

THROUGH THE EYES

K S Firoz: Our Own King Lear

Khondoker Shahid Uddin Firoz, better known as K S Firoz is a dear face of the Bangladesh showbiz industry. The veteran actor has made significant contributions to the growth of the entertainment industry with his iconic performances. The artiste's acting prowess has been acknowledged with many awards and accolades, including the Baishakhi Padak 1407 from Sri Ratna Natya Goshthi, AKTEL-Natya Shabha Puroshkar, TV Audience Forum Award 2005, RAOWA Lifetime Achievement Award 2007, MEJAB Lifetime Achievement Award 2008, Mrityika Padak 2008, BASHAD Padak and many more. And today he is adding one more candle to the birthday cake! Star Showbiz wishes K S Firoz a very happy birthday and many more successful years to come.

A KALEIDOSCOPIIC LIFE

I used to be a good athlete. I bagged medals in the 800 meters sprint and 4x400 meters national marathons. Then in around 1964, some of us, the energetic youth of the locality, came together to form a theater group. There I played my first role called Madhav. It was staged in the British Council Auditorium and was well appreciated. In December 1964 came BTV (East Pakistan). The following September, I received a call from producer Mr. Zaman Ali Khan with an acting offer. It was probably the third drama of BTV and I was surprised to get such a great offer. Back then, there was no auditioning. Perhaps somebody significant had noticed me in one of my theatre performances, and thus came the opportunity. *Dwip Tobu Jole* was my first TV drama. Dolly Ibrahim was my co-artist along with Shumita Debi and Qureshi Bhai. At that time, it was almost impossible to consider taking acting as a profession. In June 1967, I joined Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) and went to Kakul Abbottabad, Pakistan and, following an eight-month training, I got commissioned in the army in 1968. My first posting was in Quetta, 33 Cavalry (Armored corps), tank regiment. Abdullah Al Mamun Bhai, who was already very dear to me, got shocked to hear this news. I could only make a joke, saying from 'Art' to 'Army' at least the 'A' was still there! Following the liberation war I was commissioned in Bangladesh Army and served until leaving in June, 1977 as a Major. After that, I worked for TEMO and BRTC for short periods. There was a group called *Unmochon*, led by Rita Rahman, daughter of Mashiur Rahman. I joined *Unmochon* and came back to stage, as even after so many years I still had the drive for stage acting! Our first drama was *Azrail-er Postmortem*, a captivating story outlining the mismanagements in our health sector. Unfortunately, *Unmochon* had a very short lifespan. The General Manager of BTV, Mustafizur Rahman, was very close to me. He knew me since the Jagannath College days. One fine morning of 1985, he called me to come to BTV. By that time, the industry had begun to see infrastructural growth. Mustafiz bhai took me to Zia Ansari Bhai,

who put me through a completely diverse set of character adaptation tests, and I succeeded effortlessly. Thus came my big break: the TV drama *Protisruti*, an adaptation of Danielle Steel's *The Promise*. After that, I played the lead role of Gedu Matbor in *Chor Atorjaan*. What followed is an array of dramas, serials, some movies; some great successes and great memories. Since 1988, I am a member of Arambag Theatre and have also been elected as the General Secretary and President at different times.

ON THE CHANGING TIDES

The environment was wonderful in the early days. I enjoyed my work every day. Back then, artistes would take ample time to rehearse before acting, because you need better practice for better execution. Now that we have universities teaching drama and theater studies, we are getting educated artistes. There are many who generalize the contemporary works as

industry, people are often annoyed by the endless commercial breaks, which is why many are switching to YouTube for less interrupted entertainment. I came to know that my drama *Premnogor* runs on YouTube when a fan from a foreign country called me to express his gratitude after watching this online. We also have lesser commitment from some artistes. Senior artistes still maintain time-schedules, while juniors mostly fail to prove their punctuality. *Actors' Equity* is looking into this issue as well. If we take it as a profession, we better be professional with our mentality and output as well. I still demand scripts before learning any character. I am not a rickshaw puller; and so expecting me to undertake the character of a rickshaw puller without proper orientation would be just wrong. However, nowadays acting is being made rather shallow because of such fickle dialogues and acting. Popular



low-grade attempts, which I don't agree with. Time has changed, so the type of content is also sure to change. We now have a commercially sound industry. We have many TV channels. We have established *Actors' Equity* now, where we discuss how to improve the situation. Due to globalization, we are inevitably influenced by so many different cultures. Many are now taking acting as their full-time profession at a very early age. So they need the industry to be a commercially sufficient source of earning their living. There are yet many controversies and discriminations. We see someone artistes getting more remuneration than others for no practical reason. With the ad agencies dictating the

faces of other professions are taking over acting as if it is a child's play. The audiences are also welcoming these new faces, unaware of their acting ability and ignoring the overall effect of this on the industry and on the society as a whole. These days there are hardly any family drama. We are not getting TV dramas that we can watch with the whole family. There was a time when even Humayun Ahmed Bhai was criticized for using slangs in his drama. However, now it has become a common practice. Irony is, what Humayun Bhai used to do was and looked lifelike, but the circus we now see is just ridiculous. Now the TV commercials are also promoting obscene contents. Excessive local dialectics used in

TV dramas is causing us to forget the importance of proper pronunciation of our treasured mother tongue. We are forgetting that media is an impactful platform of our culture, from where people can learn and apply ideas and activities in real lives. So we have to be careful about the language, dress up and behavior portrayed in family programs.

ARTISTE AGELESS

There is only one Abdullah al Mamun. Only one Humayun Ahmed. They have been unique, and will see no competitor. Now I am working with directors like Syed Shakil, Shokal Ahmed, Arif Khan, Aronno Anwar; and they are all distinct with their approach as well. I think working under such diversity has enabled me to become a better actor. I learned a lot from Abdullah al Mamun Bhai and Zia Ansari Bhai in the primary days of my career. We never had any institution to learn acting. So we had to watch and observe to learn. I used to study the works of Abul Khayer Bhai. He would undergo peculiar makeup, ever so often, to bring perfection to the character. I learned the importance of proper makeup from him. These days, even fans from Kolkata sometimes knock me after watching my works on YouTube. It is this priceless love of audience that an artiste craves. Many senior artistes, who I look up to for inspiration, have appreciated my work. The late Golam Mustafa once said 'I loved the character Firoz played. I was trying to find mistakes and he didn't make any!' after watching *Protisruti*. These are some of the memories that keep me going. One of the biggest achievements of my life was playing the lead role in the Shakespeare tragedy *King Lear*. Every time I went up on the stage as Lear, it felt as though I had actually become the king himself. I could feel the king's deep and utmost desperation encapsulate my soul. Unfortunately, we had to close the show after 10 sessions. That one role, however, took a special corner inside my heart. I have, since then, cherished to play such roles again and again in my career.

SEEKING RELIEF

I used to read a lot of books, but I don't get much time now. *Datta* by Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay is one notably favorite book of mine. Richard Burton's *Becket* and the Hindi movie *Didar* are two of my favorite movies. I am a big fan of Dilip Kumar and Anthony Quinn. Golam Mustafa, his daughter Suborna Mustafa, Afzal Hossain, Humayun Faridi, Kabori Sarwar, Razzak Bhai are some of my favorite actors. Outside the country, I like Sophia Loren, Audrey Hepburn and Richard Burton. I am a big fan of war movies too.

FOR THE MEMOIR

I would like to humbly request the audience and the readers to pray for me, so I can serve them with my acting for many more years to come.

By Tasbir Iftekhar