

## Yusuf Idriss on Dhaka Stage

# A Captivating Performance

by Nilratan Halder

It has almost all the making of an absurd play. Yet few in world drama can rival Yusuf Idriss's 'The Farfoors' in projecting reality as it is. Adapted from Arabic into Bangla under the title, 'Vriyarakantantra' (Servocracy), the play had its premiere show at the Mohila Samity Manch on Friday (Feb 24) morning. Those who have not read the original play will hardly miss anything after having had the opportunity to witness the two-hour twenty minutes absorbing show.

'Kanthoshilon' mostly known for its endeavour to promote perfect pronunciation of Bangla words and also recitation presented the play with a level of finesse rarely matched even by the professional theatre groups in our country, thanks to its director Khaled Khan enjoying popularity more as a stage and TV actor than as a director. Yet people with a knack for theatre here surely know that he has already made quite a mark by successfully directing Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' (adapted into Bangla as 'Putul Khela'). But Khaled should be thankful to Shamsuddin Chowdhury for the latter's excellent job of adaptation of the play into Bangla. So compellingly adept the translator has been that never for a moment did the audience get the slightest idea that the play was anything but written by us, for us and about our own time and situation.

The choice of 'The Farfoors' is undoubtedly very ambitious for Kanthoshilon. As the second production the play surely threw a challenge to as amateurish a group as Kanthoshilon. But seeing the performance, the audience are most likely to conclude that it was worth taking the risk. A most powerful Bangla rendering of the drama has been enabled by equally matching performance of the raw but dedicated actors and actresses. Above all, the director's creative imagination has been able to produce a few scenes of supernatural and ghostly illusions that make the play a class of its own.

Now Yusuf Idriss's play has an enduring appeal in that the short-story writer and dramatist places man at the centre of all events. To unravel the mysteries of life and death he chooses simple incidents but never hesitates to punctuate them with the supernatural, theology and religion. But they

are so subtly and appropriately baked into and blended with the flow of events that they become an integral part of the commonplace. It is this serio-comic treatment of our everyday life that makes Yusuf Idriss's appeal so enduring. The Egyptian dramatist has behind him one of the world's great ancient civilizations to support his outlook of life in its entirety. So history, with its panoramic view is rolled into the life of the protagonists — ordinary people — of his play.

It is not for nothing that the playwright resorts to the beaten track of a play within the play and yet succeeds in creating newer dimensions. In this play, the events centre round two key figures: a master and his servant. But they are so because there are two playwrights (writers) who find it advantageous to create them as such. Through this symbolic representation of two people from two different classes the playwright seeks to show the unequal class relations on which civilization after civilization has thrived. His thematic simile and use of space are simply amazing. Yusuf Idriss involves the audience in the play in a way no one has ever tried. His characters move between times and places. All through the march of human civilization, humanity itself has been flawed by this unjust relations between man and man. Yusuf Idriss has made caustic comments on this relationship through play-acting.

In fact, 'The Farfoors' starts through play-acting. Here is a fool like King Lear's or Caliban in 'The Tempest' representing the universal servant, the mad and the wise rolled into one. So the drama unfolds with the search for a master. There is an intriguing relationship in that they agree to perform their jobs provided that one or two of their conditions are met. Here the writer of the play within the play becomes an omniscient and omnipotent force like the almighty God. The two are just fulfilling his wishes. Curiously though, when the servant revolts against the injustice, there is no explanation for why the fool is a slave and his master is a master. Named Falu, the slave encounters a more aggressive representative of a new generation of writers who meets the slave's defiance with the threat

of physical force. Actually the number two writer maintains a *mastan* gang. The transformation of the writer is like a malevolent creator. But man's coming through the stages of atrocious dictatorial and megalomaniac rules does not necessarily find a happy ending in the new-found democracy. Here the adaptation has been done in line with our contemporary politics. The language too has been tailor-made for the purpose. It has only enhanced the appeal of the play. Democracy ends up in plutocracy and the mountain-like frustration forces people to opt for an easy way to get killed. At this point the master shows his true self of a cruel, uncaring and conscienceless personality. But Falu rises in stature and condemns the master for taking a man's life without remorse. This is how things are here. But Falu manages to gradually bring his master back to his senses and even convinces his boss to reverse-play their roles. Even this is not enough for them to survive the hard and intriguing time. So they even decide to take their own lives. But they cannot and get into the eternal cycle of existence.



The interesting point here is that they must vacate for the birth of a baby whose father asks them to hurry up. Is that a message of optimism? Perhaps Yusuf Idriss does not like to be

solely pessimistic. He only points to the defects of our civilization, our systems of governance. At the same time there is very subtly discernible a religious allusion — one that

is more akin to the rebirth of soul as seen by the Hindu and Bouddha religions. The last scene is a repetition of a circular movement symbolising the regeneration of life. The hope is that the new-born might take the task initiated by Falu further ahead and once human society may become perfect where man will no longer be either a servant or a master. Falu at least for a brief period had such an equation with his master. The task is to translate it into a permanent relationship. The production in all respects could do justice to its creator. This makes us happy.

## The Legacy of Al-Andalus Unveiled at UNESCO

Paris: 'The Legacy of Al-Andalus' is an ambitious cultural and touristic project supported by UNESCO that highlights the splendour of Spain's Islamic culture. It will be unveiled 7 March at the Organization's Headquarters.

From the Eighth Century to the end of the 15th, the long sojourn of the Moors on territory extending from Huelva to Almeria through Seville and Granada in southern Spain left an indelible mark on the destiny, ideas and customs of its inhabitants. The influences of this civilization stretched through all of Europe and, through the Spanish conquistadors, to the Americas.

Through a dozen historical routes, 14 exhibitions and diverse publications, this project evokes the culture of 'Al Andalus' — a name the Arabs gave to the entire Iberian peninsula — which was among the most important civilizations in European history. In addition to revealing the heritage of Andalusia, this undertaking is designed to encourage culture, promote tourism and energize the social and economic structure of the region.

The Spanish institute Sierra Nevada 95 initiated this pro-

ject and signed a cultural cooperation agreement with UNESCO. King Juan Carlos of Spain and UNESCO's Director-General Federico Mayor are supporting this activity, which is part of the Organization's 'Contribution of Arab Cultures to Ibero-American Culture via Spain and Portugal' programme, better known by the acronym ACALAPI.

A series of historic itineraries stretching from Portugal through Morocco and to Timbuktu in the southern Sahara will allow visitors to trace the footsteps of Andalusian merchants from the era as well as the grand adventurers who left records of their travels. From 1 April to 31 July, various 'information centres' along these routes will provide details on the local culture and heritage.

From 1 April to 15 July, 15 thematic exhibitions will be held in Andalusia's larger cities, each focusing on a specific aspect of Al-Andalus culture from scientific innovations and Moorish expertise in the field of hydrology to life in the souks or Arab market places.

A series of scientific and informative publications also will

be edited, including practical guides on each route as well as reproductions and translations of ancient texts and written works.

The Legacy of Al-Andalus Foundation will be established at the conclusion of this project to provide a legal framework to publicize and preserve this heritage and as a permanent forum and meeting place for aficionados of Andalusian civilization.

The Spanish and Andalusian authorities are supporting this project, which will be unveiled during a ceremony to be held at 6:30 pm Tuesday 7 March in Room XI at UNESCO Headquarters. UNESCO's Director-General and other dignitaries including the president of the regional Andalusian government are expected.

In addition to an oral presentation of the project, the ceremony will include a 10 to 15-minute video screening and the display of 36 explanatory panels. Numerous photos, maps and documents describing the historic routes outlined in the project will be exhibited, as well as a presentation of exhibitions and publications that are expected to appear during this project.

## In the Virtue of Quran

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arm. I began to cry and my father (who returned home late at night) asked me the cause of my crying. I indicated the fracture in my arm and the consequent pain. He wanted to set it aright by himself but I could not allow him even to touch the arm as it was heavily painful. He got alarmed and assured me to take me to the doctor in the morning. But I could not sleep, even in his lap, for the rest of the night. I was dying of pain.

The next morning he took me to Dr Sundari Babu, the doctor-in-charge of the Ibrahimpur Charitable Hospital, at our next village. That a doctor could be so beautiful in look as well as in practice was to be seen to believe! He asked me to show my hand and he started talking to me, what has happened, how it has happened, and he twisted the arm and set it aright, and I was crying and crying profusely and bitterly. Then he put plasters on both sides of the arm and fastened them with a long piece of cloth. The whole exercise took him only ten to fifteen minutes and I was alright. I was alright from the incredible pain that I was put to face by the disjuncting of my arm. I got a real relief, a relief of heaven!

I came back home with my arm hung with the neck and I had now to do all my works with the left hand. This was a

new experience and I could not but bear it out with great difficulty. But what was intolerable to me was to witness other boys playing and I was not. I was debarred from playing. What a pity! I continued to endure such extreme provocations for ten to fifteen days and then I started playing again with my one hand hung up with the neck. How long one could control oneself? On the second day or the third day I broke the same arm above the elbow while I was playing. This time I fell down on my knees and nobody was to be held responsible for this. But how could I face my parents again with another fracture in the same broken arm? But I had to face and I had to meet the consequences.

I was taken again to the same Dr Sundari Babu who gave me a good smile and applied the same treating method that he practised before. After the plastering was done he cautioned me not to break his plasters the third time I broke my arm. Exactly the same thing happened to me within one month of this incident. I fell down one day on my feet while I was stepping back and broke the plasters and disjuncted the arm.

This time my mother was threatening to beat me with a cane in her hand and I was back-stepping and I fell down. As a consequence to all these

problems that I created, my parents and their parents, along with other elders of the family, decided that I should be turned out of the house and banished to a neighbouring village, called Jafarabad, where I could study the Quran under an able teacher, Hafiz Abdul Mannan of Luxmipur.

Thus the chapter of my history began to be written from another world of Quran study and Quran preaching, and the birthplace of this historic chapter was rooted from Jafarabad and not from my village Kadipur. And the credit of this historic (January 1993) but silent chapter goes to Hafiz Abdul Mannan to whose able and ruthless leadership I owe all that I have been able to do during my last 50 years of active life. Had I not been so naughty a boy and so unmanageable a son to my parents, I would not have been banished to that world of Quran study and Quran preaching, which ultimately became my most favourite and proud world of activity. I am now the proud student of a proud and rich world, which is called the World of Quran, and from where I have by now, with the mercy of Allah, contributed about 50 books, on Quran and Quran-related subjects.

"As to you the Quran is bestowed upon you from the presence of One Who is Wise and All-Knowing." (Al Q 27 : 6).

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## Belief in God

Continued from page 11 those who rejected our signs. Then see what was the end of those who were warned but heeded not.

Al Quran: Sura Yunus

To the Ad people God sent Hud as His messenger. They were a gifted people. God had given them talents and wealth but when they did not listen to the preaching and admonition of prophet Hud, He sent a devastating cyclone as a result of which the whole people lay prostrate like hollow trunks of palm trees for committing habitual sins.

To the Thamud people He sent Saleh, one of their brethren. He said, "Oh my people! Worship God, as you have no other God save Him. It is he who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein. Ask forgiveness of Him and turn to Him in repentance." He further said, "This she-camel of God is a symbol to you. Leave her to feed on God's free earth and inflict no harm on her." But they hamstrung her. Prophet Saleh gave them three days' clear warning for repentance, but they heeded him not. On the contrary, they insolently defied the command of their Lord and continued in their evil courses. So, a terrible earthquake associated with stunning rumbling noise came and buried them where they were.

Thereafter, came prophet Abraham. He said to his father and his people, "What are these images to which you are devoted?" They replied, "We found our fathers worshipping them." He said, "Indeed you and your fathers have been in manifest error. My Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. He created us all and I am a witness to this truth." He continued, "Unless my Lord willeth nothing can happen. My Lord comprehendeth in His knowledge all things." Then he broke the idols to pieces and said, "Fie upon you

and upon the things you worship besides God! Have you no sense?" They said, "Burn him and protect your gods if you do anything at all." But God made the fire cool and a means of safety for Abraham.

He and his son Ismail built the Kaba as the house of God and purified it to be a centre of worship.

Similarly to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah God sent Lut a nephew of Abraham as an apostle and warner. The people exceeded the limits in sins and practised lusts on men in preference to women. Furthermore, they ignored his admonition and rejected his warning. Consequently, God sent a violent tornado associated with showers of brimstones which destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with their inhabitants because of their iniquities but saved the prophet, his family-members and followers except his wife, as she was of those who lagged behind.

God sent Shuaib to the Madyan people as a messenger who was one of their brethren. He also said "Oh my people! Worship God as you have no other God except Him. Give just measure and weight, do not withhold from people the things that are due to them and do not make mischief on the earth." But the unbelievers and their leaders did not follow his admonition. As a result an earthquake with a mighty blast seized them unawares and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning. Thus the Madyan people perished for not heeding prophet Shuaib's warning.

After Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and among Noah's progeny David, Solomon, Job, Zakariah, John, Idris, Elisha, Jonah, Elijah, Zul-kifl etc came with clear signs, but most of the peoples would not believe what they and their forefathers had rejected beforehand.

Subsequently He sent Moses and his brother Aaron

to Pharaoh, king of Egypt and his chiefs with His signs, but the latter were arrogant and a people in sin. When the truth came to them from God they said, "This is indeed evident sorcery." God took Moses, Aaron and the children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his hosts followed them arrogantly but they were overwhelmed with the water of the sea. Then Pharaoh repented and said "I believe that there is no God save Him, whom the children of Israel believe in. I am of those who submit to God." But it was too late.

Eventually, Jesus Christ the miraculous and charismatic son of Mary came with clear signs and the Gospel to preach the unity of God and guide his people in the path of truth and virtue. The number of his followers swelled and his influence began to grow remarkably which alarmed the Jewish and Roman authorities. He was arrested and apparently crucified under Roman law but in fact God raised him up unto

Himself.

Lastly, came Mohammad (SM) the unlettered prophet of the desert to whom the verses of the holy Quran were revealed by God for exhorting the people of Arabia to have faith in the Creator and Cherisher of the worlds, to eschew evil, to stand firm in righteousness, to establish regular prayer, to practise regular charity, to seek His mercy and above all follow His commandments with perfect integrity, and devotion.

He was vehemently opposed, persecuted and oppressed by the pagan Quraish of Mecca who compelled him to migrate with his disciples to Medina where he was received cordially. After several battles against the infidels with his limited number of followers he returned to Mecca triumphantly with the help of God and almost the whole of Arabia embraced Islam which also spread to other countries of the world during his lifetime.

## Diplomacy in Islam

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est and magnificent palaces. Envoys were also provided with gifts and robes of honour before their departure which reflected hospitality of the host state. It is interesting to note that gifts were exchanged by both sides as a part of diplomatic protocol which is generally being followed in the present day during the visit of Head of State or Head of Government.

During Abbasid rule there were four big powers. In the East there were the Abbasid and the Byzantine empires while in the West the Frankish empire and the Umayyads of Spain were reigning. The rivalry between the two Eastern powers and the two Western powers continued for a long time which ultimately led to establishing significant diplomatic links. There were also conflicts between two Muslim states and the two Christian states. These conflicts facilitated Frankish ruler and the Abbasid Caliph to develop cor-

dial relations with each other. Similarly Cordova developed friendly relations with Constantinople. According to one source, it was Pippin, the ruler of Franks, who sent the first of a series of diplomatic missions to Al-Mansur, the second Abbasid Caliph, to initiate diplomatic negotiations. The first such exchange of envoy took place in 765 AD.

During the period of Charlemagne, son of Pippin, several envoys were despatched to the court of Harun al-Rashid of the Abbasid to establish friendly relations among the two great monarchs.

Diplomacy in Islam played very significant role in diffusing tension, signing treaties to make peace with enemy, exchanging prisoners of war and establishing contact with non-Muslim countries.

During the time of peace diplomacy gained prominence in facilitating trade relations, exchanging information among nations and fulfilling other social purposes.



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