

Through the eyes of Azad Abul Kalam

Theatre veteran shares opinion on current scenario



SAURAV DEY

Azad Abul Kalam is a name that requires little introduction in the country's theatre scene. One of the founders of Prachyanat and Prachyanat School of Acting and Design, the stage veteran spoke to The Daily Star on various aspects of theatre schooling, youth in theatre, and more. Excerpts:

How is the Prachyanat Acting School faring?

Azad: The school has stepped into its 14th year, with the 27th batch now in training. The journey has been tough for us, as it needs adequate resources and resource persons to run it properly. We mainly depend on Prachyanat's own acting teachers, but they have their own careers and are occupied in other activities as well. We have plans to turn it into an institute, but we cannot do it right now, due to resource constraints.

Where do the students go after learning acting from the school?

Azad: Many students come and go. Some of them stay with us, while some others move into other areas. The school tries its best to guide and push youths according to their talent and expertise. Many of our former students are currently working in television, advertising agencies, theatre and other sectors as well.

What do you think is the present scenario of theatre, in terms of youth participation?

Azad: Many youths are coming into theatre and other performing arts, but there are problems. I think a majority of the bright youth are insecure about their future in regard to higher education and career. Realising the difficulties of surviving here, they go abroad. Nowadays, school students are leaning towards business studies instead of science and arts. In my time, there used to be an equal number of

students in arts and science. Schools and colleges now focus more on careers, instead of nurturing knowledge. Consequently students feel reluctant to opt for the arts and performing arts, and lean towards job-oriented fields of study. There are reasons behind that though, as performing arts is not yet a wholesome career here.

How do the youth perceive theatre?

Azad: Many of those who come to theatre choose it as an interim platform. They come here, create a circle, gather knowledge and finally move out when they find opportunities. Our school enrolls students of all ages; what we consider are sincerity, efforts and passion.

Prachyanat has a reputation of producing innovative plays. What's the secret?

Azad: It's just the result of our practice; we believe in innovation. We do not want to repeat anything and try to remain up to date. This is a challenge for us. I can't say we do it as well as we want to, but we give it our best effort.

What is it that excites you the most about theatre? What are you working on right now?

Azad: I love everything about the stage. I write, direct and act. I have done numerous television and stage plays. Currently, I am working on "Tragedy Polishbari", which I wrote on the lives of garment workers. Prachyanat will soon bring the play to the stage.

What's your take on the new troupes and productions?

Azad: Some troupes are doing really well, while the rest are terrible. As unfortunate as it may sound, I think the number of bad productions heavily outnumber the good ones.

Any words of encouragement for those who want to join this art form?

Azad: Theatre is a lifestyle. Once you embrace it, you cannot stay away from it.

Classics burnt as fire breaks out at Bombay Talkies



A scene from "Achhut Kanya".

Indian cinema lost some of its greatest milestones forever to a fire, which broke out at the Borivli office of the legendary film studio, The Bombay Talkies Limited, yesterday.

Master prints of around 60 films were reduced to ashes. These included "Jeevan Naiya" (Ashok Kumar's debut film), "Achhut Kanya" (Ashok Kumar's first hit), "Neel Kamal" (Raj Kapoor's first big break), "Jwar Bhata" (Dilip Kumar's debut film), "Ziddi" (which launched Dev Anand's career as a leading man), "Andolan" (Kishore Kumar's first film as a hero), "Bandhan" and "Jhoola" (two of Ashok Kumar's biggest hits).

Founded in 1934, the studio, which produced 102 feature films and was the launching pad for some of Hindi cinema's biggest stars, was the country's first public limited film company. Rajnarayan Dube known as the 'Pillar of Indian Cinema', financed all the films produced by the company. Now, his grandson Abhay Kumar, is reviving the banner along with Johnny Walker's son Nasir.

When contacted, Abhay told the Mirror magazine, "It took around 45 minutes to douse the flames. The fire was set off by a short circuit. I was in Delhi when it happened. I returned to Mumbai only on Monday morning. I am shocked beyond words. I have lost my treasure trove. Fate can be so cruel at times."

Source: TOI

Moushumi-Omar Sani bet on Brazil

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Moushumi-Omar Sani, a popular on-screen couple in the '90s, have been a real-life couple for some time now, and are a happy family with their two children. Moushumi and Omar, both keen supporters of the Brazil football team, are closely following the FIFA World Cup on the small screen. The duo spoke to The Daily Star about their interest in the game and their busy professional lives, ahead of their favourite team's quarterfinal encounter against Colombia.

How closely have you been following the World Cup?

Omar Sani: I haven't missed any game of the key teams.

Moushumi: I watch almost every game despite my hectic shooting schedule.

What team are your children supporting?

Moushumi: They are also keen supporters of Brazil. They even got a large flag ahead of the tournament.

Omar Sani: I enjoy the matches more now, because of the kids' passion for the game.

What did you think of Brazil's first knock-out match?

Moushumi: I was very tense all the while.

Omar Sani: I was very disappointed when Hulk's goal was cancelled. They did not display the full extent of their capabilities in that match. As a long time supporter of Brazil, I expected more from them.

Which team you want to see in the finals? Moushumi: Definitely, Brazil.

Omar Sani: Best wishes to Brazil. I hope the team wins the 'hexa', or their sixth world cup trophy.

Tell us a little about your children.

Omar Sani: Our first kid, Fardin Ehsan Shadhin was born in 1997. Later, I became the father of a baby girl.

Moushumi: I'm very proud of my children. I want to see them grow up to be good human beings.

What have you two been up to, professionally?

Moushumi: I have been flooded with offers for TV plays. Besides acting, I'm busy directing a film, "Sunno Hriday".

Omar Sani: I'm not such a regular on TV. My last play was "Binar Ashukh", directed by Meher Afrose Shaon. But I have a hectic time shooting my new movies, "Bullet Raja", "Leader" and "Runout".



OUR PICK

MODERN FAMILY

A mouthful of mockumentary

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Numerous TV shows spawn up every year on biggest television networks of the world, but very few break through the boundaries of a niche audience and gain global popularity. ABC, one of USA's leading TV networks, have produced some of the most-loved sitcoms in USA's history, including those vastly popular in Bangladesh as well, like "The Six Million Dollar Man", "McGyver", "Dynasty", "The Fall Guy" and "Hart to Hart" in the '80s and '90s. More recently, their series "Scrubs", "Boston Legal", "Desperate Housewives", "Grey's Anatomy" and

"Castle" have gained popularity back here among the TV audience. "Modern Family", a rather uniquely-formatted sitcom (situational comedy) has grown in popularity since its debut in September 2009. It has won many awards, including the Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy four years on the trot, five Emmys in total for its actors, and a Golden Globe for Best TV series - Comedy or Musical.

The show, done in a 'mockumentary' style (mock-documentary) keeps the characters swinging between fiction and pseudo-documentary, talking directly to the camera, and adds layers to the plot. It's about three interconnected families, humorously depicting elements of every family household character in the USA, including the relationship dynamics and dysfunctions. The storyline is simple and not too tightly continual, making it ideal for any casual audience to still enjoy it if they pick it up from the middle of the series.

But it's the characters that really make this show a success. In one family is the elderly Jay Pritchett (Ed O'Neill) living with his second wife, a gorgeous Colombian-origin younger woman, Gloria Pritchett (Sofia Vergara) and her son from a previous marriage, Manny Delgado (Rico Rodriguez). Jay has two children, Claire Dunphy (Julie Bowen) and Mitchell Pritchett (Jesse Tyler Ferguson). A sincere homemaker, Claire is married to the eccentric realtor Phil Dunphy (Ty Burrell), and the couple has three children; teenage fashionista Haley (Sarah Hyland), the

nerdy middle child Alex (Ariel Winter) and the simple-minded little Luke (Nolan Gould). Lawyer by profession, Mitchell lives with his flamboyant, emotionally-charged partner Cameron Tucker (Eric Stonestreet), and they have an adopted daughter, the Vietnamese-born Lily Tucker-Pritchett (Aubrey Anderson-Emmons). Every character has their very signature personality traits, and their interactions make the show as lively as it is. Without a definitely single plot, the story moves on in a superb fluid way, providing an abundance of tasteful humour, often throwing in some profound thoughts and ideals that are sure to strike a chord in the audience, transcending geographical and cultural barriers.

The show is available on DVD at most DVD shops, and can also be downloaded off the internet. Created by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, the show has had five seasons, and will return for a new season in September this year. Easy-watching, funny and addictive, it is a definite try-out for TV fans looking for new watching material.

Pahari Sanyal: The actor and the singer too!

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

"Dipen, ei bhul ami ki kore korlam, ato din kebol Radha ke nurse boleji janlam, Radhar bhetor meye ti ke ekbar'o dekhilam na". Pahari Sanyal as Col. Mitter was expressing his soulful regret with a penitent expression. The articulation had such command such impact in the candid confession of a towering personality. The viewers were overwhelmed and Pahari Sanyal was Col. Mitter at his best. He spoke four languages - his mother tongue Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English - with aplomb. The words he uttered in English in "Deep Jeley Jai" conveyed the impression that he was equally at home in English. He acted in Ivory-Merchant Production's "The Householder" (1963). His diction in the languages was impeccable.

In his mother tongue Bengali, his expression was mellifluous. His longest dialogue in "Deep Jeley Jai" was when he was describing the flowering of human psychology holding his pipe and deftly playing with the lamp-shade. His description traversed from a baby's playfulness with his organs, and then when he discovers his appearance in the mirror; self-love develops - it is the narcissistic stage; then the boy starts to love his mother and the girl her father. When he finds that the society does not sanction such attachment he starts seeking his mother or the image of his mother in another woman. Pahari Sanyal's mastery of narration was splendid!

Pahari Sanyal was a robust presence in Bengali film, along with another titan Chhobi Biswas. He was equally comfortable in Hindi films. Some of his popular presence in Bengali movies was in "Bhanu

Goyenda Jahar Assistant" (1971), "Harano Sur" (1957 as Roma's father), "Shilpi" (1956 Anjana's teacher), "Sabar Upare" (1955, Rita's journalist brother) and indeed "Deep Jeley Jai" (1959) as the redoubtable Col. Mitter. Critics acclaim Pahari Sanyal for his iconic role as Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in "Vidyasagar" (1950). He also acted in Satyajit Ray's "Kanchenjunga" (1962) and "Aranyer Din Ratri" (1970). His performances in these movies were profoundly natural. In "Aranyer Din Ratri", his Atul Prasad song "Kunje pukare oli jahare barey barey" bore the mark of his excellence as a singer.

Pahari Sanyal's Hindi film career had a number of good films. "Adhikar" (1939), a bi-lingual popular film gave him a foothold in Hindi filmdom. He was in Raj Kapoor's notable film "Jagte Raho" (1956). He acted in a number of popular hits of the time like "Badi Didi" (1939), "Haar Jeet" (1940), and "Mohabbat" (1943). Pahari Sanyal acted in "Yahudi Ki Ladki" (1933) with Saigal, with PC Barua in "Maya" (1936), with Suchitra Sen in "Mama" (1966) and in the Rajesh Khanna-Sharmila Tagore blockbuster "Aradhana" (1969).

Iconic roles were Pahari Sanyal's forte. He was the natural choice for the roles; therefore he shone in "Kadambari", "Mahakavi Kalidas" (1944) and "Shravan Kumar" (1946).

Pahari Sanyal, born Nagendranath Sanyal, had his education in Lucknow, India. He first enrolled for an engineering degree in Benares Hindu University. His love of music carried him on to take Hindustani classical music lessons in Morris College, Lucknow (now Bhattachande Music Institute University). There he took

music lessons under the tutelage of Ustad Md. Hussain, Chote Munna Khan, Nasir Khan and Ahmed Khan. Besides, he also took lessons of tabla from Rashbehari Sil and Abid Khan.

He was deeply inclined to different types of songs. Eventually Pahari Sanyal became fluent in Hindi and Urdu. During his stay in Lucknow, he came in touch with Atul Prasad who greatly contributed to his songs. Among many of his Bengali and Hindi songs, "Suhag Ki Raat" of "Adhikar", "Tore Prakash Se" of "Chandidas" and "Keno Poran Holo Badhan Hara" of "Bhagyachakra" were popular. Pahari Sanyal also sang Rabindra sangeet like "Amar Ei Poth Chawote Anondo", and songs of Atul Prasad. Recently when Soumitra Chattopadhyaya was in Dhaka, he recalled listening to Atul Prasad songs by Pahari Sanyal.

Pahari Sanyal's film career spanned five decades from the beginning of the '30s to the end of the early '70s. Devakikumar Basu was a friend of Pahari Sanyal. Basu took him to BN Sarkar of Star Theatres. He helped his career. His first film was "Rajrani Meera" in 1933 directed by Devakikumar Basu. Pahari Sanyal ultimately rose to the category of Kundan Lal Saigal. In the same year he acted in "Yahudi Ki Ladki". He was also seen in "Chandidas" (1934) and "Rooplekha" (1934). In the year 1935 we saw him in movies like "Carvan-e-Hayat" and "Dhoop Chhaon". He acted in "Mayaand Krorepati" in 1936. His other notable movies are "Vidyapati" (1937), "Mahakobi Girish Chandra" (1956) and "Jomaloye Jibonto Manush" (1958).

Pahari Sanyal was born in Darjeeling on 22 February 1906, and passed away on 10th February 1974.

The writer is a film enthusiast.

