

Partha Pratim Majumder in one of his plays.

His contribution to the performing arts of miming was further recognised when he was conferred with the 'Chevalier De L'ordre Des Arts Et Des Lettres' (Knight in the Order of Fine Arts and Humanities) by the Ministry for Cultural Affairs and Communication of France.

"As they declared my name for the highest cultural award of the country, I requested them to think twice since there were many artists like me across the globe. But they said I deserved it because I was able to blend the soul of Hindu philosophy with Judio-Christian culture through my performances," he says with humility.

Partha Pratim Majumder along with his group also received the "Moliere Award", the highest European honour for contribution to theatre, in 2009. At home, he received the Munier Chowdhury Award in 2009 and the Ekushey Padak in 2010. Majumder also acted in several movies, including 'The Players' with Academy Award winning actor Jean Dujardin.

When asked about how he hopes to improve the art of miming in Bangladesh, Majumder shared some of his frustrations, stating, "Little do I want to live like a celebrity far from my own country. I do visit different parts of Bangladesh to teach mime and inspire youngsters, as I love my country. Recently, I appeared in an awareness campaign against HIV in a television commercial funded by the Standard Chartered Bank. Standing close to my 60th birthday, I dream of building an international mime institute in the country," says Majumder. This institute would not just be one for mime artists, adds the maestro, but would help artists to be fit as well.

Mime is not just an art form, says Majumder. It is the modern representation of the oldest form of art – the sign language, which was used for years before humans learnt to talk.

"Rewind the clock a million years back. Nature was a mystery to men. When there was rumbling of thunder, two people embraced each other in sheer panic. Now we reproduce that expression through mime. Your silence can speak a thousand words. This is where the charisma of miming lies," he says.

He then goes on to give an example of how deeply the audience was moved during one of his performances. "It was simple movement, really. I mimed that I had torn the spine off a flower before throwing it away callously. The audience's reaction was instantaneous and spontaneous – they shivered as if I had truly committed a crime! You can truly take your audience on a journey through good mime performances," he says.

Majumder further opines that the country lacks in the proper cultural practice of miming. His main objective of setting up an institute is to have a platform which would work to incorporate the art of miming in the inherent culture of Bangladesh. He even approached a few multi-national companies in this regard. But to no avail.

"A friend of mine wanted to donate a large flat of his in a posh part of the city in February last year in order for us to start the mime institute. But political violence stood in between my dream and its fulfilment," says the artist sadly.

At this juncture of our conversation, Majumder asked me what time it was in Bangladesh. When I replied that it was after midnight, he considerately said that we should call it a day. But I was hungry for more and pleaded him to tell me about a performance in Bangladesh that left an indelible imprint on his mind. The master obliged, stating that the most memorable performance was one that he performed at the National Museum in 1998. The story began with the Pakistani occupation army blindfolding and killing innocent Bengalis before dumping them together into a grave. A woman, who was violated, is traumatised and loses her mind. But after all the struggles, Bangladesh is finally a free country. Years go by. But a number of the collaborators of the Pakistani army are still living in Bangladesh. Some of them try to rape the woman again at the graveyard. But they stop when they hear voices coming from the graves of the martyred Bangladeshis. They kill the rapists but leave with a haunting message that Majumder still remembers.

"It's a simple line, really; the actors mime the words to the audience, "If you let them come back here again, won't you feel ashamed?" And then a green canvas is seen with a deep red circle, representing our national flag that depicts the amount of bloodshed on our green lands for us to gain our freedom," the master artist concludes. ■