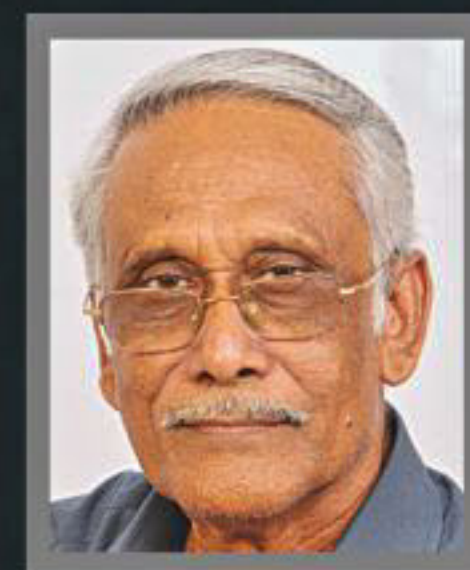


Old is gold but young is not worthless

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



The lifeline and animation of group theatre in Bangladesh is essentially dependent on our young generation. Many people blame them for not being culturally oriented and open but my over 40-year experience of teaching tells me, all generations grow spirally in their creative faculty (for good reasons) which we oldies often either forget to recognize or just take it for granted and ignore. I have seen this happen in our world of theatre too, and it is not a very good and acceptable behavior on the part of the elders. What the youths need is endorsement and nourishment in all their creative efforts—be they significant or insignificant or they will lose their self-confidence. A generation devoid of self-confidence will indulge in the habit of imitation, and the glowing example is, most students of our country at the secondary and higher secondary levels in particular, have become entirely exam-oriented which in turn has fully conditioned them to memorizing notebooks or notes supplied by innumerable coaching centers that have commercially mushroomed all over the country. Thus, so-called *srijonshilota* (creativity) is hard to be found in the domain of education—both among the teachers and the taught. Whatever little creativity we now have can be found, perhaps, in our world of theatre.

Very recently I witnessed two plays by two young playwrights and directors: *Ritwik* and *Shey*—the first is produced by Theatre 52 and the second by *Podatik Natyo Sangsad*. The theatre groups that produced them are not new; they have a

reasonably long history of theatre production, especially *Podatik*.

Ritwik is a biopic play—the life and, both cultural and political journey of Ritwik Ghatak, the renowned moviemaker of the Indian subcontinent, well known for his movies like *Ajantrik*, *Subornorekha*, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam*. The last mentioned movie made him a hot favourite to our audience as it was produced and shot in Bangladesh and



most of the casts were locals. But the play somehow avoided *Ritwik*'s this episode of life that brought him so much of fame—reasons only best known to the writer director Mizanur Rahman. He mentioned in his note printed in the handbill that he constructed the play based on *Ritwik*'s personal, political and theatric life with a blend of his own imagination. Biopics are difficult for the

writers/directors—as they have to do a lot of research on the life of the given person and mix it with their own imagination, and that's the rub! The play is Mizan's debut effort on the stage and it showed almost all kinds of possible shortcomings—weak dialogues, absence of dramatic synchronization, lack of smooth exit and entry of the actors and most of all frail acting (the actors are not among the big names and are young). But

what I found in the teamwork is really amazing and admirable—it was sincere, devoted and by all means *srijonshil*.

Same goes with *Shey*. The writer and director of the play Debashish Ghosh is not an unknown name in our theatre arena, and *Shey* is not his debut production. The play is an adaptation of Rabindranath's juvenile fantasy written at the age of 76 (*Rabindrashomogra* glossary

written by Arunkumar Mukhopadhyaya, published by *Pathok Somabesh* reads, the juvenile fiction was written for Rabindranath's granddaughter Nandini, and a few installments of *Shey* had been published first in *Shondesh* magazine when the poet was 70, and it came out as a book after six years). Rabindranath also sketched a few pictures to illustrate the same book. Debashish used those sketches in his play very befittingly, but what was missing in it was their proper coinciding with the storyline. The story reminds me of a British juvenile writer Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's (penname Lewis Carroll), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* that have been transformed into very popular stage play and movie. Though acting and other related theatrical elements were better than *Ritwik*, to me the most admirable part of the production was, it was meant for the children (and we have almost zero entertainment shows and events for them), and I noticed during the show almost all the kids present laughed their hearts out and shouted spontaneously. That is no mean achievement!

However, going back to my initial statement on which I have developed this discourse: old is gold (of course not always!) but creative efforts of our youth are not always worthless if done with avid fidelity and in complete good faith. Mind it, they are our future!

The writer is a theatre activist, playwright and theatre critic. He is also a Bangla Academy awardee for translation.