Theatre Legend Ebrahim Alkazi Passes away / Manohar Khushalani



Ebrahim Alkazi

Theatre doyen and legendary Pedagog Ebrahim Alkazi, who shaped proscenium theatre in India, died peacefully on Tuesday afternoon after suffering a heart attack, his son, Feisal Alkazi, informed us. Feisal told me the whole family was proud of his fathers humongous achievements. A career spanning 74 active years he passed away at 94.

The funeral will take place tomorrow at Jamia Milia VIP Grave Yard. But outsiders have been politely told to stay away, for their own safety, away due to the prevailing pandemic. The entire family comprising among others Feisal Alkazi, Radhika Alkazi, Amal Allana, Nissar Allana were present in Delhi.

Mr. Alkazi, has been the longest serving director of the National School of Drama, produced plays such as Girish Karnad’s “Tughlaq”, Mohan Rakesh’s “Aadhe Adhure” and

Dharamvir Bharati's "Andha Yug". He mentored generations of actors, including Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri. M.K. Raina, Bhanu Bharti, Sonu Krishen, Manohar Singh, Surekha Sikri, Uttara Baokar, Dolly Ahluwalia, Ram Gopal Bajaj, the list is endless.

According to Wikipedia, He was born in Pune, Mahrashtra, Alkazi was the son of a wealthy Saudi Arabian business man trading in India and a Kuwaiti mother.[8] He was one of nine siblings. In 1947, the rest of his family migrated to Pakistan while Alkazi stayed back in India.[9] Educated in Arabic, English, Marathi & Gujarati Alkazi was schooled in St. Vincent's High School in Pune and later St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. While he was a student at St Xavier's, he joined Sultan "Bobby" Padamsee's English theatre company, Theatre Group. Thereafter he trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London in 1947.[7] There he was offered career opportunities in London after being honored by both the English Drama League and the British Broadcasting Corporation, however, he turned the offers down in favor of returning home to rejoin the Theatre Group, which he ran from 1950 to 1954.[3]

Early on in his career he got associated with the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group, which included M.F.Husain, F.N.Souza, S.H.Raza, Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta, artists who were later to paint from his plays and design his sets.[7] In addition to his directing, he founded the *Theatre Unit Bulletin* in 1953 which was published monthly and reported on theatre events around India. Afterwards, he established the School of Dramatic Arts and became the principal of Bombay's Natya Academy.[3]

As the director of the Nationa School of Drama Alkazi revolutionised Hindi theatre by the magnificence of his vision, and the meticulousness of his technical discipline. Here he was associated with training many well-known film and theatre actors and directors. While there he created the

Repertory Company in 1964 and directed their productions until he left.

He also founded Art Heritage Gallery in Delhi with his wife, Roshan Alkazi.

Alkazi won many of India's most prestigious awards, creating an awareness of theater's sensibility and successfully mixed modern expression with Indian tradition.[3]

He was the first recipient of Roopwedh Pratishtan's the Tanvir Award (2004) for lifetime contribution to the theatre.[11] He has received awards including the Padma Shri (1966), the Padma Bhushan (1991), and India's second highest civilian award the Padma Vibhushan in 2010.[12]

He has also been awarded twice by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in Direction in 1962, and later the Akademi's highest award the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship for lifetime contribution to theatre.