

## NANA RANGER DIN

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Nandikar's "Nana Ranger Din" (45 mins, Bengali), directed by Rudraprasad Sen Gupta, translated and adopted from Anton Chekov's "Swan Song" by Ajitesh Banerjee, presents an old actor, of sixty eight years, Rajani Chattopadhyay (Rudraprasad Sen Gupta), holding a candle on an empty stage, with dark surroundings. It is around midnight. The 'Shahjahan' play is long over. The green room is deserted. Focus lights illuminate the actor's face and torso, as Rajani commences the monologue : "How much have I drunk?" Rajani is dressed in period silk costume—red flowing garments, a loose red trouser, and a white jacket. The music, a blend of flute, drums and trumpet, accompanies Rajani's monologue. Divided between the first and third person, the monologue also speaks to Rajani : "Take care of your health."

Rajani cannot control his hiccups and belches. The days and evenings have passed, and the wait is for midnight. The curtain is the signal for the burning ground. Rajani peers at the empty auditorium, the balcony and the box seats. Rajani the ghost of theatre, is in a ghost house. He is the sole actor, and there are no human beings. He occasionally calls for Ramrij, a theatre hand. Kalinath (Parthapratim Deb), the theatre prompter, who has been secretly sleeping in the greenroom, every night, enters the stage. Intoxicated Rajani continues his discourse with Kalinath. He recalls the seven applauses at the end of the day's show. The reminiscences reveal that there is nobody at home, he does not like home, Allah (God) is one, and he does not have any relatives. There is Nobody who speaks kindly to him, and there is nobody to perform his last rites.

In his youth, Rajani had joined the police as an inspector, with a lot of courage. Soon he quit and joined the theatre. The last forty five years of his life, he has sketched theatre; but youth, ideals and strength have passed away. After watching Rajani's performance of 'Alamgir', one girl had fallen in love with him. Rajani describes the girl's innocence, curly hairs, strange gaze, as of a light belonging to unknown days. When Rajani had proposed marriage, the girl demanded that he leave theatre. Rajani realised that praises for an actor, were meant for entertainment; and applauses were empty. When one descended from stage, an actor was a nobody 'theatrewalla'. The outside world would have no relations with theatre people. No sister or son was to be given in marriage. The candle is kept on stage. As age grows, the voice is damaged. Death for an old actor is premature and sad news. Kalinath advises that God exists, and to forget old days. In the past, the voice had nuances, and different characters came alive.

The recitation of old lines from old plays is integral to the reminiscences. Kalinath prompts as Aurangzeb's son, while Rajani recites Aurangzeb's soliloquy. Rajani prays on stage : "Whatever has been done is for religion." There are queries on darkness and silence, and whether Kalinath has liked the acting? Rajani's movements are brisk and his hands outstretched. He requests the 'begum-saheba' to sing, and mimes the embrace. Kalinath, with spectacles on, cries. Rajani tells him that a man who loves art should not cry. Amidst the dark

spaces, and the actors in focus light, Rajani laments that days were gone, occupation is gone; and where is genius? Before the final departure from a centre stage door Rajani recites from Shakespeare : “Farewell the Tranquil mind; farewell content! ...” (Othello, Act III, Scene III); “Out , out brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player...” (Macbeth, Act V Scene V); “A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse! (King Richard the Third, Act V, Scene IV).

Rudraprasad Sen Gupta as Rajani, the old actor, is utterly convincing. The tragic exuberance of poetry and drama are maintained throughout. The portrayals of snippets from earlier stage mountings are never repetitive, banal and futile, even though an actor has to go through identical, daily routines. The monologues verging on little mime shows, is played out on a fat simply lit stage, designed by Saumik and Piyali. Swatilekha Sen Gupta’s music, follows the pattern of stage music of the late 19th Century, and makes the characterisations more humane. The music is direct, without any haunting lines. The relationship between an individual and theatre is not just confined to leave-taking by an aged performer, but a complex interlinking of an entire professional life. The final image avoids bestowing any unapproachable saintliness on the performer. Cautious hope is never lost in rendering Chekov. □□□