

THEATRE'S 'DESER MANUSH'

Power to the Masses

THEATRE has produced a thought provoking play 'Desher Manush' at the Mohila Samity auditorium. The group has a considerable tradition of presenting drama based on contemporary issues and problems of life. This group is concerned about the contradictions around — whether they be political, social or economic. They feel that it is necessary to bring out the various problems before the people.

If drama is considered the mirror of life the responsibilities of theatre artistes towards the people are manifold, believes Abdullah Al Mamun, one of the leaders of the group. Feeling this sense of duty the 'Theatre' drama group has chosen this play as its new production.

The plot of the play has been adapted from a novel called 'Keu Janena' written by Mainul Ahsan Saber. In this novel Saber has brilliantly presented the post liberation chaotic scenario. The theme of the novel is about the pathetic and deplorable condition of the family of freedom fighter Shahid Maruf. The play gives a conventional theme a new dimension.

Taking this family as the central theme the play 'Desher Manush' has developed into various directions. The background is the period of the prevalent autocratic regime between '82 and '90.

It appears as though the entire country had come to a standstill, the people being crushed under the grinding wheel of the selfish regime. The people of Bangladesh are depicted as having become frustrated. They are shown as slowly and gradually coming to a point when they cannot protest any more.

When everybody thought there would never be an end to the autocratic rule, the Bengalis who have a long tra-

dition of uprising, resort to a mass movement. The play shows how the people of Bangladesh rise up and strike heavily at the bastion of the greedy and egocentric autocratic rulers and lauds the victory of the masses.

'Theatre' is quite conscious of selecting its plays and appears to be quite aware of the problems confronting the country in the post liberation period. There are problems such as religious fundamentalism, economic exploitation, women's dilemma and autocratic oppression. Among the plays by the 'Theatre' group the specially commendable ones are 'Kobor' which was

based on the language movement, 'Paer Aawaj Pawa Jae' based on the liberation war, and contemporary themes such as 'Shubochon Nirbachany', 'Ekhon Durh Shomat', 'Shenapati' and 'Kokilara'.

The play 'Desher Manush' has dealt with politics, social aspects of life and bureaucracy in government administrations. It is a satire on the post liberation situation and it has not spared the students, thinkers or even the Mukti Joddha Sangsad. It has criticised government officials, police officers, and every form of establishment. It depicts the national institutions as totally

corrupt, lackadaisical or helpless. The students, and labourers, who are often glorified in the media and by writers, and ordinary people have also come under criticism. It depicts how people are gradually forgetting the '71 incident and getting involved in sorting out their own egocentric ways.

The main plot of 'Desher Manush' has a widow whose husband has died in the liberation war and who must now look after her daughter and father and mother-in-law. She is shown as paying for their expenses by teaching in a school. The widow's husband had a piece of land on which they made a construction in which they live. After 20 years a hoodlum in the area claims the land as his own. He has false documents for his claims whereas she herself has lost her documents in the turmoil of '71.

The wily 'goonda' threatens the widow and tries to get help from the neighbouring youth. Meanwhile the widow makes a scramble to the police and the Mukti Joddha Sangsad. There she is ignored and brushed aside but finally advised to go to a minister who has once been her husband's friend but he too has no time, patience or sympathy for her.

The widow even resorts to the government settlement office to make a copy of her original deeds. Even there she gets no assistance and is rudely rebuffed. At this time there is the arrival of a distant cousin, who comes from abroad, and it is he who ultimately helps her as he has both power and money. This

man, who is the ultimate redeemer of the distressed widow ironically turns out to be a 'muzankar'. It is stressed at this point that real power lies with the government with its varied slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad', 'Joy Bangla' and 'Bangladesh Zindabad'.

In this satirical play the parallel story of a man who returns home after being abroad. This part is played adequately by Abdullah Al Mamun. He is depicted as being keen on being involved in politics and wants to come into power. How is he to get into power? He is shown as trying to convince the students, labourers, intellectuals but finds no response from any of these groups as they are preoccupied with other matters in life. Finally he goes to the minister. There too he is told that every individual in the Bangladesh society is making a beeline to be in the good books and he has no hopes of sudden success.

The play which has the 'Jaitya Smiti Shoudho' in the background, does not use many changes of costumes, even though the characters depict different personalities such as students at one time, freedom fighters at another, intellectuals on one occasion and peasant labourers in the next. They might tie the 'sari' in a different fashion or add a red ribbon around their head to symbolise their dedication to Communism — but no more.

As for stage props, a couple of chairs are brought in occasionally, and sometimes a desk and telephone to depict bureaucratic government offices. But that is all. Like the change of costumes, the use of stage props is kept to the bare essentials and a lot is left to the imagination.

The producer uses a chorus as in Greek plays. This lends it a haunting effect.



A scene from Theatre's 'Desher Manush'.

Firdousi Mojumdar, who plays the part of the harassed widow has been acting now for 25 years. She says 'I come from a conservative background where my father stopped my meals at home and my mother had to feed me secretly because I had taken to acting. I was encouraged by my brother Shahid Munir Chowdhury who thrust me to play the part of a robot in 'Daktar Abdullah Karkhana'.

Firdousi adds about herself, 'I like playing serious parts where conflicts are depicted. I enjoy it when the dialogue is rich and different from real life. I like the events to be realistic but I can't stand anything that is mundane.'

Her favourite roles are the solo performance in 'Kokilara', Rabindranath Tagore's 'Drishti

Dan', Zahir Raihan's 'Borof Gola Nodi' and 'Ekhon Durshomoi' which was based on the problems of the flood. She also enjoyed acting in 'Paer Aawaj Pawa Jaye' by Syed Shamsul Haq. She cares for politically oriented roles too. 'Every citizen should be politically aware,' she remarks.

Abdullah Al Mamun, who plays the part of the aging politician, says 'I prefer directing for the TV, as you have more independence on stage.' He says that he has suffered a lot for his convictions. 'I am often misunderstood and misinterpreted but I'm not doing any disservice to the government. I am inspired by contemporary incidents,' he adds.

Mamun who has written and directed 22 plays for the

stage and about a hundred for the TV, complains that the stage, as is available in the city, is not ideal. 'The stage is a makeshift and inadequate one and it has been existing in that way for the last 20 years,' he points out.

'It is not necessary that every play should have a message. But it should definitely entertain the audience,' he insists.

Ramendu Majumdar, who has been acting since his school days in '53 and who plays two different important roles in the performance, has done 60 different plays on stage so far. His number of performances go upto 800.

It is a family tradition to act for Ramendu as his father was an amateur actor too.

— F. Haq



Ferdousi Majumdar and Abdul Kader.

Telling Tributes

A. K. Khan: In Memoriam Edited by Helal Humayan

Published by: A.K. Khan Citizen Remembrance Committee, 8, Nawab Strajuddowla Road Chittagong.

Reviewed by Dr. Shabbir Ahmed

A. K. Khan: In Memoriam deserves to be called an outstanding publication in its own right. Its merit seems to have been well commensurated with the noble soul to whom it is dedicated. None indeed, can afford to overlook the list that covers as many as 21 contributors of whom a good many are eminent scholars and academicians of international repute along with a host of professionals renowned at home and abroad. Needless to say, similar commemoratives already stand a long overdue for a good number of these age-old contributors themselves.

Thus the volume presents



A.K. KHAN IN MEMORIAM

BOOKS

itself with a panorama of tributes, homages, deeds and documents and certain deliberation of the departed soul himself making the total contents refreshingly splendid and exciting for all readers, ardent or ordinary.

As a matter of fact, A.K. Khan was one of the very few illustrious sons of the soil, who lived an ideal life of profound success enjoying for long his paramount achievements in full. He belongs to the genre of those self-built personals who earned life-long fortune and everlasting fame after death. Countless were those close to him to enjoy his company and very many were to be benefited around him, as his all attainments added much to the human bequest for the public good and prosperity. People at large are his beneficiaries knowingly or unknowingly, while so vast is the number of his admirers in appreciation and acknowledgement.

But his magnificent personality remains to be more and more understood with increasing value-judgements towards which the present book may be treated as a preamble. Mr. K.A. Hoq's reference to the 'Constraints' after independence, deserves detailed study and assessment as he observes — 'Mr. Khan had made up his mind on a formula of compromise based on parity of representation from each wing of the country. The formula which ultimately came to prevail and was known as the 'Muhammad Ali Formula' was originally mooted by Mr. Khan'. Prof. Huda's reflection on 'Disparity' may open a fresh discussion in keeping with the Contextual developments.

The most brilliant article pertinent to the capital contribution of A. K. Khan, was the product of Sayed Ahmedul Hoq

who ably grasped the tempo and temperament of the industrial magnate in charge of 'Industries and power resources (1958-62)'. In the same thread Salahuddin Kasem Khans accounts are squarely illuminating and illustrative of the manifold talents of his beloved father.

Prof. Rezaul Karim's elegy 'Marane Jibane' (in life and death) is an in-depth account of a life worth living with and without bounds. His robust expression of utilitarian enterprise of the subject, is resonant in the symphony of reverberating commotions of 'living in transit towards live sublime'.

Beside personal remembrance of his associates, journalistic reports, Helal Humayan's in particular, seems to have added to the much needed information in its primary setting. In the arena of many-sided discussion, Syed Ali Ahsan's is oriented towards outlining the aesthetic attainments a rare quality-trail of character to make him so great. Certain essays and parliamentary deliberations of A.K. Khan that found place herein are doubtless, of astounding value, while his Comments on 1962 constitution is a rare specimen of serious scholarship.

The present volume (316 pages) contains a number of valuable sketches and 82 pieces of photo album set in chronological order, which is apt to be termed as a documented catalogue of sociopolitical life for as many as three regimes British, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well.

I solemnly wish the departed soul eternal bliss and perfect rest and cherish wholeheartedly the widest circulation of the book with maximum benefit thereof, for the people in general.

Bombay's Pride in 170-year-old Daily

Conservative traditions and principles help to keep Asia's oldest daily newspaper strong and vigorous

by Prakash Chandra

IT is a modest, 14-page newspaper. But the Bombay Samachar can claim to be Asia's oldest daily. 'Ours was the only paper east of Suez which recorded the assassination of Abraham Lincoln,' says Jehan Daruwala, the paper's 76-year-old editor. Published in the Gujarati language, the newspaper celebrated its 170th anniversary on July 1.

Typically, there was no fanfare to mark the occasion. For the Bombay Samachar is conservative in appearance and content (no murder and mystery stories). And it has remained the same all through its history.

Matching its style is an old-world charm. It is housed in an old and elegant red-brick two-storey building. The massive interior of its office looks as it probably did 50 or 100 years ago.

It embodies both beauty and history in an equal measure,' a staffer says. Indeed, Bombay journalists swear no other newspaper can match its venerable status. Even the highly respected Times of India is only 131 years old.

The Bombay Samachar has a circulation of 150,000. It is found all over the globe, wherever there are Gujarati-speaking Indians — a great trading community — to read it.

The newspaper's first customers were the Gujarati-speaking traders of the Kapra bazaar, a textiles market of Bombay. Today, bazaar clerks as well as corporate leaders follow its business reporting.

Gujarati businessmen have changed their ways; they are now more likely to be seen surrounded by desk-top computers than amid cushions. But their loyalty to the newspaper has been consistent.

'Any newspaper can get circulation with a clever strategy and a bit of luck,' observes Rustom M. Cama, 70 director of the family-owned newspaper. 'But it is far more important to have credibility, which is our biggest asset.'

The key to the newspaper's success is conservatism. Mr Cama, a former president of the Indian Newspapers' Society and chairman of the Press Trust of India, believes the paper owes its credibility to its scrupulous adherence to printing only fully authenticated news. Rumours are kept out. So are unauthorised stories.

'We in Bombay Samachar don't know investigative journalism, and the headlines in our paper never carry a question mark,' Mr Cama says.

As a matter of principle, the newspaper has remained consistently secular in its approach. It has never emphasised the interests of any particular community. Its readers include Hindus, Muslims,

Bhuras, Jains and Parsis. Mehli Cama, Mr Cama's son and fellow director, says with unconcealed pride: 'Ours was the only paper in the country which did not need to have a censors' cell during the Emergency. For the government knew that we would stay absolutely neutral.'

The editorial staff are equally proud of its meticulousness. 'Our position is like that of a mountaineer who, after climbing a great height, has to put every new step with great care and circumspection,' says editor Jehan Daruwala. 'Even the smallest mistake can cause a ruinous fall.'

Despite its conservative image, the paper has boldly taken up several social causes. 'When the occasion arises, we don't pull our punches,' says Mr Daruwala.

The paper's biggest selling point is its reliable and comprehensive coverage of commercial news. The paper was founded by Fardoonji Marzhan, a Parsi merchant who saw a business potential for a regular bulletin containing information on the cargos and movements of ships in Bombay harbour.

The first issue of Shri Mumbai Samachar on July 1, 1822, consisted of three quarto sheets — 8 inches by 16 inches — and another half-page supplement. Soon advertisements started flooding the paper, especially its front page. Even today the Bombay Samachar has retained the practice of publishing small classified ads in the lower half of its front page.

The paper's ownership changed hands in 1932 to Mancherji Cama, an ink and paper merchant. Mr Cama also bought the Bombay Chronicle.

The nationalist stance of the Bombay Samachar and the Bombay Chronicle endeared the papers to such stalwarts of the independence movement as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The Chronicle's editor, B. G. Horniman, was even sent to jail for his British rulers.

'Although the Bombay Samachar has reported all the twists and turns in India's history in the past 170 years, it has remained faithful to the basic principles laid down by its founding editor, Fardoonji Marzhan,' says editor Daruwala.

'His first principle was that the paper's language should be simple and understandable to the common man. Secondly, it should have a moral basis. News should not be doctored, and news and views should not be mixed.'

As for the future, 'we will move with the times,' says director Rustom Cama. His son, Mehli, agrees: 'we will go right where the action is.' — Depthnews Asia

READING in Jamaica, as in many Third World countries, is not a popular habit. Television is much more popular: TV sets are everywhere to be found — even in households which at first appear to lack the means to own them.

Until recently, children used public libraries mainly for school work. Rarely did youngsters pay visits to libraries — especially during their long summer holidays.

Now, thanks to the efforts of a group of creative Jamaican librarians, all of that is changing. Children are learning that reading need not only mean 'book learning'; it can also give youths pleasure, satisfaction — and a competitive edge. Librarians have used all manner of methods to lure youngsters back to the books.

They have launched a national reading competition.

They have encouraged children to play indoor board games such as draughts, backgammon and chess — games which release their competitive instincts and prompt youngsters to read up on rules and strategies.

They have also invited writers of children's books to speak with youngsters. At such sessions, children come to realise that authors need not be considered far-away figures; they are real human beings with whom they can speak.

In 1988, after securing sponsors to cover the expenses of competitors, the first National Reading Competition for the 9-11 age group got under way.

Sponsors included two institutions with a vested interest in literacy — the country's main daily newspaper and a bookstore chain — along with companies which manufacture biscuits, toothpaste and a food

Making Reading Fun

Jamaica can boast of having one of the highest literacy rates in the world. But with the increasing onslaught of television more and more Jamaicans are losing interest in books. Now, reports Gemini News Service, some concerned individuals and organisations are trying to regenerate interest in books by making libraries more accessible. by Cedric Lindo

Throwing the book at TV



drink. The following year, the competition was extended to the 6-8 age group. This year, a third group — 12-to-year-olds — was added to the competition. The number of children taking part has risen to 4,000. They come from all over Jamaica.

Since last year, the finals of the National Reading Competition have been televised. The

possibility of being a finalist and appearing on TV to the admiration and envy of fellow students has proved an added incentive to enter.

Even without the nationally televised excuser, prizes are attractive. Trophies, cups, cash and books are acquired and the national champions in the two senior age groups are entitled to a free trip for two — Two to allow a parent to ac-

company each winner — to Disney World in Florida.

Contestants are asked to write about one of four specially-selected children's books.

The librarians in each of Jamaica's 14 parishes choose a winner and from these the headquarters of the competition selects the four best. The finalists are brought to Kingston, the capital, so that the national champion in each age group can be chosen.

All finalists are treated to two days in Kingston with lunch at a luxurious hotel on the first day, which is also televised. On the second day of their stay in the capital they are asked to say why they like the book and what they thought of the competition.

Gloria Clarke, acting deputy director of the Jamaica Library Service is enthusiastic about the success of the competition. In its first year, to everyone's surprise, the winning parish was not Kingston and St. Andrew — considered to be a more sophisticated region than most because it includes the capital — but a rural parish. This pattern has continued since the competition began.

Clarke praises the librarians for their innovation. 'Several librarians who have visited from overseas — notably from the United Kingdom, Wales, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria — have commented favourably on the programme, she says.

Jamaican patois has a saying about someone who is little but sturdy and strong: 'Im lickle but im tallawah.' Perhaps the librarians are showing that in innovation lies the solution to Jamaica's dire economic difficulties. — GEMINI NEWS

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,  
My husband and I have very different views on religion. He does not believe in any of the expressions of religion such as teaching the children to read the Koran or saying prayers five times. He thinks those are rituals and true religion is in the heart and should be very personal. I am finding it very difficult to adjust to this situation. He questions me on everything I do and is always asking for explanations. Please advise. I don't listen to what he says and do what I please, but this creates tension.  
Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,  
This is a very sensitive matter to advise on because you two seem to have ideological differences. I suggest you try to listen to what he is saying, maybe he feels that you are imposing too much on him and therefore is resisting the whole thing. Take it easy and go ahead very slowly and carefully. One has to give up some short term goals to attain long term ones. Instead of teaching the children to read the Koran, just talk to them about it, tell them about the significance and the true meaning of Koran. Ask your husband to join in also, and please don't push the situation. Be patient.  
Dear Mita,  
My husband is very jealous and possessive. He has stopped me from doing many things since the last 10 years. I could not pursue a career, complete my education, learn to sing etc. because of him. Recently I have started to resent this and blame him for everything. Now he says I can do whatever I want to, but it is too late. I have lost my initiative, drive and my voice. I can never forgive him for doing this to me and might separate. The only problem is the children. What will happen to them? Please advise.  
Helen, Chittagong.

Dear Helen,  
I understand your sentiment and regret at having to give up all that because of your husband. But is the fault entirely his? Ask yourself this question very carefully. When your husband was imposing his will on you how firmly did you resist? Did you try your best to convince him to let you pursue your career or complete your education? You will not like my answer, but sometimes women have used this reason just to be lazy. Your resentment now is also very natural. But it is not enough to take a separation. Give it another try. It is never too late to start. Hundreds of women have gone back to careers after a break of years and have been very successful.  
Dear Mita,  
I am 20 years old and study law. I want to be a very successful lawyer someday but my parents want me to get married. As I am not fair they think it is not wise to refuse good proposals. What can I do to convince them that marriage is not important for me at this stage and that I want to establish a career first. They are also influenced by my aunt who married off her daughter at the age of 18 and who has 2 children now. What can I do?  
Dear Zeenat,  
Please don't judge your parents too harshly, they are trying to do what in their mind is best for you. As for your being not fair, I am glad that you have the self confidence to admit it, yet not care about it. It is really of no consequence. As for your marriage, try to convince your parents that you are not against marriage but would like to complete your education. I am sure they will not arrange it without your consent. Meanwhile do so well in your studies that they will be convinced on their own. Be very patient and tactful. Don't in any way be aggressive. I am sure you will have your way.  
Zeenat Ara, Malibagh.