

‘The space for serious plays is shrinking’



SEEKING CREATIVE FREEDOM Kumud Mishra feels there is no finite truth

Back on stage with “D for Dhumrapan”, actor Kumud Mishra says the motive of arts is to react to things happening around us and this should not be seen as furthering somebody’s agenda

From a love guru in Rockstar to a wrestling coach in Sultan, Kumud Mishra is making his presence felt with his small but impactful roles. But it is stage, where Kumud really belongs. He has an enviable capacity to make you feel the inner urges of the character he essays. The versatile actor will now be seen in D for Dhumrapan, a comic play set in the smoking area of a corporate building where appraisals, politics, and relationships are being discussed. It will be staged in Delhi as part of the ongoing Old World Theatre festival in New Delhi. Here he talks about his understanding of theatre, why censorship cannot work and his career in film industry.

Excerpts:

How do you place humour in your life and why it is important on stage?

Humour is as important for a play as it is important for our life. The good thing is there is variety in it now but we are still considered to be weak in terms of sense of humour. Phuhad or cheap comedy tradition has its own space and society will decide its future. Comedy should be celebrated in every form – be it slapstick or dark humour. The way I do it, I do not want to compromise with my form even though there are only 20 people present for the show. I do not mean that others who are not doing my kind of work should shut down. Problem begins when people want others to conform to their ideas. There is no finite truth; only personal truths.

How do you see contemporary theatre and do you think there is a lack of young playwrights and original writing?

The quantity has risen and as far as quality is concerned, I cannot say much because I have not seen many of the plays. There are various regions where new things are happening. In Mumbai, more vibrant theatre happens, especially by the younger lot. There are playwrights like Manav Kaul who has been writing original plays for 10-12 years and his process and fascination with the bizarre and his response to criticism is overwhelming. Abhishek Majumdar, the Artistic Director of the theatre group Indian Ensemble in Bangalore, is doing path-breaking work in contemporary playwriting and I have done Muktidham with him. So there is a lot of work happening.

How can theatre show the politics of the present world?

There are two ways of doing it. Either you present the idea as it happens in reality or you question those ideas as a reaction. The motive of arts is to react to all those things happening around us. Theatre has the capacity to react in a certain way and IPTA has been a great example but these days a smaller fraction of people are doing it. The reaction has no relationship with any party or system. It is related to society. It is tragic that whatever one does in reaction, it is seen in relation to a political party or a person and everyone uses that for their own motives. Anything cannot be classified as right or wrong, just because one sees it that way. There has to be a debate and discussion which makes any form of art more vibrant, relevant and visionary.

How do you react to corporatisation of theatre events?

I believe that whoever approaches for the show – be it an individual, institute or a corporate – any festival which comes without any agenda is beneficial for us. With agenda I mean censorship of words and events in the play. The selection of plays can be there like what happens in Mahindra Theatre Festival and Khidkiyan, organised by Mukesh Chhabra. The space for serious plays, which can challenge you and the system, is shrinking. I remember in one city we were informed that we cannot speak about politics, abuse and religion. If this is coming from anywhere in the country, it is alarming for us. If conditions are already set, how will creative freedom survive? But we cannot generalise as still there are fora to present your views. I am against any sort of censorship as I think after a certain age, an individual should decide what he wants to consume. Creative freedom cannot and should not be demanded as it is a part of Indian tradition.

You are now regularly seen in films. Does an actor have to do films to get recognition?

I do not think any theatre actor needs to get into films for recognition nor film actor require to prove themselves on stage. I have not done theatre because it may make my path to films, and I do not buy the idea that films are one step ahead of theatre. Had I been thinking that way, I would have left theatre many years ago. Theatre is my personal need. I never took my performance as an audition for the film director sitting in the audience. When I am doing theatre, I only concentrate on it. And filmmakers are giving me decent work and it helps me earn and, in a way, supports my theatre as well.

Do actors from stage have an edge in films?

If someone thinks that theatre makes you a better actor, it is arrogance. They also say theatre artist brings a certain kind of colour to film roles, but believe me, theatre main bhi gadhe hote hain! Like our society has. Film actors are equally trained in their own grammar. It is not guaranteed that a trained actor is a better actor and it depends on how a person uses that training. Even a non-actor can do good roles if directed properly. Earlier character artists were given roles which they played for their entire lives but these days there are varieties to it, and in that space, actors with theatre background are doing well.

(Directed by Akarsh Khurana, "D for Dhumrapaan" will be staged on October 13 as part of the ongoing Old World Theatre Festival at India Habitat Centre.)