

KAMAL BAYEZID

In the Play of Life

Secretary of Bangladesh Group Theater Federation, Kamal Bayezid has been one of the eminent figures, along with whom, the theater industry of Bangladesh has seen its golden days. He joined Dhaka Theater in 1977, and has contributed significantly to the growth of the colossal art of theater ever since.



FLASHES OF INSPIRATION

Back then, I just had graduated from my college. Some of the freedom fighters who lately had liberated the country used to perform in theater those days. I used to watch their theater plays quite often. Their art and philosophy intrigued me and I joined *Dhaka Theater*. It was back in 1977. *Dhaka Theater* then happened to be one of the leading theatre groups of Bangladesh. I performed in 23 plays of the *Dhaka Theater* group, to be precise, and in more than one thousand plays for different groups and organizations on different stages. I enthusiastically have been working in theaters since 1977. 41 years is a very long period of time. Our group leader in *Dhaka Theater* is Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu. He always encourages our relentless endeavours of developing art and theater. I myself have been fortunate to have worked with dignified associates like Raisul Islam Asad, Shimul Yusuf, Shahiduzzaman Selim and many more. *Dhaka Theater* continues its struggle to make a remarkable difference in the present situation of theaters in Bangladesh.

OF LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD

I grew up reading plenty of dramas and analyzing their characters. Being the son of a theatre enthusiast who was a teacher as well, I always had the privilege of getting lost amidst piles of books which eventually encouraged my propensity for acting. Later on, the acting prowess of actors like Afzal Hossain and Suborna Mustafa; and dramas staged by *Nagorik* added fuel to my passion. In our socio-economic context, signing up for a profession like theatre performance is close to impossible. Art hardly appeases one's appetite for food. I cannot afford to perform in stage very frequently these days, because responsibilities of a completely different kind take up most of my time. And the urban perplexity continuously

demands ample time to put up with these daily hassles of life. While our theatre group continues its practice, rehearsals, workshops and programs, I take care of the organizational responsibilities. I try to manage finance within our inadequate budget. As you know, we hardly have any sponsors for our independent art in this country. Not only the finance, I often try to work on our structural imperfections too, in accordance with the contemporary media. That is how I contribute to my theatre group these days.

THEATER IN NEGLIGENCE

In our country, making a living as an independent artist is unthinkable. This happens due to utter inattention of the government to art and culture. I am not sure if even 0.1% of the budget has ever been allotted to art. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has been all the way reluctant to the establishment of independent art and artists. We, the theatre enthusiasts, have no financial back-up. In fact, an independent artist has to spend money from his own pocket to successfully stage a play for the audience. I went to a small village in Manipur, India. They have theatre groups and surprisingly the artists there even get honorarium from their government. This is unimaginable for us in Bangladesh. Suppose a small theatre group in Kurigram wants to stage a play, who would finance them? No one! Being a theatre artist in Bangladesh is about working for others without remuneration. Thus some potential performers lose their enthusiasm and we fail to flourish.

THINKING OF A SOLUTION

Waiting for the government to shower its grace on us does not make sense. We have more than 600 theatre groups in our country. Now we have to work strategically. Working in different places, with new faces and staging story based plays could be an effective initiative. It would

minimize the costs as it doesn't require high-tech lights, sound et cetera. Also, theatre education is neglected in our country. Although now we have quite a few number of Theatre and Performance Studies departments in the country, yet the number is insufficient. We have to enlighten our citizens as to why theatre art needs more regard and recognition. To have a progressive society, having several groups of cultured people would be a requisite. Why can we not have at least one theatre group in every school and college? Theatre education, as a prime and primeval subject should be included in our curriculum. To trigger people's interest, street theatres can be initiated.

DREAMS OF A CULTURAL REVOLUTION

We are sowing the seeds. The future generation will look after the plants and thrive. We are going through a restless, brutal time. Crimes and corruptions are casting a pall over our peaceful life. Theaters are like the blessed rain in these parched periods of time. We are struggling against multiple obstacles. The path is not easy and smooth. Why do you think our human values are deteriorating? It's because we lack cultural practice. Our sentiments and emotions are getting lost in this mechanical transition. Theatre will trigger that emotions in us and show a path of truth, integrity and sincerity. Theatre can serve as an eye-opener as well. It can come upon the lies and distortions of the society and hold a mirror to our face. After some years, a revolution through culture might take place and it will bring a perpetual wind of change.

ON THE OFF-THE-BEATEN PATH

I was a banker once. That hectic banking life did not suit a gallivanter like me. I left the job and started my business of importing live flowers. This is not a commonplace business in our country. I am probably one of the three or four busi-

nessmen of Dhaka who are associated with it. I have quite an extravagant lifestyle. My spending is equal to my earning. No savings.

SEEKING RELIEF

I mostly listen to songs that speak of my country and my countrymen. I have an unwavering fascination for folk music. This particular genre of music speaks of our roots, our origin; thus it is so close to my heart. Though I do not have a favorite singer in specific, I loved listening to Bari Siddiqui a lot. I am more likely to be enthralled by the music of a song rather than its lyrics. Chinese and Thai music hence have a sui generis place in my heart. I have grown up reading books and telling innumerable stories. I am very much into travelogues and biographies. Novels and imaginary stories do not attract me as much as people's true stories of struggle and evolution do.

OFF MY DIARY

As I said, I love travelogues, I love travelling too. I have been to 42 countries around the world. Some tours have been made with my family, some were business trips. I love to explore the unforeseen nooks of the earth; life is much bigger than we can even think of. Lives of the vagabonds beckon to me. My grandfather had green pupils. One of our ancestors was Persian and my grandfather had inherited his eyes. These genetic diversities bewitch me. I want to go to the dark hazardous forests of South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, Egypt and a thousand other places. In Jordan there is a small beautiful city in the lap of the mountains. I want to go there. Travelling is something that brings me closer to the nature. In life, I do not idolize anyone. I prefer appreciating people for what they are and what they do. Life is a big canvas and the sky should be the limit.

By Sharbani Datta