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## **A Report on Theatre and the Pandemic in Bengal**

Under the impact of Global pandemic our lives had been disturbed on many levels. Cultural and creative aspects of our lives have immensely suffered as our economic and social well-being got adversely affected. Theatre for instance requires the physical presence of an audience which was no longer permissible owing to this Covid-19 pandemic. It is a matter of great regret that even after experiencing the receding trend of the pandemic some of these institutions have not recovered from the crisis. Economy is in doldrums. Revival of theatre has become a tough challenge for those associated with these kinds of creative endeavour.

Now what was the implication of this Covid 19 pandemic in terms of restrictions on private and public life? There emerged extensive governmental reactions worldwide. From shutting down borders, complete lockdown to imposition of detailed surveillance of citizens' movements and activities. Governments have utilised the timeworn instruments of state sovereignty, such as restrictions of access to public spaces. So theatre and related activities went out of bounds for the citizens. However like every other profession theatre too has deep economic implications for the people associated with it. Theatre as a profession generates employment at different levels. People are employed as the playwrights, actors, and other backstage technicians, ticket sellers as well as ushers. So a complete lockdown would mean that all the categories of people would lose their jobs at least for the time being and their existence becomes precarious.

The lockdown was declared by the Indian Government on 24th March 2020 for containing the dreaded disease of Covid 19. Theatre and especially proscenium based theatre, unlike other forms of art needs an insulated environment where the performance is going to take place. It cannot be totally digitalised. Wee bit of rehearsing may take place online and audio play may be held. But theatre without an audience is absolutely meaningless. Here in Kolkata some individuals had experimented with a new concept of online theatre without much success. A few theatre groups tried to upload their old famous plays on YouTube though there were few takers of that. The ambience theatre creates with the physical presence of the audience can never be substituted such efforts. The artists on stage get the inspiration after watching the attentive audience before them. Every time the actor relives his role anew. It is not an act of repetition. It is indeed a living art form. The impact of Covid 19 Pandemic as well as the following lockdown had a deep impact on the contents of the plays.

For obtaining first-hand information about the precarious conditions of theatre workers the author decided to conduct a series of interviews with the people associated with theatre. What he learnt from them was that Covid 19 had virtually put the theatre at a crossroad. It made the theatre professionals and activists suffer emotionally, financially and socially. However the people associated with it are absolutely determined to fight this out. New techniques and modes have been devised for facing this challenge. In fact Theatre has started evolving as art form. The entire paper would try to analyse the situation of pandemic and its impact on this art form from four different angles.

