

70 Years of International Theatre Institute (ITI)

**WHAT'S
IN THE
THEATER?
ABDUS SELIM**



History of human civilization evidences that differences in language, culture, education and the arts between the communities globally gave birth to conflicts, dominations, colonization and wars. As a result, from the 'age of discovery' in the 15th century until mid 20th, colonialism rose to its height and witnessed its culmination in two World Wars. So language and culture—and we know language itself is culture—happen to be at the core of misunderstanding between communities, and one of the prime reasons for founding of United Nations (UN) and its affiliate body United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) back in 1945, that started functioning from 1946, was to create a friendly, human society world over.

Just after two years, that is, in 1948, International Theatre Institute (ITI) was created aiming at building 'an organization that was aligned with UNESCO's goals on culture, education and the arts.' The idea of establishing such an organization was initiated by Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director General of UNESCO, and the British playwright and novelist J B Priestley. The main purpose was to 'promote the international exchange of knowledge and practice in the performing arts (theatre, drama, dance and music theater in all their forms) in order to consolidate peace and friendship between peoples. ITI is the world's largest performing arts organization now with a membership of 92 centers globally including Bangladesh.

The ITI founding fathers, Sir Julian Sorell Huxley and John Boynton Priestley, rightfully deserve some reflections. Huxley was a British evolutionary biologist and eugenicist (researcher



mentor an organization like UNESCO that is entrusted with harmonizing human cognitive behaviors! No wonder in that endeavor of his he found theatre, drama, dance and music as strong and effective means to form the right kind of genetic order in mankind!

On the other hand Priestley being a novelist, playwright and scriptwriter had an inherent affinity with humanity. Though he had a left-wing belief that was in conflict with the government, Priestley came to wide public notice for his novel *The Good Companions* and the play *An Inspector calls*. The play is considered to be one of the classics of the mid-twentieth century English theatre. The original (English) version of the play with some editing was once performed in Bangladesh by Naela Azad Nupur's repertorie under the banner of *Jatrik* (not a theatre group as such) in 2016. So the alliance between Huxley and Priestley was in no way untoward—Huxley believing in the improvement of human genetic quality and Priestley in human equality having faith in left-wing principles.

2018 is a significant year for ITI as the organization was founded on July 1, 2018—three score and ten years ago—completing its significantly fruitful existence globally for long 70 years. Its network spread all over the world steadily and has created a noteworthy impact, especially in the Asian, African and Arab countries. Different member-countries

have drawn up round the year programs and events to celebrate 70 years of ITI. Bangladesh center of ITI is also planning to join the festival.

Bangladesh has had a long relationship with ITI. ITI Bangladesh centre was founded in the year 1982—36 years ago—with the lone initiative of Ramendu Majumdar, a leading theatre activist of the country. Soon after other stalwarts and big names of the theatre world of Bangladesh such as Professor Kabir Chowdhury, Syed Shamsul Haque, Aatur Rahman, Aly Zaker, Sara Zaker, Asaduzzaman Noor, Lucky Enam, Dr. Enamul Haque, Mamunur Rashid, Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu, Dr Israfil Shaheen and the likes joined the organization. Professor Kabir Chowdhury was the founding President of Bangladesh ITI while successive two Presidents were Ramendu Majumdar and Aatur Rahman. The current President is Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu. The executive committee has a long list of devoted theatre activists, directors and playwrights of the country. One of the major achievements of Bangladesh ITI is the election of Ramendu Majumdar as ITI World President for two consecutive terms—from 2008 to 2014. He is now honorary World President of ITI.

In 1981 Ramendu Majumdar in consultation with the then ITI Secretary General Lars Malmberg tabled a proposal at the ITI Third World Festival in Seoul to establish the Bangladesh Centre of

International Theatre Institute which was met with an initial objection from a few members present on the ground that professional theatre did not (still does not) exist in Bangladesh. The entire 1981 was spent exchanging letters and memos from both ends and finally Bangladesh group theatre practice received recognition from International Theatre Institute, and ITI Bangladesh Centre was formed in 1982. Since then, among a wide assortment of activities both at home and abroad the ones that Bangladesh regularly observe, perform or participate in, are celebration of World Theatre Day every year, holding theatre workshops and seminars, holding Monodrama Festivals, holding Dhaka International Theatre Festival biennially, attending ITI World Congress every year, taking part in young theatre activist exchange programs, attending different ITI Committee meetings, and most of all publishing World Theatre journal annually. Bangladesh enjoys a special recognition in the ITI World Secretariat as a country of Professional Amateur Theatre because, though theatre activists and workers in Bangladesh do not earn their living from working in the theatre, they perform theatre like genuine professionals.

Happy 70th Anniversary of ITI!

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2018 - The Year of ITI



Celebrating 70th Anniversary of ITI
Vive ITI!

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working on improving human genetic quality), and Priestley, as I mentioned above, was a playwright and novelist. Who else could be a better person than Huxley who believed in improving the genetic quality of a human population to