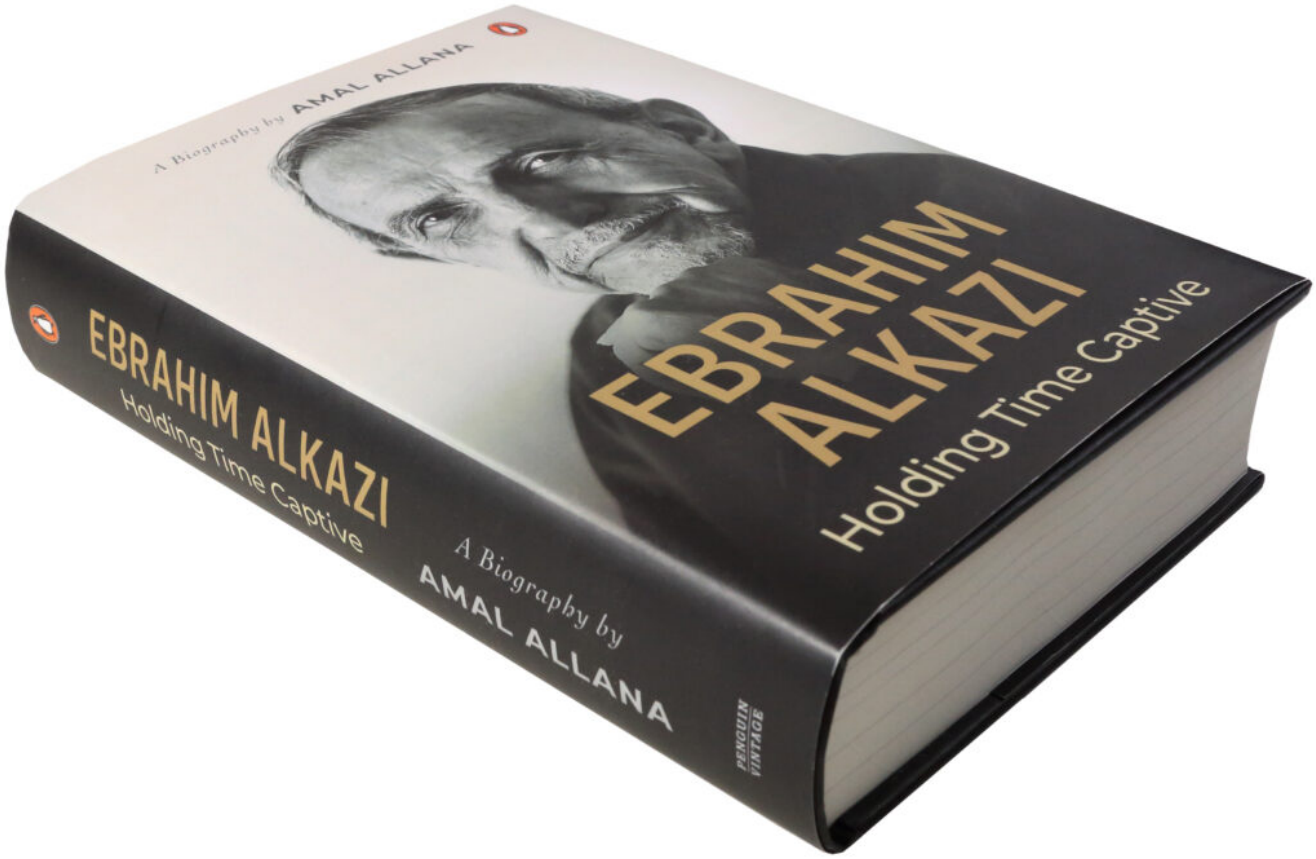
Ebrahim Alkazi: An uninhibited scholarly Tale of a Towering Thespian

Review by **By Manohar Khushalani**



The launch and discussion at the India International Centre (IIC) of a multilayered narrative, “Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive,” shed light on the life and legacy of Ebrahim Alkazi, a towering figure in twentieth-century Indian theater and visual arts. Amal Allana, Alkazi’s daughter, presents a meticulously researched account of her father’s life, offering insights into his role in shaping the cultural landscapes of Mumbai and Delhi from the 1940s to the 2000s.

Ebrahim Alkazi, renowned as a theater doyen and pedagogue, passed away at the age of 94, leaving behind a monumental legacy in Indian theater. His career spanned an impressive 74 years, during which he directed iconic plays such as Girish

Karnad’s “Tughlaq” and mentored generations of actors, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. Alkazi’s upbringing, education, and early associations with the Bombay Progressive Artists’ Group laid the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions to Indian theater.

As the longest-serving director of the National School of Drama, Alkazi revolutionized Hindi theater with his visionary approach and technical precision. His establishment of the Repertory Company and the School of Dramatic Arts showcased his commitment to nurturing talent and promoting theatrical excellence. Beyond theater, Alkazi’s influence extended to the visual arts, as evidenced by his founding of the Art Heritage Gallery in Delhi with his wife, Roshan Alkazi.

Allana’s biography not only celebrates her father’s professional achievements, but also delves uninhibitedly into his personal life, providing a nuanced portrait of a multifaceted individual. Through interviews, archival research, and personal recollections, Allana, herself a renowned and celebrated theatre director, offers readers a glimpse into Alkazi’s emotional journey and his profound impact on modern Indian cultural history.

The discussion at the IIC, moderated by Naman Ahuja, further enriched the narrative, with Allana engaging in conversation about her father’s legacy and the process of writing his biography. Dramatic readings by two actors, Sonam Kalra and Rehaan Engineer, added depth and resonance to the event, underscoring the theatricality inherent in Alkazi’s life and work.

Overall, “Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive” stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of a cultural icon. Allana’s narrative, both enthralling and critically astute, pays homage to Alkazi’s monumental contributions while situating him within the broader context of modern Indian cultural history.

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An Uninhibited Tale of a Towering Thespian

BOOK LAUNCH: *Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive by Amal Allana (Penguin Random House: 2024)*

DISCUSSANTS: *Amal Allana in conversation with Naman P. Ahuja*

READINGS BY: *Sonam Kalra and Rehaan Engineer*

COLLABORATION: *Penguin Random House*

22 March 2024

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Alkazi, renowned as a master-stroke and pedagogue, passed away at the age of 94, leaving behind a monumental legacy in Indian theatre. His career spanned an impressive 74 years, during which he directed iconic plays such as Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, and mentored generations of actors, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. Alkazi's upbringing, education and early associations with the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group and the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions to Indian theatre.

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• MANOHAR KHUSHALANI