

INTERVIEW

Mushtaq Kak: A Multifaceted Personality

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Introduction

Proud to be recognised as a Dogra Kashmiri, since brought up by Dogra mother and Kashmiri father; Mr. Mushtaq Kak is only person from the state of Jammu and Kashmir to head a National Cultural Institution; enacted in both films and theatres; trained some of the artists for Bollywood movies and on top of that acted in a Hollywood movie. A multi-talented person, having sound cultural background, being artistic director of Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts for 10 years, performed various roles in more than 15 Bollywood movies; Mr. Kak is still very humble and a person with open heart. Though he has mesmerised people sometimes by his acting, sometimes by directing and sometimes by training the artists, he enjoys directing theatre plays the most. He has directed has directed as many as 97 plays in Dogri, Urdu, English and even in Sanskrit. Who can forget the heart touching acting of the child artists in the movies Sikandar, Black and Kuch-Kuch Hota hai, who were trained by Mr. Kak.

A Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee in 2015; Mahindra & Mahindra Excellence Awardee, Mr. Mushtaq Kak also runs the Amateur Theatre group - one of the best theatre groups of the state. Recently his play Ishq Malangi staged on day 3 of Qadir Ali Baig Theatre Festival 2017; was applauded by audiences and media for bringing out story of an unconditional love within Kashmir which is in contrast to the image of Kashmir with violence, hatred and terrorism. No doubt, it was a great opportunity for the interviewer to speak to Mr. Kak and witness his simple yet majestic personality and get to capture a glimpse of his

journey of numerous ups and downs. It's a humble endeavour to bring forth a portion of his journey and share it with you.

Q.1. How did you get attracted towards theatre?

Ans. Everybody asks this question. Though many people will tell you many stories about their attraction towards theatre, I don't have any such story. I don't know when it happened, how it happened, what happened, but I was in school when I got attracted towards theatre. I went to Radio station where I met Late Mr. Ratan Kalsi, who is my Guru, and started doing a Punjabi drama with him. This is how I started.

Q.2. As a viewer, this is my general observation that though theatre looks very easy going and entertaining, but it is a tough profession which requires lot of hard work, so it is not a cup of tea for everyone, that's why I was curious whether anyone in your family was interested in theatre and you picked your choice from there?

Ans. No, no one in my family was in theatre, not even far-off relatives was in this profession; however during my school time, my family members used to say in Punjabi '*e ki bhanda wala kaam phad leya*' means '*ye kya bhaando wala kaam pakad liya hai*' (why have you started working as clown). However performing art is at a very good position these days, even people are doing PhDs in Performing Art, separate departments have been opened in universities in this discipline which has provided numerous job avenues to the students. Thus performing arts has come a long way from our time and it is kept in high esteem these days.

Q.3. Have you taken any formal training in dramatics?

Ans. Not at all. I have not taken any formal training, even though I had been head of acting institutes such as served as head of Shri Ram Centre for

Performing Arts for 10 years and apart from this I teach in dramatics department of various universities, conduct workshops here in India and abroad, involve in production work with various companies. In this process of working, I got trained.

Q.4. There is no formal education in Performing Arts in Jammu & Kashmir till date. We see that other disciplines, particularly science discipline is flourishing here, but performing arts is taking backstage. Why?

Ans. The reason is that there are many brokers of culture in Jammu & Kashmir and people are not saying anything. When I was in Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts; I was very enthusiastic to open an institution in my state, I can open my own institution where I could train students as I run my own theatre group. Central Universities have been opened in the state. There should be Department of Performing Arts there. Our kids are going outside to study this, but people are not demanding this department here due to unawareness and so government is also not doing anything. There are departments of Music and Fine Arts in universities but Performing Arts in totality is not there. I kept demanding for this since long. In all interviews I say, “when you are demanding for AIIMS, IIM, IIT, why not a Department of Performing Arts”. It is there in pipeline, only a push is required.

Q.5. Sir, do you think that if such departments are opened in the universities here and people get involved in creative activities, it will help in drawing the people of Jammu & Kashmir to mainstream?

Ans. We are there in mainstream. We go outside to work. Even recently I was in Hyderabad to present one of my plays in a festival. The plight of Performing Arts in Jammu & Kashmir is due to bureaucrats and politicians. There are few

people and groups who are feeding them and in return they are giving these groups some advantages.

Q. 6. I have also visited the Jammu & Kashmir Art and Culture Academy in Srinagar, but I found it in very shabby condition. Why do you think it is ignored like this?

Ans. The most unfortunate tragedy is that our state has no cultural policy. If cultural policy would be there, only then something will happen. All remedy lies in cultural policies of the state.

Q. 7. In Indian diplomacy, the role of cultural diplomacy is very important. We cannot solve every problem with ‘hard diplomacy’, we need sometimes ‘soft diplomacy’ or ‘cultural diplomacy’ in which theatre’s role is supreme. What do you think about it?

Ans. Theatre has a big role in it. When our freedom struggle started, the role of street plays was significant. There is certainly a big role of theatre in cultural diplomacy.

Q. 8. Do you feel, folk theatre in Jammu & Kashmir has also taken back seat?

Ans. No, it is flourishing. There is a lot of funding for Kashmir folk theatre. I don't know about Jammu's folk theatre, but Kashmir's folk theatre is flourishing. In one family, four members have taken agencies and it is a general practice they are fetching a lot of money, I can prove this. Government of India is giving money in lacs, State government is giving money, Tourism Ministry is giving them work, Sangeet Natak Academy is giving them work. You can go to the site of Ministry of Culture and you will be astonished to know that those who are taking lacs of rupees are actually doing nothing and those who are working in mainstream are not taking anything. We don't have any grant of

Ministry of Culture or Sangeet Natak Academy or State department, but our theatre is continuously working. If you will see on social networking sites, we are working non-stop without any funding.

Q. 9. Why do you keep yourself low profile and do not highlight your work in media?

Ans. No, I cannot run after media for everything. I have my own way of working. I cannot call media for every small or big issue. My media factor is little bit weak. I cannot do good marketing. I am not a marketer, but I am a maker. If you will search on Google, you will find that I am doing maximum number of plays, new one with some good content, literary and value based.

Q. 10. Tell us something about the play ‘Ishq Malangi’ which you presented in a festival in Hyderabad recently.

Ans. It’s a mixture of two stories of Jammu. The original stories are written in Punjabi by Khalid Husaain Saheb who belonged to Jammu. It’s a story set in the backdrop of 1940’s Jammu, which is dramatised by Pritam Katoch. This play is being run from last year.

Q. 11. Have you presented this play in Jammu too?

Ans. No. I have not done it in Jammu and I will not do it here. For whom I will do it here? These people cannot see it, they are habituated to watch dance programme. Why should I present it to them? I have not taken money from them for making this play. You will see often that I prepare play, but don’t showcase them in Jammu. I showcase them outside. My second play ‘The Chairs’ is getting ready but it will also showcase it in the festivals outside, not in Jammu. I am fed up with the system here. I cannot do those things which other people do. But I am quite happy; I work according to my own conviction

without any compulsion. I am compelled to work due to my team, my children and my colleagues.

Q. 12. Why do common people not feel associated with theatre? Do you think that theatre has become only an elite medium?

Ans. No, it is not like that. This is our fault. We don't know why we are not able to give them something which can associate them with us.

Q.13. Not here in Jammu, but in Mumbai and Delhi the tickets for theatre are very high. Is it one of the reasons?

Ans. Yes, that could be a reason. However, the sale of tickets is also very high for the theatres in Delhi and Mumbai. In Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts, the sale of tickets used to be as high as 2.5 lacs. There is not such culture here. It will take time.

Q. 14. Sir, you have also worked in films. Do you think that an actor should work according to medium?

Ans. No, these are genres. There are three genres - theatre, film and television. But acting is same. Sometimes few things should be applied more, sometimes applied less; otherwise there is not any big difference in acting. There is nothing like different capsule for one and different tablet for other or different injection for another. Ultimately raw materials are same only some plus-minus is there and projection is there.

Q.15. You told us about challenges before theatre that there are bureaucratic problems; there is no urge among common people for theatre. Who are responsible for this?

Ans. This is our fault not the fault of people. We are not making such plays and we have not been able to generate that urge that they come running for our shows.

Q.16. How do you visualise the future of theatre in Jammu?

Ans. I am not able to understand the future of theatre yet. Sometimes I feel that a lot of theatre is happening, sometimes I feel a serious theatre, and complete theatre is missing. Some people are working, young people are working, but in which direction it will go is hard to predict. It keeps fluctuating.

Q.17. Why do you think people switch from theatre to films and keep working there only? Does their artistic urge not get satisfied in theatre or do they want more projection? What is the reason?

Ans. I feel they come to theatre only for training, but their target remains films. They take training in theatre and focus on films; some cases are there when if they do not do well in films, they come back to theatre.

Q. 18. What message you will give to the next generation who wish to join theatre?

Ans. Whoever wishes to join theatre must ask a question from himself or herself that why he/she is joining theatre. When he/she will find answer to this question, he/she will not get frustrated otherwise without finding a solid reason one may get frustrated and blame other factors for this. One should be very clear why he/she should do it.

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