

performances about 1843, which influenced the first Indian efforts in palatial private theatres. When *Aladdin* was announced it was stated to be a "Melodramatic Pantomimic performance, interspersed with combats, choruses, dances, processions, etc.". Again, it was noted that "the difficulty of working new machinery will be entirely remedied".⁷ One should remember the type of productions which were popular then in England, for the English conditions were likely to be reflected in Calcutta: "The public does not care a fig for the 'legitimate drama'."⁸ To amuse the audience in Calcutta, even after the performance of *Henry IV*, Part I, a popular farce was included in a double bill. Sometimes, on benefit nights for actresses, three farces were given in succession for five long hours. 'Inexplicable dumb-shows and noise' also invaded India. Several species of entertainment were confused. Thus, one reads the announcement of the 'Sans Souci' Theatre, "a much-admired melodrama with new scenery, music and properties, of *The Tale of Mystery* or *The Unnatural Brother*, to conclude with the farce *Three Weeks after Marriage*".⁹ More than the 'legitimate drama', musical farces and sensational pieces with all possible theatrical attractions dominated the Bengal stage at this crucial moment.

These English theatres, which were fast becoming commercial, filled the minds of rich landlords with great ideas. At the heavy cost of two lakhs of rupees (£13,000) the popular medieval drama *Vidyāsundar* was acted by men and women in 1835, in the house of Nabinchandra Basu in

7. *The Englishman*, January 2 and 3, 1843.

8. *Britannia*, October 15, 1872, quoted by *Englishman*.

The writer adds: "Notwithstanding the admiration of the whole world for 'the one great bard', playgoers are the same race now in thought and feeling as that which preferred Dryden and Tate to Shakespeare, and *Pizarro* and *The Castle Spectre* to the finest creation of poetic genius. Novelty and exciting novelty, either in actors or performances, is essential to success; there is nothing to be done without it."

9. *The Englishman*, February 15, 1873.

Shambazar. Although "not a true copy of the scenic representation of the English theatre, it displayed a clear attempt at innovation. . . . The play was not performed at one and the same place in the house, but different scenes were put up and enacted in different parts of the building, when the audience had to shift with change of scenes".¹⁰ The scenic representation made the play immensely popular with the guests.

The next important stage, the fifth, was marked by the enthusiasm of youths in the educational institutions of that time. With the students it was a time of renaissance. Fascinated by the English performances and inspired by the example and deep interest in theatrical productions of their professors, in the absence of regular Bengali plays, the students tried to express their ambition in a double manner. Dr. Wilson's English version of the Sanskrit classic, *Uttararāma-carita*, was staged in 1831, at the garden house of Prasannakumar Tagore, with Wilson himself in the cast. Secondly, since performances after the English mode became fashionable, and Captain Richardson (of the Hindu College) and H. Jeffrey (of the Oriental Seminary) were veteran theatre-lovers, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Othello* and *Henry IV* were staged in English in a proper European style, the most notable English actors in Calcutta being occasionally invited for training and advice in production. The young Indian enthusiasts started a tradition which was greatly enriched by the second generation.

All the above five stages culminated in the year 1857, which is generally recognized as one of the most memorable in the history of the theatre of Bengal. In the coming of the printing-press to India, in the cultivation of ordinary vernacular prose by pioneer missionaries like Carey, in the momentous minute of Lord Macaulay in 1833, and in the foundation of the three principal universities of India by the Act of 1857, British civilization had given a tremendous

10. *The Calcutta Review*, January 1924, p. 111.