

THEATRE: A MODE OF COMMUNICATION IN KASHMIR A CASE STUDY OF TWO THEATRE GROUPS OF KASHMIR – FUNTOOSH AND EKTA

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Abstract

Theatre has been an integral part of Kashmiri culture since ancient times. Its genesis in Kashmir can be traced back to 12th century when texts like Nilmata Purana and Kalhana's Rajtarangini were written, which revealed the glory of genre of drama at that time. With the passage of time, this genre of Kashmiri culture saw many ups and downs, but managed to survive and later on thrived. Today, there are many theatre groups flourishing in the valley which make their presence felt significantly with their work in Kashmir. This paper tries to investigate how theatre started and developed in Kashmir and how well it has been successful in communicating to the common people, by taking the case study of two prominent theatre groups of Kashmir – Funtoosh and EKTA.

Keywords

Theatre, Funtoosh, EKTA, Nilmata Purana, Kalhana, Rajtarangin

Introduction

Drama and theatre were intermingled with the Kashmiri way of life since centuries. Kashmiri folk theatre in spite of its present impasse has been an energetic medium since its inception, the need is to recognize it and put it on a new platform, where people can reach it. Historical records like the Nilmata Purana and Kalhana's Rajatarangini (twelfth century) reveal that Kashmiri theatre had attained its glory during that time, which is further supported by theorists & aesthetician Abhinavagupta (tenth century). The golden age of drama in Kashmir lasted 1500 years- from the beginning of Christian era to the fifteenth century (Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009).

The history of Kashmiri drama viz-a-viz the theatre falls into three periods (1) Buddhist and Hindu period which lasted till early fourteenth century (2) The Muslim (Sultanate and Mughal) period which lasted for another five hundred years and (3) the contemporary period of the twentieth century. In Kashmir, according to Nilmata Purana, there were four most important occasions in a year when mostly these music, dance and drama activities were taking place i.e. (1) on religious festivals (2) on social occasions, (3) on agricultural festivals and (4) in winter on first snow fall occasion – so have the music, dance and drama of Kashmir taken the shape and form (Yasir, 2009). There existed a performatory tradition in the vernacular (old Kashmiri) which, unlike the elite drama, was based on the spontaneous folk imitation of elemental life-birth, calamities, death, rebirth- in connection with celebrations and festivals of sowing, reaping and threshing. Thus in the earliest form of Kashmiri theatre, the unschooled and naive Lagun ('imitation'), any person could mimic for mere entertainment a king, a sadhu, a soldier, a bridegroom, or other respectable social figure. The function of this primitive burlesque was only to provoke mirth. Although as a natural

mimetic activity, Lagun did not require professional training, certain people called *kelak* ('buffoons') attained special prowess in it and adopted it as their profession (Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009).

Kashmir has seen many a turbulent times after 12th century –viz- the invasions, attacks, floods, famines, raids, fires and epidemics from time to time and this has resulted in the loss of books, manuscripts and play-scripts. With the advent of foreign rule and invasions, decline in all forms of Kashmiri art and literature was quite an expected misfortune, consequently the folk taste survived in all its manifestations through Bhands of Kashmir in the shape of Bhand-Pather. Though the Kashmiri drama was banished from the royal court but back in the villages the class of artistes – folk-performers, continued to entertain the public in the popular folk-theatre-festivals known as Bhand-Jashan. And thus the theatre of Kashmir survived through the most powerful theatrical form, known as Bhand-Pather. Even during the Muslim rule, Bhands were the popular entertainers and used to cross Pir Panchal range and perform in Jammu, Himachal, Punjab and other areas entertaining people through their humorous plays (Yasir, 2009).

Parallel to the Bhand Pather, there flourished a tradition of devotional theatre that primarily aimed at conveying the message of truth and revealing the pleasure of leading a pious life. A repertoire of Hindu plays was always available to the performers and temple premises were the centers of these activities. However, no early manuscript of such drama is extant; among the preserved ones, *Satich kahvet* ('Touchstone of Truth') is the oldest accessible to readers. The author, Nandalal Kaul Nana (1877-1940), composed it on the life of Raja Harishchander, in rhymed dialogue with lyrical interludes. It was first performed in 1932 at Raghunath Mandir, Srinagar (Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009).

Yasir Bhawani (2009) expresses that "With the splay of modern sensibility, education and political awareness in the early twentieth century, many socio-religious institutions came into being which started staging plays on special occasions, festival, ceremonies and celebrations but it was just a couple of times in a year".

With the establishment after India's independence of a body of writers named the Jammu and Kashmir Cultural Front (later Congress), theatre received serious attention. Several plays were composed and staged to strengthen the Front's political viewpoint. In 1950, a new repertory, Kala Kendra, emerged but after presenting two plays on the socialistic pattern, it returned to the old religious and romantic drama. The Sri Pratap College Dramatic Club appealed to a wide audience with its thoughtful productions, which also deviated from the revolutionary theme. The founding of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) in 1958 initiated a new wave of enthusiasm for non- propagandist theatre, and several amateur clubs emerged in the capital, Srinagar and other towns. Nav Rang Dramatic Club (1964), Rangmanch (1967), Royal Theatre (1967) were few of the popular theatre clubs of that time. In 1974, eighteen repertories working in the valley set up an association called the Kashmir Theatre Federation under the able guidance of Ali Mohammad Lone, Pran Kishore, Som Nath Zutshi, Bansi Mattoo, M. L. Kharoo, Moti Lal Kemmu and Makhanlal Saraf. This led to glorious period in Kashmiri theatre. In the years that followed many people and groups joined the federation and participated in various theatre festivals. Drama Clubs of Nawakadal Girls' College, S. P. College and M. A. Road Girls' College also produced several plays, under Shamla Mufti (1928-) which aroused interest in theatre among college going students, The governments Song and Drama Division organized a dance drama with exaggerated costumes and effects *Esyi esy ti esyi asav* ('We were and Shall Be') in open purlieu of Parbat Hill, which was admired by audience. In 1980's, theatre received fresh impetus as the JKAACL strived to reinvigorate the cultural movement by coordinating the activities of all rural and urban troupes (Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009).

Kashmiri theatre started to get impact badly with start of militancy in the state by mid 80's and theatre came to a halt in the state completely. In between, many attempts to infuse new energy to the theatre were done which were largely unsuccessful. The famous theatre platform, Tagore Hall was also burnt down in 90's which acted as a major blow to the theatre activity of the state. Also due to prevailing militancy many actors and writers fled the state which again weakened the theatre activities further.

After ten years' complete lull, an initiative was undertaken by the National School of Drama (NSD) in 2001 under the supervision of M. K. Raina, a Kashmiri who had made it big on the national stage. A series of workshops that followed resulted in the re-emergence of groups, especially in rural areas. *Su yi* ('He Will Come', 2005), adapted from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by Arshid Mushtaq with two Bandi Pethir clowns in the lead, attracted remarkable attention and was widely admired. The efforts of talented director Yasir Bashir Bhawani adequately enthused school and college students. In 2006, Sangeet Natak Academi and the JKAACL organized a folk festival in Srinagar, where old repertoires of folk drama resurfaced with vigour (Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009).

Literature Review:

Kashmiri theatre has a glorious history of five thousand years (Yasir, 2009). Kashmiri theatre was very popular and well recognized in the society since its inception. It can be gauged by the fact that every house patronized the performing arts – music, dance and drama and young girls and boys were trained by their mothers.

Farooq Fayaz (2008) gives the credit for such inherent culture of music, dance and drama to the exemplary natural beauty and soothing climate of Kashmir. In his words:

Kashmir's distinct Geo-cultural clime has endowed it with matchless artistic merit and skill. The countless treasures of its natural beauty in the form of lofty mountains, lakes, waterfalls and charming flowers and its unique religious plurality offered enough chances for its people to demonstrate their talents in the forms of fables, fairy tales, epics, dramas and poetry.

Receiving ignition and inspiration from natural beauty and its religious colourfulness, theatre activity in Kashmir reached to its height during the ancient period of Kashmir history. There is a definite evidence to prove that in the days of Kshemendra, Kashmir had theatre of its own. A magnificent stage was erected for the royal court where famous dancers, musicians and actors used to perform, which were highly applauded by the King and the people (Yasir,...). In the words of Yasir (2009);

Historically the golden era of our music, dance and drama art forms – the richest performing art forms of Kashmir, was the 4th to 7th century AD, when our music, dance and drama had reached to the zenith of its glory and every village had a stage of its own, where music, dance and drama performances were held.

J. L. Kaul (1970) also supports this in the words, "Though very little of the dramatic literature has descended to us, and that too only in Sanskrit, yet we know that theatre was inseparably associated with royal glamour." He gives the proof of one verse by Lal Ded in the 14th century about "tsamari chhetri rath simhasan/ ahlad netyras tuli-pryenkh" (feathery canopies, chariots, throne/ pleasurable theatre and cushioned swings).

However, this trend did not last long. In 14th century only the glory of Kashmiri theatre started losing its sheen. As Bhawani Bashir Yasir (2009) explains it:

With the advent of Muslim rule (14th century) in Kashmir, the Kashmiri theatre received comparatively a great setback in urban community due to lack of state patronage and public support for obvious reasons. However, it did not disappear completely in Kashmir as the folk theatre form continued to receive applause in the remote and rural areas when they were performing in the folk-theatre-festival called Bhand-Jashan on one hand and entertaining the public on another.

But Farooq Fayaz (2008) considers it as a transfer of tradition from one hand to another hand. He says, “Before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanat in Kashmir, theatre activity in Kashmir was largely associated with socio-religious ceremonies. Both archeological and literary evidences suggest that the theatre performances used to be organised on the eve of festivals and on the birthdays of Lord Buddha, Lord Krishna and other deities. In the backdrop of pre Muslim religious personality of Kashmir, fine arts like singing, sculpture, music, dancing and theatre performances became part of the devotional exercise.” He further says:

With the establishment of Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir, the theatre in tune with earliest Hindu traditions, continued to attain legitimacy from the saintly centres. The only difference was that the place of Maths, Monasteries and Temples was taken by Shrines, Khanqahs and Rishi abodes.

J. L. Kaul (1970), also gives an example of a couplet written by the poet Nur-ud-Din (c. 1400), which says ‘*Kyiliky gari gari resh lagan, / yithi pethir lagan manz rangan*’ (the ascetics of today, like actors, go from door to door, / and perform as if they are on the stage floor). In his words, “Equipped with simple musical instruments like a drum, *dahri* (a rod with iron rings), or *sunray* (*swarnai*, a pipe), such folk performers wandered from house to house, exhibited their skill and got their aliment from those whom they entertained.”

An improved form of Kashmiri folk theatre was the Pethir, a satirical comedy in which several actors exaggeratedly represented individuals, classes or supernatural beings with the purpose of ridiculing human follies, frailties and cruelties. Pethirs on social themes, with musical interludes are still known as Bandi Pethir – a genre preserved through the efforts of Mohammad subhan Bhagat (1927-93), himself born into a family of these performers ((Kaul, 1970 in Lal, 2009). So deep was people’s attachment to these actors of Bhande Pather that during the days of acute crises, prompted by natural calamities like floods, famines, epidemics, fires and recurring earthquake, common masses sought their help by arranging special prayer performances at the Shrines of Sufi and Reshi saints (Fayaz, 2008). In the words of Bhawani Bashir Yasir: Bhand Pather is the oldest and richest art form of our folk theatre, which has preserved our theatre art form in all its manifestations. It has survived in all times only for its popular idiom, versatile metaphor and unique style in content, presentation and performance. These folk and wandering performs are spread all-over Kashmir and have peculiar dress, improvising wit and humour in their acting, dancing and music.

Various Forms of Kashmiri folk theatre

BHAND PATHER

The oldest and popular form of Kashmiri folk theatre is Bhand Pather. The word *Bhand* with its origin in the Sanskrit word “Band” meaning comical behavior. The word Bhand Pather is the combination of two Sanskrit words- Bhand stands for jester and Pather means dramatic personnel. But in Kashmiri parlance, Bhand refers to folk actor and Pather points to dramatic performance with a greater tinge of imitation and exaggeration. (Fayaz, 2008)

Bhand Pather is a distinct Kashmiri performing art combining mimicry, buffoonery, music and dance, which emerged some 2000 years ago and reached its culmination in the tenth century. Certain features have been present in every Bhand Pather over the centuries. Typically it starts with a musical performance which, besides attracting spectators, creates an emotional mood that accord with the intended drama. The three essential components of Bhand music are the oboe- like *swarnai*, a small one sided stick- drum (*nagari*), and a big dhol. At the end of the musical prelude, called *catusak*, the performers sing hymns and pray for the well being of the audience. This is followed by a prologue to the Pather, in the form of a brief conversation among the three main actors who intimate the theme and plot. The principal actors are the *magun* (the leader), *sutardhar* (the commentator), *vidushak* or *maskhari* (the jester), and *pariparsok* or *kurivol* (the lasher). The *magun* produces the play and prays for the people, the *sutardhar* comments on the action, the *maskhari* delights the spectators with his silly tricks and taunts, and the *kurivol* lashes the jester whenever he goes beyond control (Lal, 2009).

Bhands of Kashmir existed in various types and forms which changed with the tide of time and reemerged later in a more acceptable and contemporary forms. Among the present living forms, Wattal Pather is considered the oldest and the Angrez Pather as the latest. The essence of all Pathers is not their antiquity or modernity but flexibility (Fayaz, 2008). The acts performed by the Bhands are not the old stories only but today they incorporate new contemporary themes like social, environment, gender etc which they have accommodated in their acts. Some of the living day Pathers are:

1. Dard Pather: The play portrays the picture of Kashmir under the Dards a symbol for Afghan governing elite.
 2. Gosaine Pather: The Pather focuses on the historical reality that Kashmir has been abode of saints, sadhus, peers and sufis; purity of faith, search for the ultimate reality and universal brotherhood has been the dominant scene over the centuries.
 3. Buhir/ Bata Pathar: Buhir Pathar and Bata Pathar are the two versions of the same theme. These plays portray the characteristics of the most prominent Pandit community as it lived centuries back.
 4. Shikargah Pathar: This dance drama Pathar is named after the great sanctuary- Shikargah laid out by the Mughals when they ruled Kashmir. It is the only Pathar in which dummy masks are used to represent various animals.
 5. Raaze Pathar: The Pathar refreshes the bad memories of the Afghan rule in Kashmir, by depicting the lavish styles of the kings and their courtiers, downtrodden oppressed state of masses, rampant corruption and the high handedness of the officials.
 6. Aarmen Pathar: This Pathar depicts the lifestyle of aarem (vegetable farmers) section of the society.
 7. Waatal Pathar: It is one of the oldest Pathars performed today, depicting lifestyle of the Waatal tribe.
 8. Bakarwal Pathar: This Pathar depicts the life of a backward class called Bakarwals, a shepherd tribe from hilly areas of the state.
 9. Angrez Pather: This Pathar depicts the English oppression of the Kashmiris. (Fayaz, 2008)
- Bandi Pather today has deviated from many of the norms of the classical Pathar, but in spite of the Vicissitudes of the centuries, its rudiments remained intact. It continues as a full blown dramatic form in which several arts like masks, mime, music and dance converge (Lal, 2009).

CHAKRI

It is one of the most popular forms of the traditional music of Kashmir. Depicting the melodic tradition of folk music that evolved in the valley of Kashmir many decades back, Chakri truly upholds the heritage of

culture and arts in the place. The people of Kashmir are quite popular for owing a multi-cultural past. Chakri is an excellent outcome of that very musical history of the valley. The rhythmic accompaniments that are used while singing the folk song of Chakri include Rabab, Garaha and Sarangi. Performed by the folk population of Kashmir, Chakri is considered incomplete without the apt support of the musical instruments. Although a form of ancient folk category, Chakri has today went through some minor variations. For one, the advent of harmonium apart from the usual instruments is quite new. However the basic theme and flavor of Chakri is still intact which shows the passion of Jammu & Kashmir culture enthusiasts. (<http://www.kashmironline.net>, accessed on 2nd October, 2013).

Same instruments are also used to recite Kashmiri and Persian fairy tales and stories viz Yousuf-Zulaikha, Laila-Majnun, Hemal Nagray, Zeeny Mazoor, Hazrati Suleman Bilquis etc. Chakri is followed by the musical rouf. Chakri has been divided into three patterns as per the geographical location. In northern Kashmir the style is more influenced by Poshtu and Afghan style of music whereas the style is quite different in the southern Kashmir where the lead singer generally sings in the higher octave (<http://kashmirimusic.weebly.com>, accessed on 2nd October, 2013).

'Chhakar' has an important place in the Kashmiri folk music tradition. It entertains old and young ladies and gents. The credit of making 'Chhakar' famous in Kashmir goes to the professional artists who, along with their full team, sing and create a musical environment, which is full of fun and entertainment. 'Chhakar' traditionally was confined to villages, though songs, set to 'Chhakri' music, were sung on wedding occasions in the urban areas. The credit of popularizing it goes to Radio Kashmir. We often watch 'Chhakar' programmes on T.V or hear it on All India Radio, in the valley. Chhakar' gayaki is not new. This type of folk song has been in practice for a long time. According to Raj Tarangini, king Bhashmakar had made a type of folk song popular in which, utensils of clay or brass was used. Even today, we find gaagar, chimta, matka, ghada, etc. being used as the instruments with 'Chhakar' gayaki. 'Chhakar' is sung collectively in a group. 'Chhakar' which is sung by professionals has only men in it. A very important feature of 'Chhakar' gayaki is that the singers themselves play the instruments. The style of singing such that the first line of the song is sung by the leading singer. The same line is repeated by other members of the group. The speed of the song gets very fast and the work gets difficult to understand. When 'Chhakar' is in its full swing, people from around get up and start dancing. (Dhar, 2003)

ROUF

'Rouf' is a very interesting and emotional type of folk dance. It is called 'Row', in the capital and 'Rouf' in villages. It is directly related with spring. On the basis of the climatic conditions, there are four seasons in Kashmir. Every season lasts for three months. At the outset of spring,

Kashmiris entertain themselves by dancing and singing. This practice was prevalent even in the ancient times, which is mentioned in Nilmatapurana. It has been proved that 'Rouf' has been inspired by the bee and is the imitation of the lovemaking of the black bee. 'Rouf' might have been originated from 'dwarf dance', of vedic language. In Vedic language, it means a bee, which further developed as Rouf. In 'Rouf' beautiful ladies form two or four groups, consisting of three or four girls. They face each other. Each girl puts her arms on the arms of the other girl. All the girls jointly bring their feet forward and then backward. This is how the dance proceeds. The songs are in question answer form. In Kashmir, in far-flung villages, usually two groups are formed. One group questions and the other answers, musically, while dancing 'Rouf' (Dhar, 2003)

Naind Gyavun

Naind Gyavun is related to farmers folk songs. Naind is the changed form of the word 'Ninad' of Sanskrit. The word 'gyavun' also has originated from gayan of Sanskrit. The tradition of agricultural songs is prevalent in every state and region. The nature of agricultural songs is joyful, exciting and merry making. Songs make difficult tasks of the farmers easy and enhances their zeal. India is an agricultural country. The tradition of agricultural songs is prevalent in every state and region. The nature of agricultural songs is joyful exciting and merrymaking. The people in Kashmir are rice eaters. To prepare the paddy fields is not an easy task. It requires hard labour with proper planning. Singing makes difficult tasks of the farmers easy and enhances their zeal.

When the plants start dancing in the breeze, the farmers come back for cultivation of the soil and weed. Making the fields suitable for agriculture is called 'Naindai'. In harvest season which comes in Kashmir in October and November farmers have to be quick and vigilant in harvesting and carrying grains for storing. They are scared of the uncertainty of rains and snow. They find no breathing time in between, but sometimes give pause to their work. They sit beneath a tree and entertain themselves with singing. It is accompanied by 'Manjira' etc. Since these songs sung in chorus pertain to farming, they are called 'Naindan Chhakar' (Dhar, 2003).

LADISHAH

Ladishah is one of the most important parts of Kashmiri music tradition. Ladishah is a sarcastical form of singing. The songs are sung resonating the present social and political conditions and are utterly humorous. The singer generally called ladishah move from village to village performing generally during the harvesting period. The songs are on issues be it cultural, social or political. The songs reflect the truth and that sometimes makes the song a bit hard to digest, but they are totally entertaining (<http://kashmirimusic.weebly.com>, accessed on 2nd October, 2013).

'Ladishah' is originated from ladi and Shah. 'Ladi' means a row or line-'Shah' has been added with the passage of time with the coming of Muslim rulers. 'Ladishah' is a satirical song, which reflects the society's condition. It is a type of song, which makes people laugh, but at the same time, it is a satire on the existing government. The singers of 'ladishah' remain in groups and carry an instrument with them, which is called 'dhukar' or 'dhukru'. 'Dhukar' is made of iron (1 -1.5 mtrs. long), with metal rings hanging around it. The singers wander from village to village. They generally go to other villages at the time of harvest to earn their livelihood. They are satirists, who compose their songs on the spot, on the issues pertaining to social, small and big evils. Their manner is very humorous and entertaining, but bitter at the same time. (Dhar, 2003)

Purpose of the present study

In the backdrop of above mentioned historical, social and cultural facts about the theatre in Kashmir, our study examines the following questions:

- i. What are the changes in the forms of theatre and communication in Kashmir since its inception to the present era?
- ii. How much the present generation is interested in the age old tradition of theatre in Kashmir?
- iii. What are the challenges before the theatre groups trying to regain the glory of Kashmiri theatre?

Methodology

This study uses hybrid of methodologies, but the most prominent one is Case Study. Out of all functional theatre groups of Kashmir valley, two groups – Funtoosh and Ekta were selected to study deeply. This selection was done on the basis of popularity of the groups and their experiences. Where Ekta started much earlier in 1988, Funtoosh recently came into limelight with its hit events since 2012. This way, we got two samples from two different eras, which has enabled us to compare the challenges and opportunities before both these groups.

Both the groups we have selected are peculiar in themselves. Where EKTA is not only a theatre performance group, but also it trains the Kashmiri people by organising workshops, Funtoosh is presenting the old traditional culture in a new modern flavour.

Information's were collected by meeting and discussing thoroughly with the members of the theatre groups which allowed us not only to gather informations but also to observe their work minutely. Apart from this, personal communications on phones and by e mails were also used. The informations have also been gathered from their official websites. All this helped us in understanding the two selected theatre groups and their communication patterns, their innovations and achievements.

Case Study I: Funtoosh

Funtoosh is a brainchild of four youngsters - Sibath Qureshi (25) Rayes Mohi ud din (28), Abrar Ali (25), Shehla Arif (27) [all film making and mass communication professionals]. It started in 2012, so young, but so vibrant. The idea behind Funtoosh was to provide the Kashmiri people a taste of their own culture in a new style, in a new package with more entertainment, so that the culture they are proud of would not die silently. Funtoosh tried to present the events in a style that appealed the young modern generation so that instead of discarding their own traditional forms of entertainment, they would appreciate them and accept them as a part of their culture. They plan their events at a time, when Kashmiris are reluctant and prefer to stay at home like at the time of 'Chillaikalan' ('Chilai Kalan' is the coldest period of the winter starts from December 21 each year) or at 'Ramzan'. They want to give Kashmiris a message that 'Chillaikalan' is time to celebrate, time to enjoy snow rather than sitting at home.

Though it was risky to organise an event at a time when most of the people are unwilling to come out of their homes and that too for entertainment by spending money to buy a ticket, Funtoosh did it. Here, in Kashmir the culture was to watch such programmes for free, but Funtoosh introduced a culture of buying tickets among Kashmiris to enjoy such theatrical programmes and they are successful in attracting at least 3000 people per day to watch their shows.

The story of Funtoosh is not a fairy tale to come true, rather they had to struggle a lot and still they are struggling. First even their own families did not support them. In Kashmir, if anybody wants to join theatre, he is considered 'useless' and the family becomes weary that how would he survive on such hobbies. This is particularly disturbing and culturally banned for girls. In Kashmiri society, girls cannot perform on stage, otherwise people would react badly, but Funtoosh did it in a very respectable way. They presented girls on stage in traditional attires and made them perform on sensitive issues, which the audience accepted. They proudly claim that they did not face any controversy since they have started. But they complain that people react badly when they come to know what Funtoosh is doing.

They majorly communicate social messages through their dramas. They first take auditions for each event and then themselves train the selected person for the event. They showed me a mime act (silent drama) where boys show by acting how smoking is so harmful for life. Their mime group also got selected in Color television's programme 'India Got Talent'. This was a big breakthrough for Funtoosh and people started recognizing its ability. The confidence level of the participating students also boosted after performing on national television.

Usually, if any event is organised in the valley by Cultural Academy or by National School of Drama, they hire professionals for that, but Funtoosh believes in hidden talent. They do their own audition for each event. Select the potential performers and Shehla Arif train them according to the event. Even for Bhand-Pather, they selected the students and trained them instead of using the professional Bhands, unlike their contemporary groups. This way, not only they introduced innovation and freshness in the performances, but also attached the students' group to the traditional art form of Kashmir. Their performances include from Bhand-Pather to the fusion of Kashmiri musical instruments with bollywood songs, from mime to portraying the traditional arts of Kashmir which are dying now.

The main attraction of Funtoosh is its inauguration which they do with an unique blend of traditional and modern culture. For example, they introduced their first event 'Chillaikalan 2012' with the entry of a robot who said that with the advancement of technology, even 'Chillaikalan' has been modernized and it came in the form of a robot. For promotion of the event they created a mascot of a tall joker, who used to roam around and invite people to the event. It got a very encouraging response from the people as well. In one of the event they inaugurated it by welcoming emperor Akbar.

The excerpts of an interview with one of the founder member of Funtoosh, Mr. Abrar Ali is given below:

1. In your words 'What is Funtoosh'. How would you like to define it?

"Funtoosh" is a house of entertainment where music, theatre, Dance and various other art forms are blended and delivered in a unique and creative way and later exhibited. To us, Funtoosh is more than an event management company now, as we do not only deliver and supply imaginative and reliable entertainment but also design the young and aspiring artists to identify their hidden talents within them. Funtoosh is a family where organizers, artists, clients, and our valued audiences trust each other and work hard sincerely to actually preserve Kashmir's prosperous cultural heritage and language. The impression of our events has been strong enough to make people adapt "Funtoosh" as an only entertainment brand of the valley. Funtoosh is an institution, a mirror of society and its creative components.

2. How Funtoosh started?

Factually saying the real Funtoosh is yet to start. What has stated by now is only the lights and sounds of the action to be seen in future. Funtoosh, 2 years back was only a serious discussion between four crew members almost unknown to each other on the sets of a film being shot in Kashmir. The topic of the discussion was "nobody cares about the culture of Kashmir?" The discussion would have continued and faded out later if all four of us would have not united on the line, 'Let us care'. A month later, we hosted FUNTOOSH Jashne Chillai Kalaan". The event was *mashallah* rated as a best ever cultural festival of the valley. Even the international news agencies carried the news.

3. A brief about the events organized by Funtoosh.

- **"Funtoosh jashne Chillai Kalaan 2012"**

The brand new concept was aimed to bring about a cheerful rendezvous to people in the chilling winter with a blend of culture-entertainment and art. Our intentions were purely to facilitate the young talents in the field of performing arts. The event was witnessed with a huge number of audiences who sat on the edge of their sets during the whole show.

- **"Funtoosh Jashne Bahaar 2012"**

The 'Jashn-e Bahaar' put forth the real picture of beautiful Kashmir through live and exclusive illustration of Kashmir's famous social and cultural history. The set of the show was created as to reflect the real ambiance of the heaven on earth Kashmir. Jashne Bahaar facilitated Kashmir's valued arts and crafts and appreciated those golden hands of Kashmiri artisans who still love to grip themselves towards such arts and keep the same alive in the society.

Such arts included Paper mashie, willow work, wood carving, carpet weaving, and other hand crafted products. The item turned out to be the most liked by the audiences. Kashmiri folk theatre like 'Bhand Pather' and 'kashmir Charki' in music genre were the other attractions on the event. . It was on the sets of Jashne Bahaar that Kashmir's first 'Mime Group' was launched.

- **"Funtoosh jashne Chillai Kalaan 2013"**

Audiences wish to digest a variety of things; different and new. So was the time to think out of box on this event. The concept of LIVING STATUES, first time in Kashmir was brought on the stage of Jashne Chillai Kalaan 2013. Audiences highly appreciated the exhibition of living statues blended with a prayer performance by kids on of the famous Poems of Alama Iqbal (r.a) that is "lab be aati hai dua ban kay tamanna meri"

It is imperative to mention here that "Funtoosh group" was already been selected for the India's Largest TV Reality Show "India's Got Talent" where the "Funtoosh Mime group" (students with the hobbies of dance and acting) qualified up to semi finals round and returned proud with a flag of inspiration to the other aspiring artists of the valley.

- **"Funtoosh Jashne Reat Koal 2013"**

Celebrating all seasons of Kashmir didn't leave the 'Summers of Kashmir as any exception. A different set of artists emerged and expressed their will to exhibit their efforts towards art. A session of training and rehearsals under the guidance of 4 core organizers helped the artists to deliver the performances on time and effectively. Theatre artists, Mime group, dance group, and a twin sister duo performed so beautifully and dynamically on stage that audiences wanted the organizers to repeat all the items once again for them.

- **Funtoosh RAMAZAN ART EXRESSION**

First of its kind, This 2 day Art Exhibition and Competition was organized on the eve of Holy month of Ramazan and was based on a theme 'Islam and Ramazan'.

The initiative was to bring the local youth ESPECIALLY KIDS interested in art of painting together and explore their expression of art towards the month of 'Ramazan'. The competition witnessed a huge response from students, kids and other young art lovers and their parents.

The competition was judged by the renowned artists of valley. The best among the art entries were awarded 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes in senior and junior category.

The first day of the event was witnessed by the participants exploring their talent of painting on the canvas followed by the exhibition and awards on the next day. More than 350 students participated in the event.

Events in Pipeline:

A short film festival, Funtoosh Jashne Harud 2103 and Funtoosh Jashne real koal 2014.

4. What do you communicate through Funtoosh?

FUNTOOSH communicates Society of Artists with the Society of art lovers. Funtoosh communicates love and care of those who have unintentionally been neglected with those who wish to deliver an amount of appreciation to the deserving. So far, Funtoosh has been successful in doing so. With fantastic audience feedback and gratitude, we wish to be in the wave of communication with the people. May almighty help us in future too.

5. How innovative your communication style is?

Living statues, Painted faces, technological icons, beautifully dressed fairies and angels have turned out to be the goal achieving innovations of FUNTOOSH. We achieve this by approaching each brief on a personal level, listening to and understanding the needs of our artists, audiences, sponsors, therefore providing a creative, realistic and aesthetically correct content of Funtoosh Event has become a permanent trend by the organizers.

6. How is Funtoosh different from other such groups?

We ourselves do not strictly believe that we are different. Yes, our audiences make us feel so. We believe other people too can step forward and contribute towards the social beliefs, morals, culture and valued tradition. Our modes of promotion are diverse like generally a "Mascot" is made to promote Funtoosh events in public places like parks, markets, shopping malls. The content of our events has been so interestingly consistent and so distinctive that our fans eagerly keep waiting for our next events. Thank you.

Our team comprising of four core members namely Sibath Qureshi (25) Rayes Mohi ud din (28), Abrar Ali (25), Shehla Arif (27) [all film making and mass communication professionals] look forward to continue such events and production works in future in more powerful and innovative ways. Those which shall not only provide the new stage for the young talents via theatre and new art forms but shall also contribute towards the society in a positive manner by exhibiting the social messages and various awareness programs.

OTHER PROJECTS/ACTIVITIES DONE

- ▶ A documentary film for Department of Animal husbandry J&K in 2011.
- ▶ Health and IT segments for Doordarshan Srinagar Kashmir in 2011.
- ▶ Documentary film 'Glaciers' for DD Srinagar in 2012.
- ▶ Cinematography for the Urdu serial 'Kashish Rishton Ki' for DD Srinagar in 2012
- ▶ Sound designing for the Kashmir first 35mm feature film 'PARTAV' in 2012
- ▶ Radio programs for NRHM in 2013
- ▶ 'Kashmiri handicrafts show' for J & K Bank in 2012.
- ▶ Radio programs for Rural Development department J&K in 2013.
- ▶ Organized a 3 days Poetry festival for 'Indian council for Cultural Relations' at Radio Kashmir Srinagar.
- ▶ Theatre play "*bijli choor*" for Power development department J&K.
- ▶ 'Quit smoking' mime performed for J&K Bank 2013.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Semi finals of the reality TV show India's Got Talent for Colors TV in 2011.

- 3 years consecutive award winner of the state photography exhibition and competition for years 2010, 2011, 2012.
- Pre semi finalists of the reality TV show India's Got Talent for Colors TV in 2012.
- National award as "Best documentary film for the film Glaciers'
- Rated as state's Best Entertainment Brand by Hindustan Times for the year 2012.

Case Study II: EKTA – Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Academi

The Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi or EKTA was founded by Bhawani Bashir Yasir in 1988, but it could not sustain due to militant insurgency in 1990. It again came into existence in 2004 and gave a new birth to the declining theatre movement in Kashmir. In the words of founder of EKTA, Bhawani Bashir Yasir, “The theatre of Kashmir has suffered the greatest debacle during the last twenty years of political turmoil. No serious and sensible theatre activity was possible to be organised even by the leading institutions of theatre movement anywhere in rural or urban areas of the Valley. The situation has deteriorated to the worst when there has been no serious effort from the government bodies to save the theatre from such a debacle. So much so I believe that a nation without theatre is a dead nation.”

Describing his vision about the theatre in Kashmir, he further says, “Being a torch-bearer of theatre movement in Kashmir, having been professionally involved and active in theatre for the last 40 years and the only alumni of National School of Drama, New Delhi permanently based in the valley, I feel it my moral duty rather national obligation to take all possible and practical measures to revive, rejuvenate and boost-up a concerted national theatre movement in Kashmir, which alone would help it to earn legitimacy and popular support.”

Highlighting the political unrest in the valley and its repercussions on Kashmiri theatre, he says, “Having been directly and deeply observing and witnessing the ongoing political happenings, State’s apathy towards our theatre and its effect and impact on our cultural ethos, I am motivated rather moved by the circumstances to bridge the gulf between the people and the society and to work for rebuilding our rich socio-cultural ethos vis-à-vis theatre of Kashmir.”

Further emphasizing on the need of such an institution in Kashmir, he says, “This is primary need of the hour to explore, innovate and re-generate a new national theatre movement in Kashmir. And to make concerted effort in that direction, there is a great need of an independent Theatre Academy in Kashmir. Hence – the EKTA.”

Achievements

- EKTA conducted month long theatre workshops conducted with student participation from all the districts of Srinagar.
- State level seminars held on various prospects of theatre in Kashmir like; Prospects for Institutionalization of Professional Theatre of Kashmir, 2011, Challenges to contemporary theatre of Kashmir, 2009.
- State level mega theatre festivals held like; Megha Budshah Theatre Festival – 2011 held at Abhinav Theatre, Jammu.
- Budshah Theatre Award -2011, EKTA launched five awards in Theatre in the category of Playwright, Direction, Acting, Stage-Craft and Life Time Achievement in the field of theatre.
- Many theatre plays like Aka Nandun, Aes Chha Baeqil, Jamhoriyet Zindabad, Turnove produced over the years at EKTA.

- Many English plays translated and performed at EKTA.

Limitations

- The informations about EKTA were gathered mostly from their website and their annual report, because most of the members of EKTA are Kashmiri Pandits and they could not be accessed as they do not stay in valley.
- We did not get any chance to view any of the theatrical performances live by both the groups as they conduct such performances at a certain time and in case of EKTA, archives were also not available.
- Since very little literature is available on the theatre of Kashmir, we had to rely on the informations provided on websites, blogs and few books.

Conclusion

In spite of the rich tradition of theatre in Kashmir, now a days it is not being encouraged by the society. Especially for girls, it is considered as a prohibited area. The experiences of Funtoosh have shown that young generation is interested in theatre and many of them want to make it their profession, but their families do not support them. Also there is no financial backing for such hobbies. Though EKTA provides training to the youngsters through workshops, still they could not attract large number of participants. Funtoosh tries to attract youngsters by presenting the old traditional theatrical forms in new modernized flavour, so that it can keep pace with the changing time and interests of the people. Its innovative communication style attracts a large number of people. But still theatre has to go a long way in Kashmir in order to revive its age old glory.

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