

Gaganendra

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Theatre Commune's "Gaganendra" (Bengali, 100 mins), directed by Neelkantha Sen Gupta is a comedy drama, full of social resonance. The prelude has an introduction by the director, who describes Mitra Mukherjee, as a lady of about fifty years whose interests range from literature, Nandan cinema and gossip; and people being generally scared and awed by Mitra. On a sparse room, with large panel windows, Mitra (Kajal Sen Gupta) enters singing a tune. She is soon joined by Raja Gaganendra (Prasenjit Sen Gupta), who is dressed in coat and trousers, a hat and necklace, and carries a walking stick, along with a short beard. Raja is courting Mitra, but she is not expecting anybody special, but would patiently wait for the future. While Mitra is fond of gossip and has a large circle of friends, Raja has not heard of a cholera epidemic, even after six years.

Raja is also affectionately drawn to Ginia (Sandipa Banerjee), Mitra's daughter. He keeps summoning Moti, the coachman (not seen on stage) and refers to a recent coach accident. Walking with a limp, he thinks of new ideas, and ponders over old thoughts. Conversations meander to the district magistrate of Dhuliyān district, a viscountess, and Paris. There are suggestions for hydro therapy, and huge water consumption. Another suitor for Mitra, Bhondul (Robin Chowdhury) arrives, elegantly dressed. The friends feel that Raja should marry the widow house maid, Sita (Swati Biswas). There are preparations for lunch, with chicken, cutlery and table covers. Ginia's music teacher is down with TB. Mitra finds it impossible to marry someone, whom one does not love. Raja has property and riches. Raja and Bhondul go to meet girl friends Kasturi (Raktima), Chandrabani (Chaitali Chatterjee) and Rani (Papri Basu).

The second Act, commences with Mitra telling Bhondul that he did not eat much. Bhondul feels that Mitra is trying to get the young daughter Ginia, married to the "Khuro—old uncle" Raja. Mitra is annoyed when she hears that Raja did not go to a temple, but had gone to Kasturi's house. She relates how Kasturi had pittered sugar from a sugarpot. Daughter Ginia sings on request. Raja recalls a classical singer in Lucknow, while taking snuff. Ginia and Mitra sing about Raja dreams of a vacation, with Mitra and Ginia. Mitra is scared that Raja may fall in love with Ginia. Raja puts his head on Ginia's lap, and wants to marry Ginia immediately. Mitra sends Ginia away. But Raja is full of affections, bonds, excitement and passion, Raja remembers playing cards and billiards. Mitra insists that Ginia could never marry a mad man, while Raja confesses of being described 'mad' by associates. Ginia sits silently with head down. Bhondul enters disclosing that he has heard everything. Loud words emerge. Ginia loves Raja's Nephew, Bhondul. There is a suggestion that after Raja's death, the bride would inherit all money and property. Ginia's father is in the village home, and plans to evolve for Ginia's marriage in the native place. Raja resembles Subhas Bose without hat and false beard, but with a bald head. Dreams of getting married, accompany drinks. Bhondul warns that in-laws will await groom Raja's death.

Friends Kasturi, Chandrabani, Rani, and Priti (Swati Biswas) sit over tea. They have an invitation for a charity show. Mitra introduces her husband, Debendra Mukherjee (Somnath Mukherjee). Raja fails to whistle in the crowd, and confesses that he is not in a position to get married. Mitra relates how Raja was charmed with 23 years old, Ginia, and proposed marriage. Kasturi and friends observe that the prestige of a respectable family was involved. Raja awakens that the whole thing was a dream, and Mitra accuses Bhondul of creating chaos. She charges her husband of remaining silent. When the husband asks whether Mitra has not witnessed a dream Mitra faints. Ginia declares that her mother has been caught and exposed. She agrees that Raja was under alcohol, but full of convictions of plans for marriage. Raja re-iterates that the whole thing was a dream. Ginia discloses that she never loved Bhondul, but wanted to escape the environment. Raja wakes up hearing a girl mimick a cat's voice 'miao'. Kasturi protests against accusations of stealing sugar. The husband of Mitra blinks. After about of name calling, the girls dance.

"Gaganendra" written by Neel-kantha Sen Gupta is a farce, about educated, yet unsophisticated people. Though not a screw-ball comedy, Neelkantha's direction ensures that the dialogue-conversation structure is fast and funny. Love and the attempts to escape from the torments of reality come to nothing, in spite of the jokes and feeble suggestions, which are sometimes bizarre and improbable. The acting is ebullient, but disciplined. Rising tensions are never lost in the comedy-farce. Articulation by Kajal Sen Gupta as Mitra is excellent. Bilu Dutta's sets are simple, and artistic, like Mitra's sitting room with large, glass panel windows. Jayanta Mukherjee's lights heighten the hilarious text. Swapan Banerjee's music builds a dramatic organisation to the main characters, who talk far more than is good for them. It is the husband of Mitra, who silently analyses the situations, and blinks. □□□