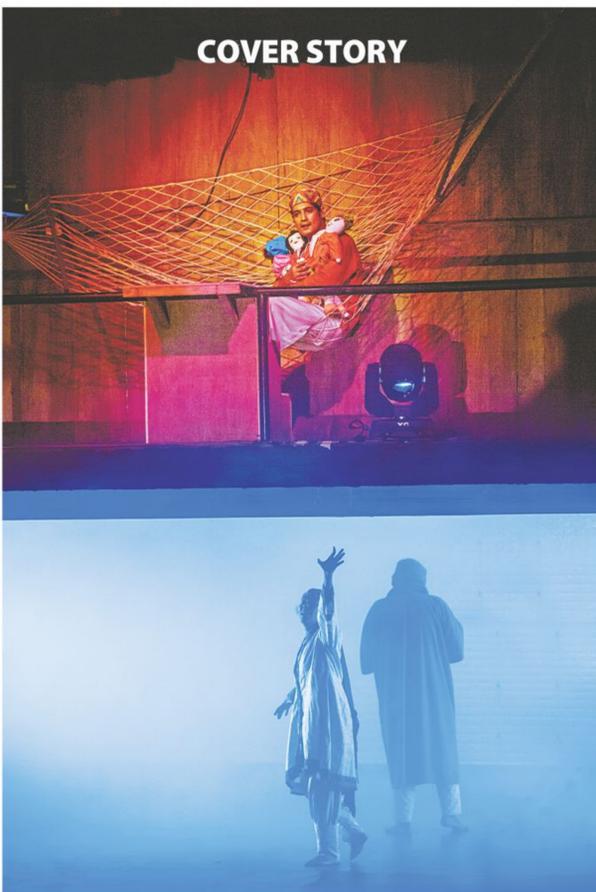


SYED JAMIL AHMED'S RIZWAN

10 DAYS OF PHENOMENAL SUCCESS



COVER STORY

After the Liberation War, Theatre was a very prominent aspect of Bangladeshi culture. There used to be amazing plays on stage, and watching them was a household tradition. Since I myself was involved in theatre, I have had the honor of getting to know Syed Jamil Ahmed, who had then just graduated from India's National School of Drama. He is without a doubt a creative genius; responsible for near-immaculate production of work like 'Tal Patar Sepai', 'Inspector General', 'Bishad Sindhu', 'Chaka', 'Bhoma', 'Ghora Elo Shohore', 'Samadhan', 'Kamala Ranir Sagar Dighi', 'Behular Bhasan' and many more. After almost two decades, he has come out with his new play, 'Rizwan', which was originally written as a poem by Aga Shahid Ali, a Kashmiri-American poet. Star Showbiz found 10 reasons why 'Rizwan' was a massive success.

10 REASONS WHY RIZWAN WAS A SUCCESS

THE TIMING: The play was being showcased from a day before Eid-ul-Adha, a very bold and unusual time for plays. However, *Rizwan* proved that Eid can also be celebrated in a cultural way, as proved with full houses when *Rizwan* played at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

THE DIRECTOR: Syed Jamil Ahmed's near perfect production, direction, choreography, lights and sets are well known. Since this was his first play in almost two decades of break, people were eager to see it.

THE CREW: Before *Rizwan*, Syed Jamil Ahmed had only worked with well-established theatre groups and crew. This time, he had worked with Natbangla, and it was

their first production.

A NEW FORMAT: *Rizwan* was presented in a Broadway-like format, and it played for 10 days continuously, with two shows per day. It helped create continuous buzz for the play.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT: The play gathered a lot of attention on social media, which helped spread news about it and prompted people to watch.

DEBATE: There have been a lot of arguments about the play; and the opinions on it have been polarizing to a certain extent. This prompted many people to watch the play for themselves and judge.

THE AUDIENCE: After a long time, a play had prompted people from almost all walks of society to

engage in an experience together.

THE SCARCITY OF TICKETS: Every day that the play was performed, there was a huge line outside of Shilpakala Academy. This proves that theatre can be as prominent as any other art form in Bangladesh, if given the right treatment.

REPETITIVE VIEWING: A lot of people have seen the play more than once, due to it being different and engaging. Some people are reported to have watched it 5 to 8 times.

TALK OF THE TOWN: Since *Rizwan* was the talk of the town for 10 days, it had become a trend and thus it was almost obligatory for some people to watch it.



For years, I have thought that Syed Jamil Ahmed has a magic box, from which he brings out amazing productions one after another. He is someone who always looks to innovate and no one can claim that one of his plays is similar to another. *Rizwan* has clearly created a myth around itself, with an unbelievable 19 shows in 10 days. To be honest, there have been a lot of "experiments" before; some have been successful and some have not. However, I believe that *Rizwan* has succeeded in every front, and is a complete package in terms of everything. The director, as I previously mentioned, is a genius. Even his enemies cannot say that his design, light, set, costume, choreography and direction are anything but immaculate. They are unparalleled in my opinion. One scene from the play that I will specifically mention is the boat scene, which creates a fantastic illusion. I would say that he deserves every bit of appreciation and love for that scene only. Many more images were created in other scenes as well.

However, I do have a few gripes with the play too. The first would be the acting by the main cast, by which I mean the two leads. I do not think the characters of Rizwan and Fatema lived up to the level of

SET, LIGHT, MUSIC & DIRECTION
SYED JAMIL AHMED
 PLAYWRIGHT
ABHISHEK MAJUMDAR
 SCRIPT
RIDDHIBESH BHATTACHARYA
 COSTUME & CHOREOGRAPHY
NAILA AZAD NUPUR
 PRODUCTION
NATBANGLA

production put on by the director. They were given huge opportunities as relatively fresh faces, but in my opinion they failed to understand the gravity of their roles. They did give it their all physically but I thought that in a way, could not under-

stand what the director actually wanted from them. However, the rest of the cast did an excellent job. In some parts of the play, I thought the music was a little too loud, and in some places the dialogue could not be clearly heard because of that. I would also have preferred live music instead of the pre-selected tracks that were used, as it would have gone better with the play, in my opinion. I do understand that this was completely the director's stylistic decision. At some places, the play seemed to drag on for too long as it was dependant on the performers, so the script felt weak as the leads were relatively weak.

I would like to conclude with two possibilities that can be derived from the play: it will either act as a big inspiration for others to come up with more innovative work, or Rizwan's near-perfection will intimidate people into not experimenting too much out of fear. Either way, *Rizwan* in my opinion is an epic play which will be remembered for a long time.

By Rafi Hossain

