



WORLD THEATRE DAY

# 'Nation without Theatre is a dead Nation'



Bhawani Bashir Yasir

Observing March 27 as World Theatre Day is aimed at to promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts (drama, dance, music theatre) in order to consolidate peace and solidarity between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding and increase creative co-operation.

World Theatre Day was created in 1961 by the International Theatre Institute (ITI). It is celebrated annually on the 27th March by ITI Centres and the international theatre community - the world over.

Various national and international theatre events are organized to mark this occasion. The first World message was written by Jean Cocteau (France) in 1962. And since then each year a figure outstanding in theatre or a person outstanding in heart and spirit from another field, is invited to share his or her reflections on theatre and international harmony. What is known as the International Message is translated into more than 20 languages, read for tens of thousands of spectators before performances in theatres throughout the world and printed/broadcast world over.

50th World Theatre Day was organised in Paris on March 22, 2012, in which award winning director and actor John Malkovich delivered his International message at UNESCO that included readings of play excerpts with Malkovich and other theatre artists.

Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, in his message remarked, "Theatre has the power to move, inspire, transform and educate in ways that no other art form can. Theatre reflects both the extraordinary diversity of cultures and our shared human condition, in all its vulnerability and strength". And on this historical occasion, I would like to share my experiences with the people of Kashmir.

Most of the people think that the government alone can shape the destiny of a nation. It might have been true hundred years ago when there was no public awareness, education and there were no civil institutions but in the challenging modern times when the enormous flow of knowledge through information technology and communication has changed the world into a global-village; one single institution even one person can bring great change to shape the fortunes of one's nation. The only questions lies of the vision and wisdom of an individual with commitment, capability, competence and will to do something better in a constructive, positive and prudent way.

Building infrastructure like roads, buildings, hospitals and water supplies helps a nation to grow physically only. This growth becomes a curse without mental growth of an individual. It is a proven fact that guiding a nation to preserve, promote and prosper their cultural ethos and heritage leads them to national understanding thereby helps them to grow mentally as well,

which, in essence, is the real national growth. Not only this, culturally conscious and rich nation makes them feel proud in the comity of nations to co-exist and emerge to share their history, knowledge, literary treasure and to spread the message of love, peace and international brotherhood through their expression of art and culture. It is this priority rather than the fundamental basis as to why UNESCO has focused on institutionalization and strengthening the system of governance for culture in developing countries under its "2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions".

The legacy of all performing arts is believed to have been preserved in the back of one's mind. And every mind has its own version that makes it the richest cultural heritage. Out of all these arts, the art of theatre is the most appealing genre not just in carrying on with its physical form or style but in its expression. As more often than not, I have been saying that a nation without theatre is a dead nation. It is not just a statement of mental luxury but a hard fact that theatre has been a prime institution in preserving not only the cultural ethos and heritage of a nation but plays a healthy and key role in shaping the mental state of a nation as well. Theatre makes a nation wise, vigilant and vibrant. It is not just living in a society but changing it. The contemporary theatre of a nation speaks not just what do they eat and wear but what they think about.

thus specifically the contemporary theatre is art of reading and reflecting the mind of the nation. It is why every developed and the developing nation has endorsed and recognized theatre as an important institution in nation building, to be protected and promoted.

The contemporary theatre of Kashmir, for many reasons, has lagged behind in this sphere. It has yet to emerge as a responsible public institution to be reckoned with. And for that matter we the people, in general, have to grow and rise to the occasion. This could be achieved only by the fact that our

style and creative in vision and expression.

The theatre of Kashmir, for obvious reasons, has suffered a greater setback in the last 20 years. It has created a big generation gap in terms of transfer of the traditions of our rich cultural heritage, which I feel, in future, is going to create cultural chaos. In general, and creative barrenness, in particular as long as the question of legacy of our theatre is concerned. The most agonizing part of this black-era is that we have lost a great treasure of theatre-documentation due to the displacement of Kashmiri Pundits, especially in light of this hard fact that the State Information Department has never ever documented any theatre festival or the ongoing theatre movement of Kashmir.

Our print and electronic media has had also been equally ignoring the national significance and importance of the theatre of Kashmir in its nation building, which otherwise is one of the most powerful and popular private institution to command mass-mentality to build the theatre consciousness and public awareness. To explore the richness of one's cultural heritage and performing arts, all sensible and sensitive minds must interact with each other and exchange ideas, experiences and expressions at one stage. Unless we share our expertise, experience, knowledge and wisdom with the generation next, we cannot help our nation to grow and to preserve and protect our theatre heritage

on the other:

After making all necessary preliminary preparations and with an encouraging gesture from National School of Drama - New Delhi, it was felt necessary to establish, under the aegis of EKTA, a School of Drama & Repertory in 2006, to pave way for providing professional training in theatre-arts to the new promising and the young talented generation of Kashmir; in particular, who are deprived of such avenues to go outside the State and at the same time to build the artistic, aesthetic, creative sensibility and the professional standards of theatre of Kashmir; which could help it to regain its lost glory.

In the prime objectives of EKTA, it was made obligatory to annually hold a state level theatre festival, to be attributed to the most beloved and great art-loving King of Kashmir - Sultan Zain-ul-Aabdeen popularly known as Budshah, during whose long fifty years of kingdom - the Golden Period of Kashmir History; the art and culture of the State touched the zenith of its glory when the stage enjoyed the royal patronage.

Inviting the best selected productions in each language and of the prominent registered theatre groups and the directors from all regions of the State to share their experiences, experiments and ideas with others and at the same time to encourage serious dialogue among the prominent theatre activists of the State to build a mutual understanding and an indigenous

national theatre movement in Kashmir. In absence of Tagore Hall, Srinagar which is under renovation since last four years, we managed to hold the first ever state level Budshah Theatre Festival 2011 at Abhinav Theatre Jammu from December 29, 2011 to January 7, 2012 in which we included seven plays as outside productions and two productions of EKTA, thus making a modest new beginning of the new golden era of Kashmiri theatre. And in future we hope to make this festival theme oriented and more rooted in the soil, in terms of the content, style and creative expression of the productions.



Out of all these arts, the art of theatre is the most appealing genre not just in carrying on with its physical form or style but in its expression

theatre has to be honest, bold, creative, consistent and contemporary enough. It must argue, debate and question the contemporary issues, concepts, challenges and changing trends. It has to enrich its aesthetic, artistic, and the professional standards. Any theatre which fails to deliver in line with these contemporary challenges and conflicts, becomes irrelevant. And if the theatre of Kashmir has to win its audience, regain its lost glory, earn its legitimacy and to seek international recognition, it has to identify itself with the sensitivities, sensibilities and the popular aspirations of the people of Kashmir. It has to be rooted in the soil of Kashmir. It has to be relevant and bold in content, form and

and tradition. Since theatre is a collective act of performing art, we have to address it collectively.

As a true nationalist and responsible citizen and above all a patriotic professional theatre person of Kashmir, I felt it my moral rather national obligation to counter this challenge with missionary spirit. With full moral support and cooperation of my family and friends I established Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi - known as EKTA in 2004 to re-enforce and re-invigorate a new spirit in the erstwhile dead-theatre movement of Kashmir, on one hand and to rejuvenate, strengthen, promote and protect the theatre of Kashmir,

The Festival was primarily aimed at:

- a) To encourage a comprehensive theatre interaction-cum-cultural integration of the State by facilitating a serious theatre dialogue between all the regions and the theatre activists of Jammu & Kashmir; on one hand and to explore and share the new experiments in the modern theatre of Kashmir with each other at a single stage, on the other; thus will lead and lay a strong foundation to build and accentuate an indigenous national theatre movement mostly in the rural areas of J&K.
- b) To explore professional avenues of theatre in Kashmir and to provide a big platform

for larger exposure to promising original and genuinely deserving directors, actors, playwrights and other theatre activists of the State.

- c) To showcase the annual new and the best productions of EKTA and at the same time to provide an opportunity for the theatre lovers and enthusiasts of the State, in general and the students of EKTA School of Drama, in particular, to study and experience the vastrang of contemporary play productions.

The event included the Award of Felicitation to our living legends who have been the key builders of the contemporary theatre of Kashmir since last sixty years and at the same time our tribute to those who are not with us now. In this regard EKTA launched five national awards in the category of Best Playwright, Best Actor, Best Stage-Craft, Best Director and the Life Times Achievement Award in Theatre. For 2011, these awards were respectively conferred upon M. L. Kemmu, M. L. Saraf, Sajood Sallani, Kavi Rattan Sharma and Pran Kishore.

Taking cognizance of the uncongenial circumstances of the state, the Govt. seemed apathetic to ensure and follow a concerted cultural policy. This may not be my concern alone but concern of every Kashmiri cultural activist especially the theatre-arts lovers at large. To substantiate my statement I would like to take serious note of these facts that:

- Had this not been the case, much before the most cherished demand was fulfilled very late by the then Govt. In 2007, the next government would have not merged the State Cultural Dept. with the Tourism Dept. In 2009 only taking it as a propaganda tool. This obviously exposes the mental state of this government which is trading the culture of the state than to preserve, promote and protect it. It may be true that tourism flourishes with richness of one's culture but culture in essence is every one's national pride while tourism is only an industry. Any government cannot and should not trade with the national pride of the State for the sake of tourism and State's economic interests.
- Notwithstanding the concerns shown by the Governor and Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, the concerned agencies failed in timely renovation of Tagore Hall - the nerve centre and the only performing place in the summer capital, which is in shamble for the last four years. This has harmed not only the revenue of the Academy but has paralyzed all the significant popular cultural activities of the Valley, especially the theatre, as well.

To conclude, I would like to quote the UNESCO Ambassador for Theatre and the Uganda Playwright & Director Jassica A. Kaahwa that "Theatre is a proven means of advocating and advancing ideas that we collectively hold and are willing to fight for when violated". With these ideas, assertions, sentiments and sensitivities, I am sure that the Theatre of Kashmir is going to make a new beginning to regain its lost glory of the golden ear.

The author is an alumni of National School of Drama (NSD), a Kashmiri Playwright, Founder and Director - EKTA - (School of Drama & Repertory) bhysir@gmail.com

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