



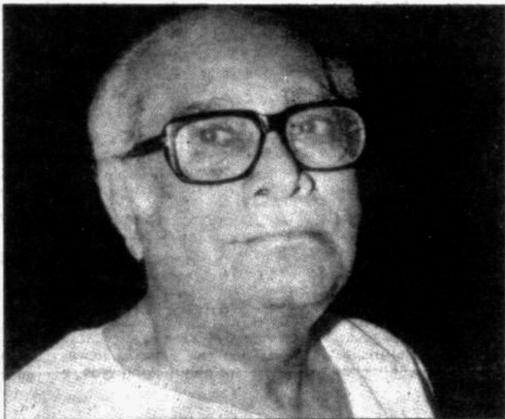
The Mysterious World of Music

Perfect Stimulant of Aesthetic Emotions

Music maestro **KALIM SHARAFI** talks to Daily Star's **Rahat Fahmida** about songs of protest, of inspiration and devotion.

“EVEN today, music in general, especially inspirational songs, has the same impact it had about 40 years back. It all depends on how you present these songs,” said the noted singer Kalim Sharafi.

The initial difference of opinion with the Pakistanis way back in 1948 increased the popularity of songs of protest. And the most popular ones were the inspirational songs of D L Ray, Rajanikanta, Sali Chowdhury, and of course those of Rabindranath Tagore, and Kazi Nazrul Islam. The language movement saw the emergence of a few new music composers, for example, Sikender Abu Zafar, Abdul Latif, Sheekh Lutfur Rahman and a few others, whose songs are still very popular and will be so, I believe, in future.



Kalim Sharafi

Being associated with the world of music for over four decades, Sharafi explained that what is songs of protest here is not the same in the Western world, where the name is 'resistance songs'.

He said that before 1971 there was lack of facilities regarding proper training for music of any sort. The only schools were Chhaya Naut and Bul Bul Academy, which provided limited scope.

The ruling authorities tried in vain to silently resist the transmission and popularity of Tagore songs. But, sadly enough, this has not really come to an end. It was in a way considered 'un-Islamic' or pro-Indian.

On the other hand, to have access to the correct notations of Nazrul songs was difficult indeed. Shudhin Das was the first one who got hold of a number of Nazrul's old records and wrote out the notations of various songs.

And now, Sharafi pointed out, after Liberation War, the government has formed a Nazrul Institute. This institute gives the opportunity to a large number of students for proper training. But the same has not been done to cultivate Tagore

songs. This, he feels, is done purposely. There is a tendency to overshadow Tagore culture for communal reasons. He said it is by chance that our national anthem is a Tagore song.

There are a number of private schools for music that have come up in the last 15-20 years. And many students are going abroad for training in music. The scope is far better after independence then it was earlier. The artists are getting an encouraging exposure that is necessary. Over and above all this, there should not be any prejudices.

“People in our country must try and outgrow biases. It is sad to see people ignore the fact that we are Bengalees with a rich culture, where we must not in any way degrade Nazrul or Tagore. We have fought to have an identity of our own, and in no way can we fall back on that.”

Art is a somewhat trivial mystery. It is a mystery because the pleasure we indisputably get from a work of art cannot easily be related to our biological needs. Especially in this case with music. It is difficult to understand why, in

the struggle for existence during all our important movements, a peculiar sensibility to certain sequences of non-natural sounds should ever have been developed. And the mystery is trivial because nothing but an accidental and non-essential appetite appears to be involved.

“On the basis of this estimate of art the theory of the aesthetic emotion” has been proposed. The emotion appears to be capable of degrees, but also of a maximum. Some songs are better than others, but it is also possible for a particular one to be 'perfect' during a particular mood. The perfect work of art excites the aesthetic emotion to its maximum.

“Expressivity in music is its power of communication, which makes these inspirational songs so very popular. All the music that is any good says something... For the passive listener it may be sufficient that a Tagore or Nazrul song seems full of meaning, the imprecision of that meaning being part, indeed, of its power. The singer can afford no vagueness. He must make a guess at the music's specific meaning.”

“No writer either Hindu or Brahmno or Muslim can avoid deciding about the character of his song. Though he may have created it in a fine fury or in a semi-euphoric state of automatism; but if he wants anybody to use his creation he has to provide some clues to its meaning. He must indicate the speed, the loudness, the kind of lilt he wants, as our writers have over the years. A theme conceived for one person to sing has quite another character when performed by thirty-two artists. Though both versions may appear in the same composition, it is up to the listener to determine which appears inspiring; and that determination involves a decision about the kind of feeling that he wishes this music to communicate, both as a whole and in detail.”

Kalim Sharafi, who has been involved in almost all the revolutionary and popular movements since 1948 including today's 'Gano Adalat', clarified that music and particularly the most familiar inspirational songs have the same impact and popularity.

“The creation of meaning by the use of musical lines and formulas, familiar and unfamiliar, is the art of composition. Nothing else is involved. Classical and structural observances have no other value, nor has novelty. In themselves they are without significance, and no employment of them in composition has any value beyond the immediate context. Nor are they capable of acquiring any value in a specific context other than that which the meaning of the whole lends to them for that occasion.”

“A writer's education involves acquiring a vocabulary of useful turns and formulas. The employment of these and the invention of others in musical works with a unique expressive content is the operation that determines a composer's quality as an artist.”

“The techniques of musical composition are many. The purpose of it is single. That

If Theatre Could Change the World ...

A newly-slim **ALY ZAKER** explains to **S. Bari** of the Daily Star the role theatre has played, and continues to play in the popular movements of this country, from the struggle for liberation to the battle against authoritarianism, to movement against communalism and fundamentalism.

WHEN *Saat Ghaater Kanakori* hit the Dhaka theatre scene, the audience gasped in surprise. The spoof on Lt Gen H M Ershad and his legendary antics was artistically negligible, but it was an instant hit, proving against that theatre was the medium that best captured the public mood.

“It may be a tall claim,” says the newly-slim theatre veteran Aly Zaker during a chat in his office, “but I shall not hesitate to say that for a substantial portion of theatre-goers, plays have served as educative and enlightening.”

The actor-director-writer has been witness to the close relationship between the theatre and socio-political movements large and small, from the War of Liberation to the recent People's Court.

Before independence, according to Zaker, regular performances of plays were unusual.

“Theatre really became an ongoing movement in this country in 1971,” he adds, “it was a corollary to the War of Liberation, founded by individuals directly involved in the struggle.”

The history and growth of the theatre in Bangladesh is inseparable from politics and its social fallout.

During the first administration under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Zaker recalls, “plays criticized the government for failing to address the basic needs of the people.”

Plays like *Swat Manusher Khonje* highlighted the nepotism and inefficiencies of the government, and even took issue with official 'dreams'.

One of Mujib's favorite phrases had to do with good people making a good country *Swat Manusher Khonje* chal-

purpose is the creation of art. Art is an infinitive multiplicity of unique objects known as works of art. Their materials are limited; consequently they bear to one another a great material resemblance whether it is a Tagore song, or one by Nazrul or by Abdul Latif. Where they differ notably is in meaning, or expressivity; and their survival is determined by that meaning. If that meaning is unique it can be remembered and reconsulting it is a pleasure. If not, remembering it is scarcely worth while. The original of which it is an imitation is good enough for us.

“The determination of music's sense is the privilege, in any group, of the leader, though there is always some communal contribution to this. The definition of this expressivity in words is the hardest thing any critic or historian ever has to undertake, though the recognition of its 'presence, and even the degree of its presence, in any composer's work is not difficult.”

“Most musicians and most habitual audiences are able to recognize strength when they encounter it. Sometimes their recognition takes the form of anger, sometimes not. But it is likely to be fairly dependable. Audiences are easily bored by nonentities but not easily angered by them. Active audience resistance to anything is one of the clinical signs by which we recognize quality. Because it is not the direction of an audience reaction that is critical; what is significant is its strength. And that strength, believe me, is not determined



Aly Zaker

lenged that view, pointing out that a clean administration was needed to provide conditions that allowed people to remain honest.

“The Zia regime saw a turn towards religious fundamentalism and the militarization of the government,” Zaker says in a regretful tone. “*Election Caricature* was a play that mocked Zia's 'yes-no' vote.”

But does Zaker think the theatre can do any more than simply provide an outlet for people who are already aware of the issues? Was it able to provoke those who were unaware?

“Yes, I think we made people conscious of the kind of administration we had,” he answers, “Stories don't need to be invented, they come out of society itself. The governments of our country have been doing such ridiculous things that we didn't have to add any commentary at the end of plays to tell people what we were hitting at.”

Besides, he adds, theatre workers are not political propagandists — “that we leave to political workers.”

Though Zaker feels that “nothing we do here can be outside of politics,” the actor or playwright is not a party activist because “we must reserve the freedom to criticize any political party, and the administration has to respect that freedom.”

In fact strong, progressive, fearless theatre is an advantage for any government, to point out its political follies and gauge the opinion of the people.

The nine years of the Ershad administration found the theatrical medium working almost constantly with a political agenda. Though he admits the usefulness of plays like *Saat Ghaater Kanakori*, Zaker says he prefers to criticize a system rather than an individual.

by the mere sounds made. “It comes from the character, the individuality of the music's expressive content. Now it is not a time for us to confuse music with religion. We should recognise our culture. And we can only do that, once we are sure of our identity.”

their own purposes,” says the actor in his precise, cultivated intonation. “Fundamentalism has to be eradicated because it is not an end in itself, it comes in the way of development, it abuses human rights, it creates a sexist society. And it nurtures and foments hatred against religion among the people. People will begin to equate religion with fundamentalism.”

Quite naturally, the talk turned to last month's events. When Zaker participated in the People's Court, he did so out of personal conviction.

“I went there as myself, but yes, obviously, after the unexpected reaction of the authorities, the theatre world is now firmly behind me. So to that extent I do represent the theatre workers. I am perfectly willing to have decent relations with Pakistan today, but I am not willing to forget history. Nothing in our action could embarrass a democratic government, and indeed it was not meant to embarrass them. We thought we were expressing a common feeling.”

How does the theatre world propose to combat fundamentalism and the rehabilitation of war criminals?

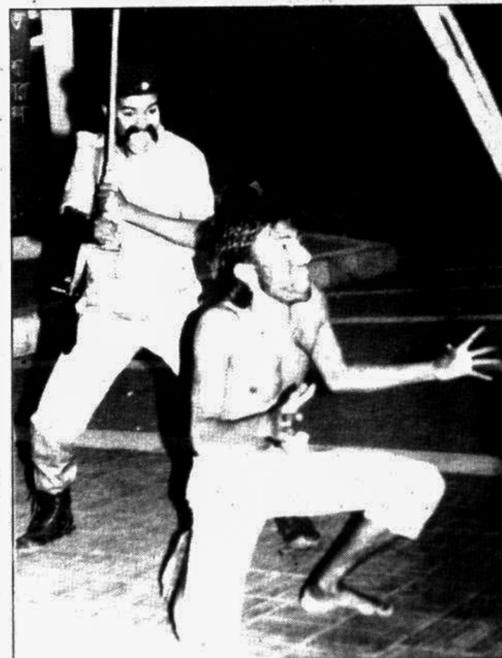
Zaker smiles. “It might not be possible through staging plays and other cultural action alone.”

Personalities from the stage and TV are role models to people all over the country. Zaker feels that if “we went out and directly addressed the people we would get a lot of results.”

For this, a forum of artists would have to be created. Theatre personalities would speak, they would organize publicized discussions.

“And among our own peer group,” he adds, “we must encourage free flow of discussion.” Foremost on the hit list is fundamentalism and all that it entails.

Asked whether he is hopeful about the impact theatre can have on the issue, he answers succinctly, “We have to do our work.”



Theatre for the people: Open-air drama on the War of Liberation at the Central Shaheed Minar.



Swagatom, Baishakh: Chayanaut singers bring in the Bengali New Year at Ramna Park.