Folk Theatre of India: Bhand Pather

The word ‘Bhand’ means the traditional and the age-old folklore entertainers from India, Nepal, Pakistan. The form had thrived and grown manifolds during the peaceful times in the valley. However, with the rise of anti-societal elements, the art form has given the theatre form a huge setback. Society must progress towards peace and let the lost theatre form regain its formal glory.

AKA-NANDUN by Bhawani Bashir Yasir

The Play

The play *Aka-Nandun*, which means 'The Beautiful', is based on a mystic legend, about a Hindu king who has seven daughters but no son. When he gets old he prays for a son who could inherit his kingdom. A jogi comes in his dream and blesses him with a son on the condition that he should name the son Aka-Nandun and promise to return him to the jogi when he is 12 year old.

The son is born, named Aka-Nandun, brought up with royal care, and sent to the royal Pathshala to learn Vedas and Puranas. When he is 12, the saint appears before the king. The king begs the Jogi to take his whole kingdom and wealth, but not his son. The jogi declines and orders the king to slaughter his son, and orders the queen to cook him for his feast. When the feast is ready, he orders the queen to divide it in 11 plates – eight for ladies, one for the king, one for the saint, and the eleventh for Aka-Nandun. Then he orders the queen to call out for Aka-Nandun to enjoy the feast. The queen calls for Aka-Nandun, who, to the surprise of all, appears. The jogi disappears and all sing the glory of the jogi.

Director's Note

Kashmir has a distinctive culture, based on the fusion of Shiv-mat and Islam, which has given birth to a tolerant, mystic and socio-religious philosophy during the last seven hundred years. And this is mostly known as Kashmiriyat. *Aka-Nandun* is based on a mystic Kashmiri poetic fable, written by mystic poets and endorsed popularly, and which emphasises the highest sacrifice of ones greed, lust, power, ego and worldly luxuries, and submit to the highest authority of the Almighty. The play translates this through the folk format of Daastaan with sublime actions, theatrical visuals and traditional music and dance.

The Playwright & Director

Bhawani Bashir Yasir, born at Doru-Shahabad in Anantnag district of Kashmir, is a post-graduate in Kashmiri literature, a renowned Playwright and Theatre Director, who after passing out from National School of Drama, New Delhi in 1987 with distinction in Stage Craft, preferred to go back to his state to institutionalise the theatre of Kashmir on professional standards, in line with Kashmiri sensibilities. He established EKTA in 1988, now internationally recognised as the authentic theatre institution of the state.

The Group

Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi, popularly known as EKTA was founded in 1988 by Bhawani Bashir Yasir after passing out from NSD. EKTA organises a national theatre festival known as Budshah Theatre Festival, in which plays from all regional languages of the state, and special entries from rest of India are also invited. EKTA has participated in many national and international theatre festivals.

Cast & Credits:

King (Ram Gopal)	Bhawani Bashir Yasir
Queen (Sonei Maal)	Shaheena Nazir / Haseena Sofi
Seven Princesses	Nusrat Jalal, Rukhsana Tantrey, Tabbasum Aslam, Iqra Binti Hassan,

Naazima Yusuf, Kousar Aejaz,

Khushbu Bashir

Aka-Nandun Arhaan Nisar

Tabeena Manzoor

The Hermit (Jogi) Aamir Hussain Mir

Raj-Guru Farooq Ahmad Mir

Daastaango Bashir Lone

Chorus (Dancers & Singers) Nisar Ahmad Rah, Mir Shaukat Hussain,

Syed Muzamil Rasool, Asrat Hussain,

Junaid Ahmad Rather

Harmonium Shaukat Bhat (Sultanpuri)

Rabaab Farooq Ahmad

Saarangi Mohd. Amin

Dholak/Nout Tariq Ahmad

Stage Props & Syed Muzamil	Nisar Ahmad Rah
Costumes Yasir / Bashir Lone	Bhawani Bashir
Light Design Bhawani	M. Muzamil Hayat
Production Controller	Gulzar Ganaie
Stage Manager	Mir Shaukat Hussain
Associate Director Bhawani	M. Muzamil Hayat

Music, Design & Direction **Bhawani Bashir Yasir**

Project Half Widows, in partnership with IAWRT and APDP – Info by Iffat Fatima, Filmmaker

The project ”**Half Widows”** is a three year media project. Which began in 2006. The project is a partnership between International Association of Women in Radio and Television(IAWRT), a forum for personal contact and professional development among women broadcasters worldwide and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) Kashmir. APDP is an association of the relatives of the victims of **Enforced Disappearances**, campaigning collectively to seek justice and to get information on the whereabouts of the missing members of their families. The project conceived and executed by Iffat Fatima is supported by FOKUS, a Norwegian based organisation which by supporting project based cooperation between Nowegian and their partner organisations in the south, aims to contribute to the improvement of economic, social and political status of women world wide.

The project is about the struggle of the family members of the disappeared persons in Kashmir.who have spent vast sums of money, time, resources and energy in a legal system that has systematically failed to provide justice to the victims. Enforced disappearance is not recognized as a crime under Indian law. Specifically the project is about women whose husbands have disappeared and are missing in the more than decade old violence in Kashmir. These women known as **half widows** in Kashmir, are living in a state of limbo, suspended in a space where they lead a life of uncertainity and anxiety. There is no closure for them to pick up the threads of their lives and move on. Being young and vulnerable they are under

the pressure of their family and society to stay within the framework of marriage and conform to a marital status, while as the reality is that they are without husbands. Their lives are torn apart and their status undefined, subject to Islamic legal procedures which are ambiguous and determined by local interpretations.

APDP was founded in 1994 by Parveena Ahangar whose 17-year-old son was abducted and never heard of again In 1994. Parveena filed a habeas corpus petition in the Srinagar High Court. With the help of human rights activists and lawyers more and more petitions continued to be filed. More and more family members got together, went to court together, held demonstrations together. Thus began a movement, a collective struggle formalized as APDP. The testimonies of the members of APDP and the documentation of cases of disappeared persons in Kashmir indicate that the practice of enforced disappearance is widespread and systematic. Almost 8000 people are thought to have disappeared, some as young as 13 or 14 years old. A large number of disappearance cases remain undocumented for various reasons, including fear of reprisal allegedly by the security forces.

Media Documentation

The media project seeks to document the personal experiences of these women and the stories which emerge from these experiences through the production of a documentary film. The documentary film will explore issues of memory , violence and healing and be a space for women whose voice is buried in the larger political and militaristic discourse to narrate their experiences with violence from their own perspectives. Besides a video documentary the project also includes 3 to 4 short video magazines which highlight immediate concerns and problems confronted by women as theystruggle to get legal assistance and information about their family members who are missing.

However the larger objective of the project is to assist and support the APDP effort to launch a long term self sustaining information and advocacy campaign against “Disappearances” and to build awareness about its impact on women Community level participation and networking is an important component of the campaign. The process of documentation, dissemination and distribution is being undertaken through a consultative process with APDP members, a network of organisations, activists, academics and practitioners. Through workshops, and conferences APDP members are trained to acquire long term organisational and media skills to be able to carry on the advocacy campaign independently. The project raises important issues of human rights, peace and justice confronting other countries as well. It will generate material that has international resonance as well as relevance and will urge policy makers and those who wield power to address the concerns of human rights , democracy and justice.

Source: IAWRT, Iffat Fatima