg you
My daughter’s chastity, her marriage is fixed
In return I am ready to serve in any way whatever you ask
I agree. I forgot how I was standing on toe. I begged him again and again.
He said, ‘If you don't give your daughter then
Every thing will be finished today,
I will burn your house; your yard will be bathed in blood.
He will take by any means. No way out
Then I said, if my and your Prophet is one, Allah is one
Religion is one, and then keep one request of mine.
Please marry my daughter.
He replied, 'Marriage? You are mad. Impossible,'
I said, ‘no one will understand; only keeping Allah
As witness I will conduct the marriage uttering religious hymn. Then I will hand over my daughter
And myself, and myself, leave for the country which ever my eyes take to
I will leave like a madman’. Then he agreed to my words
I don't know the religious hymns myself
I don't know the hymns which need to be uttered for the marriage
Only placing my daughter's hand on his hand
Uttered Allah's name thrice
And said - what did I say, forgotten, forgotten everything,
This is the way I drown the golden doll into the sea.
(MATHOBBOR lowers his head on the back of the chair and weeps silently.)

PIR:: *La ILa ha ILLALLah, La ILa ha ILLaLLah.*
(Daughter moves closer to PIR)

DAUGHTER:: Allah’s name
   Religious hymns
   All I learnt from you in the very early childhood of mine.
   Could you remember Pir-Baba? You used to come twice everyday
   In the morning and afternoon, you used to come everyday
   Leaving doll games, having wash
   Putting veil on my head, then I used to sit for learning
   How to recite the Koranic verses. If mistaken you used to beat me with a stick
   Could you remember Pir-Baba? In summer, the mango’s new bud
   On trees, sound of drum-beating coming from far-off potters’ village.
   You used to tell me, mind your own recitation,
   One who passes his time for nothing in the world
   Allah never forgives him in the other world.
   Allah? How is He? What's his appearance?
   Once I saw a tall figure on the horseback
   He had no figure yet bright as fire
   Once I saw and never again.
   Whenever I used to remember Allah
   I used to see that face. No body HE had
   Going through fields on a horseback.

PIR:: Beware, Girl, beware.
   Allah has no shape. Always He is shapeless, beware.

DAUGHTER:: Certainly, certainly Pir Baba, several times
   I heard from you. If a blind one
   Is led through a village hut
   What fish, sweets, toys, vegetables displayed at the hut
   How many boats came to the hut? How much
   He can understand? He just passes
   Through the hut. Like that man I have passed

---

70 Weekly village market.
Through the Koran, hymns, praises of Allah and Prophet
With your help I have passed through
As if through a big village I have passed through
People talk on my right and left, the dialect
I don't understand, only hear they weep
Don't understand the reason why they weep?
Certainly, certainly Baba, always Allah is shapeless
Above all His dialect is far from my dialect.

PIR:: Beware, girl, beware,
    His dialect not in meaning but in faith is clear.

DAUGHTER:: Baba, if that so, then in my heart
    My faith was no less than anyone. Clearly
    Why I can't understand anything? If Allah's
    Name is Kindness all
    If truly He can give courage to a human, Kindness all
    If truly He possesses all the power
    If truly all poison vanishes by His name
    Then where was that Kindness all, where, where?
    Where was the Source of all courage, where, where?
    When black-snake entered into my house
    When black-snake embraced my body
    When black-snake was biting my breasts
    Then, tell me, where was He, where, where?
    In which garden of the Heaven
    That He cannot listen to the cry of the created being?

PIR:: Beware, girl beware,
    Human has no right to question Him.

THE VILLAGERS:: Is not it true, who will tell?
    Is not it true, who will tell?
    Know not
    Know not
    Know not
    Know not
    Baba let her speak.
    Baba let her speak.

PIR:: Oh created being beware.

DAUGHTER:: Human has no right to question Him.
But has the right to utter His name
Only to utter His name.
And so my Papa
Uttering Allah's name thrice
Sends me to the road to sin
Later, human sins thousand times
Without worry, as Allah is witness.
No nothing hindered my Papa
As he had Allah's excuse.
To Him this marriage is accepted on the day of Final
Judgement,
As it was done by the name of Allah, by uttering that name.
Name, nothing else, only one name
Shapeless omnipresent name
Name's solidity softens the iron
That Name.
Name's strange quality glorifies the abode of sin;
The Great Pir’s cemetery becomes the abode of a burglar.

PIR:: Beware, Girl beware,
That young Master has taught you all this
With whom your marriage was arranged.

DAUGHTER:: No, no, Baba, whatever I have learnt only from you.
Only you teach us, we abide by that
Teaching, stone at heart and chained two feet,
Had a pair of eyes, that is also yours
Gave in your hand as your salary,
Whatever way you guide
Guided, your words - we shall get all in the after life.
PIR:: Your master\textsuperscript{71} says, how it is possible?
That is why he takes arms in hand leaving books
Whatever old buildings of grandparents' time may be destroyed
Does not bother him, let the world be destroyed with
The mad horse's fury
That is what he wants.

THE VILLAGERS:: Why do you pull the master's name here?
Why to spend time in useless words?
No one has ever saved his skin by putting blame on other's shoulder,

\textsuperscript{71} The teacher who teaches secular education.
We want true justice, justice.
Justice, want justice, justice, justice.

PIR:: (to himself) I see all changed suddenly
   I see fire in my eyesight suddenly
   I hear the sound and fury of a great storm suddenly
   I hear cry of my own chest suddenly.

THE VILLAGERS:: Baba, why are you silent, why delay?

PYEK:: (to himself) Situation turning bad it seems
   Is it wise to keep the weapon with me, who tells me?
   If they take me first?

THE VILLAGERS:: Why delay?
   Tell, why delay?

PIR(to himself):: I get the taste of blood's salt in my tongue suddenly
   In the false storm as much the birds move their wings
   Trees are loosed into the vacuum after groaning
   Mountain gets restless and moves to wherever it wants.

(Sound of gunfire and crackers heard from far off - as if it approaching gradually.)

THE VILLAGERS:: Justice, want justice, why to delay?
   Visible work done is required more than words.
   Time passing by, shadow gets longer
   Freedom Fighters must have reached our village by now.
   Listen to the thunder, still there is time
   Still there are time brothers, to be saved. Want to be saved
   From our deeds, what we all have done.
   Time, no time,
   Time passes by, feel the footfalls there.
   Tell why to delay?

DAUGHTER:: You want justice, because you have days ahead, more days
   More crop, many more New Year’s days, more firecrackers,
   days of happiness.
   You have days of sorrow ahead too, more bad days of
sufferings,
Flood, drought, snakebite, many unknown diseases,
Days of happiness and sorrows.
What do I have? Gone my happiness
As if someone has taken all the milk from a cow's breast
By one cruel stroke of milking. No happiness left
Sorrow has no strength to hurt me again--
Like a poisonous herb, she too cannot take birth in a salt-Mountain.

MATHOBBOR: Oh, my daughter. My daughter!

DAUGHTER:: When real truth jumps up
Then the world
Suddenly appears as out of chain is the golden-bird
Appearance on land and sky.
See; see, now, once shaking the wings
It will fly away leaving everything behind.
(Daughter suddenly drinks poison and falls on the ground. Village-women take her on their laps.)

THE VILLAGERS:: Oh! Oh! Oh!
The poison of herbs.
MATHOBBOR:: Oh my daughter, my daughter, listen, listen to me,
For that you took your life in your hand?
Don't go. Don't go. Oh daughter mine
I will become the bank of the Jamuna to save you again
From the hand of the Jamuna, wait a moment.
(Village women start wailing.)

PYEK:: Who wants molested girl in his house, in own village
Who wants to bring bad name for all pure virgin girls?
It defames all if an impure non-virgin girl is around.
Listen if your ear is still open
A spoiled girl is equal to the plate left licked by a dog.

(Village-women's wailing reaches climax.)

MATHOBBOR:: What did you say? People obey you in my honour
I picked you up when you had nothing to eat
I gave you deadly weapon hidden inside your stick
To save me, I placed you over my faith.
Strike me; strike me, with the deadly weapon on my chest.
PYEK:: Who says deadly weapon hidden inside my stick?

(Village-women take away the dead body of DAUGHTER.)

MATHOBBOR:: Come back, come back, my daughter.
            You don't allow her to go.
PIR:: Goes, got to go, and goes away
       No point stopping, world's wheel turns.
       Knowing all these will happen beforehand
       I didn't come to this house for last few days.
       But it is certain, Mathobbor Shaheb
       One who believes in soul, no sin will come near to him
       You had no belief.

THE VILLAGERS:: We also think so. He had not a single drop of belief.
                 Like a clear mirror all the happenings
                 Everyone can see with own eyes all over the country.
                 Look at this man standing, brothers, in the guise of human
                 Not a single bigger teothy animal you will get in the jungle
                 If you make traps and beat round the bush
                 No one similar you will get,
                 You will not get, difficult to get. Our happiness, peace, hopes all
                 For his own happiness he has floated all
                 Here stands that man.
                 Moreover one who can in own hand
                 Float his blood’s entity in to the sea
                 That man can easily do a sin like stopping water of Hossain
                 At the bank of the Furat. As long
                 He is alive. We have no life.

(PIR raises his stick straight over his head.)

PIR:: Believer raises his knife only to crush non-believer-evil-doer.

THE VILLAGERS: We want your death
     Death, death.
(Everyone is silent for a few moments.)

MATHOBBOR:: Want my death? Want to kill? Want to take my life?
            You want to murder me?
            All my kin, my folks, all my own
Built with the same soil
Today they want my body’s blood, today I see
Everyone with empty bowl in hand, in lines they stand
Wanting to fill up everyone’s bowl with my blood.

THE VILLAGERS:: We want, want to be saved.

MATHOBBOR:: By killing me the whole village will be saved?
I have lost all.
I hear the gunfire nearby
Listen the footsteps crossing the fields
Hundreds and hundreds, thousands and thousands
Running down to me.
May be I am a infidel evildoer, tell me, once
Will not any infidel evildoer be born again?
In some other country? In some other family? Again?
Again?
Tell me how will you gain by taking my life?

THE VILLAGERS:: It is required. There is urgency.
Not so much as an evildoer you will give your life
More than that for we allowed you to be evil
For that we want your death today.
If your blood doesn’t wet the village-road
Then how people will walk with their heads erect through
the village road?

PIR:: La ILaha ILLaLLah,La ILa ha ILLaLLa .

MATHOBBOR:: My last request to all present
Please bury me in the village.

THE VILLAGERS:: Impossible, Mathobbor
In none of the seventeen villages you will be allowed to be
Buried, Mathobbor.

MATHOBBOR:: You give me word Baba, I will be buried
There, where everyone was buried.

THE VILLAGERS:: If he is buried then we will dig out his dead-body
again.

PIR:: Can we dig out everything?
There must be imprint of everything.
Can the imprint be wiped out of everything?

MATHOBBOR:: Baba, could you tell me more clearly?
Then, listen an old tale before my departure.
My father had a box of sandalwood
Picture engraved puzzles the eyes, what inside that box of sandal-wood
Never I could know that.
Never I could open that.
Because I don't have the key.
In fact is there anything inside it or not
Who knows? But the days gone by--
I could not. I have not seen the unknown of my father's box.

(There is a noise of cracker. Whole stage is completely blacked out. When illuminates a few moments later, a huge flag over the head. The stage is filled with Freedom Fighters. PYEK is holding the cover of the stick in one hand and bloody deadly weapon in another. MATHOBBOR lies on the stage dead.)

PYEK:: Right now I have finished the great Satan
More smaller ones left. Look for the Satans
Lest they will all flee away.

(Freedom-Fighters makes blank gunfire around. They walk around.)

PYEK:: This way, all come this way now
Let me show you all then,
In what nightmare everyone was
When cruel despot had rule
Hundreds of kin were killed by that rule.
Come this way, all come this way now.
Let me show you how when
How many Military troops made camp here?
Who collaborated with them then?
We have to guard all borders of the country
Quick let’s go; quick now.
(There is more blank firing. Everyone goes out. Light is on three spots, flag, standing PIR, and MATHOBBOR's dead-body.)

PIR:: Imprint leaves a sign.
   All join in his burial prayer.
   Bring dead, more deads are there
   Deads on your left and right, front and back.
   Bring dead, more dead, mountain of dead
   Brothers stand in lines
   Thank Allah, at least we are alive.
(Black out, one by one, first on PIR, then on MATHOBBOR, lastly light remains on the flag.)
adapted for giving information of the order for the persons intending to take part on or to witness the performance as prohibited.

Penalty for disobeying prohibition.

6) Whenever after notification of any such order:
   a) takes part in the performance prohibited thereby or in performance substantially the same as the performance so prohibited, or
   b) in any manner assists in conducting such performance, or
   c) is in wilful disobedience to such order present as a spectator during the whole or any part of any such performance, or
   d) being the owner or occupier, or having the use of any house, room or place, opens, keeps or use the same for any performance, or permit the same to be opened, kept or used for any such performance,
   shall be punishable in conviction before a Magistrate with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine, or with both.

Power to call for information.

7. For the purpose of ascertaining the character, of any intended public dramatic performance, the local Govt. of such officer as it may specially empower in this behalf, may apply to the author, proprietor or printer of the drama about to be performed, as to the owner or occupier of the place in which it is intended to be performed, for such information as to the local Govt. or such Officer thinks necessary.

Every person so applied who shall be bound to furnish the same to the best of his ability, and whoever contravenes, as offence under Section 176 of the Indian Penal Code.

Power to grant to enter and arrest & seize.

8. If any Magistrate has reason to believe that any house, room or place is used, as is about to be used for any performance prohibited under this act, he may, by his warrant, authorise any Officer of Police to enter with such assistance as may be requisite, by night or by day, and by force, if necessary, any such house, room or place, and to take into custody all person whom he finds therein, and to seize all scenery, dresses and other articles found therein and reasonably suspected to have been used, or to be intended to be used, for the purpose of such performance.


9. No conviction under this Act shall have a prosecution under section 124-A, as Sec. 254 of the Indian Penal Code.

Power to prohibit dramatic performance in any local area, except under Licenses.

10. Whenever it appears to the Local Govt. that the provision of the section are required in any local area, it may declare, by notification in the local Official Gazette, that such provision are applied to such area from a day to be fixed in the notification.

On and after that day, the Local Government may order that no dramatic performance shall take place in any place of public entertainment within such area, except under a licence to be granted by such local Government, or Officer as it may specially empower in this behalf.
APPENDIX - 2

Act No. XLIX of 1876 (16th December, 1876)
An Act for the better control of Public Dramatic Performance.

THE DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE CONTROL ACT, 1876.

Preamble
Whereas it is expedient to empower the Government to prohibit any dramatic performance which are scandalous, seditious or abusive. It is hereby enacted as follows:

1) This Act may be called the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876.
It extends to the member of British India.

Magistrate defined

2) In this Act 'Magistrate' means, in the Presidency, the Magistrate of Police, and elsewhere the Magistrate of the District.

Power to prohibit certain performances.

3) Wherever the local Government is of opinion that any play, pantomime of other drama performed or about to be performed in a public place is—

a) likely to excite feelings of dissatisfaction to the Government established by in British India;

or

Likely to deprave and corrupt person present at the performance.

The Local Government, or outside the presidency power and Rangoon the local Government on such Magistrate as it may empower in this behalf, may by order prohibit the performance.

Explanation — Any building or enclosure to which the public are admitted to witness a performance on payment of money shall be deemed a 'public place' within the meaning of this section.

Power to serve order of prohibition penalty for disobeying order.

4) A copy of any such order may be served on any person about to take part in performance so prohibited, as on the other or occupier of any house, room or place in which such performance is intended to take place; and any person on whom such copy is served, and who does, are willingly permit, any act in disobedience for such order, shall be punished or convicted before a Magistrate with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine, or with both.

Power to notify order.

5) Any such order may be notified by proclamation, and a written or printed notice thereof may be stuck up at any place or places
The Local Govt. may also order that no dramatic performance shall take place in any place of Public entertainment within such area, unless a copy of the piece, if and so far it is written, or some sufficient account of its purport, if and so far as it is in pantomine has been furnished, not less than three days before the performance, to the local Govt. or to such Officer as it may appoint in this behalf.

A copy of any order under this section may be served on any keeper of a place of Public entertainment: and if thereafter he does or willingly permit any act in disobedience to such order, shall be punishable on connection before a Magistrate with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fines or with both.

Power exercisable by Governor General.

11. The Power conferred by this Act on the Local Govt. may be exercised also by the Governor General in Council.

Execution of performance at religious festivals.

12. Nothing in the Act applies to any Jatha or performances of a like kind at religious festivals.