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The Celebration of the indigenous Culture and Identity in the plays of AJOKA Theatre

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Abstract

The writers of subcontinent reacted against the idea of ascendancy under the horrid shades of imperialism by thrashing back the luggage of hegemony and cultural imperialism. Being a colony of British Empire for a long time, they lived and experienced as prisoners bounded in the shackles of European cultures. With their independence as free nation it was compulsory to wash the stains of British culture and rejuvenate their local culture and identity. For this, the writers and artists of subcontinent have been trying to celebrate and promote their native culture and indigenous identity local language at national and international level through their works and presentations. Their

participation for the revival of indo-Pak history, culture, heritage and traditions helped them to save and glorify their identity as nations. The present research aimed at exposing the efforts of a well renowned Pakistani theatre, Ajoka theatre for celebrating the indigenous culture and identity of subcontinent in its plays and presentations. Ajoka theatre has revealed to the imperialists through the excellent presentation of its plays that Pakistani nation is rich in its culture. Its depiction of villages, lake areas, local traditions, deserts like “Rohi” labor class, traditional costumes and music is the real picture of indo-Pak culture. Ajoka theatre brought on the stage the characters like Bullah and Dara Sheikho for the reassertion and glorification of their indigenous culture and identity. The study also explored that Ajoka Theatre had worked not only at international level to present the positive image of Pakistan but raised the voice at home ground by touching the sensitive issues like gender discrimination, dictatorship, identity, poverty, class struggle and sectarianism.

Keywords: Cultural imperialism; identity; civilization; hegemony; sexual discrimination; language.

1. Introduction:

A nation is recognized through its culture as it wouldn't be wrong to say that a culture is the real identity of any people. The native culture of subcontinent has many folded layers of humanity, brotherhood, and fertility which are the most important chapters in the book of sub continental history. The tragedy is that this vivacious culture came under the threats and attacks of imperial powers which did their best to tear it into pieces as they did the parts of its land. The land was in fact raped by these colonizers who not only divided them physically but also spiritually. Before the Whites invasion, the people in India were living happily without any biasness of religion, race and sector. Muslims, Sikhs, Hindu, Kashmiris, Bengali were one nation sharing the same bonds of culture, heritage, history and civilization. The colonizers not only generated the germs of intolerance, and enmity among them but disfigured it by snatching its real identity and deforming its culture. Though this land got independence in the 1947, but remained under the influence of slavery for many decades. The people of this land suffered a lot as they were being ruled for centuries but the most painful is that at the time of departure, the colonizers took away their culture, originality, beauty, and identity with them and left them with the haunting shadows of insecurity, anxiety and bigotry. Since the exit of the British from India, the peoples of this area are doing struggle to reassert and revive their culture, civilization and identity. The efforts from literary groups are really noticeable as with the power of their pens, they are producing such type of art and literature which can show to the world their original face that has been mimicked by the robbers. Among such major active groups who are working for the welfare of this nation, Ajoka Theatre is an important name.

Pakistan's prominent theatre "Ajoka theatre" has been working since 1984 to exhibit to celebrate the culture and identity of subcontinent through its plays and performances.

Ajoka theatre was established by a well known drama director Madeeha Gouhar in Pakistan in late nineteenth century. Shahid Nadeem, the eminent Pakistani writer also worked with Madeeha to support this group of theatre. The Theatre got its popularity as it touches the issues that are very close to the heart of people of subcontinent. The most important point which makes this theatre unique among other theatres is that it thinks and works beyond the boundaries. From the day of its creation, it is working for the celebration of shared indigenous Indo-Pak culture and identity. Since last four decades, Ajoka group has been working with the collaboration of other Asian groups of theatre particularly its chemistry with the sub continental organizations, groups and artists are praiseworthy. Madeeha and Shahid Nadeem are personally making efforts for the revival and celebration of shared culture and identity of subcontinent.

The well known theatre of Pakistan, Ajoka Theatre is on its way of continuous struggle to present the worldwide themes through its dramas like like "Bullah" and "Dara" to increase the positivity among the both masses of Pakistan and India. Bullah Shah and DARA Shekho are the great and inspiring figures in the history of India and. The aim of Ajoka Theatre in presenting such characters is to remind its people that they have their own culture and identity. The writer of the play "Bullah" Shahid Nadeem said: "It is Baba Bulleh Shah's kramat 'if a play can open borders, what more could playwright want?'" (Nadeem12)

Bulla is a beautiful performance of Ajoka group written by Shahid Nadeem and directed by Madiha Gohar has been performed in India more than one times which has proved a viaduct between two Punjabs. Ajoka Theatre advocates the stance that the people of subcontinent have always promoted the ideas of equality, brotherhood, sharing which are the core values of their culture. The heroic figures like Bulla, Sheikho are known as lovers and servants of humanity. Ajoka team has always brought on stage the human being presenting the glorious and vibrant culture and identity of undivided India. After independence, Pakistan and India have not been in good terms with each other for many reasons, at such critical time; this Pakistani group accepted the charge to endorse the message of mutual cooperation and shared harmony among the sub continental patches of land. For the purpose to provide a new life to the dead culture and identity of Subcontinent, this theatre group has been in touch with the writers and poets of India and Bangladesh to exhibit and

support the same heritage and civilization. Along with the band of its actors and performers, Ajoka Theatre's directors and producers went through the Waagaah boundry to take part in the opening ceremony of Pakistani theatre festival in India. At that time of celebration Shahid Nadeem claimed "that they were on the mission to present this play as a gift for the viewers of India which will surely assist them to open the shut doors of their cultural and historical memories." (Nadeem, 2008)¹

Ajoka theatre has conveyed to the world that Pakistani nation is rich in its culture as plays the plays like "Kala Meda Bhes", "Lo phir Basant Aai", "Dukhni", "Baari", "Dara" give the best presentation of Punjabi and Sindh culture. The terms like "*Aai Boo Kata*". For this the setting of the plays has been arranged in villages, Cholistan, talk, and other beautiful regions of Punjab and Sindh. The staged is arranged with colorful and bright costumes, bangles etc. The sound system of the plays has been furnished with the help of "*qwallis*", songs, "*Jhumari* and *dholic*", bangles etc, Ajoka theatre has made it crystal and clear to the face of world that Pakistan has its own individuality and has its worthy culture and rich languages. As a very famous columnist, and advocate of human rights, Professor Dr. Tareq Rahman claims that Ajoka group of theatre has beautifully demonstrated cultural colors of Pakistan and India that it reflects the remarkable episode of history. It has denied all the taboos of regions and religions. The mentioned critic expressed that the Ajoka team has introduced the people to the innovative ideals and used these as fruitful resource to support and expand the local culture of subcontinent. In this way, the culture has been used as source to bring a societal transformation and unique recognition of the people of this area. Ajoka theatre has been working for the betterment and welfare of people as it has been presenting the plays to give the audience pleasure as well as social awareness. Ajoka was established by a small but daring group of cultural defenders in late nineteenth century during the ruler ship of military officer. This time in the history of Pakistan is known as politically and culturally oppressive regime because the activities for the development of art and culture were being banned by the government. In Pakistan, this age was very like puritan age in its essence and spirit as there was ban on artistic activities.

2. Literature Review:

¹ Nadeem, Shahid . television interview, "The Alternative" , *DAWN News*, 20 May 2008

Ajoka theatre is one of the important pillars of arts and humanism in Pakistan as it that has been concerning with themes of liberty, freedom, patience, tolerance, individual rights, collective efforts for cultural celebration, historical glory, constitutional democracy and the rule of law through its plays and presentations. Its adherence to the individualism is for their basic rights as it has been performing such plays and dramas which are aimed to convey the message of humanity, love, peace, harmony liberty and to make the citizens cognizant about their rights and duties. It does not only focus on just expression of thought, conscience or discussion, but demands of fair dealing, freedom of thought, justification in the political and social spheres of life. It demands that the higher authorities and the leading departments of social life must be justified and fair in their dealings with its public. In any community, every individual must be given respect, space, honor and value and particular valuable place in the society. There has always been the dominance of powerful over the weak ones. The powerful class takes hold and preeminence on the other classes of any community. The controlling or ruling sector in any country use culture as an apparatus to guide and to promote the desired traditions and values. The literature and culture has always been important sources for establishing the identity and ideology of any nation. A well known critic Erven presented an imperative research article about the background and performances of Pakistani theatres in which he says that such type of local theatre contrary to the professionally well developed European theatre offer a more clear and effective cultural phenomenon to capture the spontaneous response to the repressive bodies of a nation. Pakistan and India has same history, heritage, culture and civilization. Both had been one once a time, geographically and culturally. These two nations have equal colors of cultures and language, but after partition, these two nations were torn into pieces geographically and culturally. Both lands had to suffer a lot for establishing and presenting their different ideologies to the world. Pakistan has to face many obstacles in establishing an independent and moderate theatre as there were groups of the conservative thinking having some extremist and fanatic ideologies that were not in the favor of same identity. They intentionally ignored and rub the vibes expressing the impacts of Indian culture as they think it as burden from Indian society on Pakistani culture.

A prominent literary figure, Fauzia Afzal Khan searched out the originality of the theatre of Pakistan in the native rituals based on pre-partition indo Pak history subcontinent that is based on the local folklores and epic stories. She says that multiple presentations in the form of “*Nautanki*, the *Kathakali* and *Tamasha*” that are the classical forms of that dramas and arts that somewhere in the theatres of England were being offered at that time. These stage activities give the direct

reflection of the beautiful landscapes, cultural colors and traditional shadows of pre-partition times. Though there is a lot of contribution of Pakistani theatre groups in establishing such a vibrant and modern theatre but its roots are basically in India's history.

In the views of Shahed Nadim, the viewers are the most essential element of Ajoka's productions because it is representing communal activities, social, political issues, which play a very dominant part in activating and training the people as its subjects and characters are real. Rather than just teaching and guiding the public about their rights, Ajoka theatre has focused on recalling a particular historical, traditional and cultural presentation that was wiped in Pakistan. The different aesthetic techniques prevailed in the subcontinent were aligned and intentionally erased from the existing Pakistan as some extremists and conservative leaders of this country wanted to shape it as the state without having any association with India's tradition and culture.

Another important issue that this theatre has been facing at international level was to erase the misconceptions about this nation as that this nation was being considered a dependant, culturally weak, economically poor, historically confused and socially oppressive. The people of this pure land had been considered as ignorant, uneducated, uncivilized, and coward as they could not get freedom even after partition. Their culture was distorted and identity was snatched by the Whites. They had never any consciousness about their rights and have always been at the mercy of military dictators. To describe all such socio political conflicts in this dissertation Michel Foucault's word "docile bodies" have been used as the people were being used as puppets in the hands of imperialists, dictators, politicians' landlords, and religious fundamentalists. The contention has been elaborated with the textual analysis, critics' analysis and the historical references. The term "disciplinary techniques" has been used when people were under constant oppression of colonizers but they acted willingly as the dictators want from them. To describe the whole scenario where people work at national, institutional level, office level, domestic level and school level they were supposed to act as the dictators want to see them. The characters like Haji in "*Teesri Dastak*" and peer in "*Kala Meda Bhe*"s represent such colonizers and dictators. In Ajoka play, "*Teesri Dastak*" Mansoor rebels against the authoritative and ruling imperialists Hajji. The audience welcomes such dialogues as it's their voice also. They are also under the constant military dictatorship and want to rebel like Mansoor. The writer of the play slams on the face of colonizers by becoming the voice of Mansoor he challenges this way by saying that he would no more bear the pain of insult. He says as:

MANSOR: “We will shout now, so loudly that your eardrums will burst” (Nadeem. 30)

3. The Research Methodology

This study is aimed to create a sense of protection and proud for having one's own indigenous vibrant culture and unique identity. The research is descriptive and qualitative in its nature. It carries great sense of significance as it is a positive initiative to minimize the extremist point of view by drawing the shared shades of culture and identity of subcontinent. This study is an endeavor to get the answers of following questions.

- 1) How does the Ajoka Theatre present the indigenous culture of subcontinent in its works?
- 2) How does the Ajoka group make effort to reassert the identity of the people of indo-Pak?
- 3) What is the role of Ajoka theatre in the celebration of Pakistani Culture at international level?
- 4) How does Ajoka Theatre portray the heroic figures in its plays.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Ajoka Theatre's Celebration of Culture:

Madeeha Gauhar and Shahid Nadeem took the step for people's right and freedom to preach the Pakistan's positive face at international level since the second last decade of nineteenth century. The regime was not only unbearable in its socio- economic and political spheres rather assumed as an enemy to the artistic and rational expressions of thought as the dictatorship was at its peak. There was no margin for cultural activities in the country as the authoritative and negative attitude of the dictators put ban on the expression of freedom. In such critical environment it was not possible for the writers and artists to celebrate art and culture.

The government of Pakistan was disinterested and antagonistic towards socially and politically meaningful writings. Some conservative groups were against the idea of theatre and the corporate institutions were not active in playing their role for the progression of art and culture and promoting liberal and humanist values. At such crucial time, Ajoka theatre took the responsibility to rebel against such authoritative rulers. The sincere commitment of the bold and rebellious members of Ajoka group and its audience has enabled the group to overcome all hurdles in such crucial times. It has survived despite the absence of economic support from the private or public sector and has won honorable name in the world of theatre. It exposes very unique and innovative matters, has

exercised adopting different strategies and mixed the present day perspectives with classical structure and techniques. Ajoka theatre supports and advocates the basic rights of the people. This artistic group that was politically engaged theatre had been marginalized in the era of military dictatorship transferred its attention from specific problematic state issues to general local layers of Pakistani culture. Ajoka theatre has been performing as an intercultural force, most importantly due to its revolutionary mood. As such, it is incorporated in the present-day concerns and practices, working with its social, cultural and campaigner derivation. This particular theatre wants to deal with the important issues hounding the human society. Besides this, Ajoka theatre's performances and plays have made an attempt to provide high quality entertainment embedded with social issues. In the Pakistani context, most of the times, this is being observed in the form of folktales, mythological figures and cultural celebrations. Through such stories, Ajoka theatre has presented the present social and political concerns with humor and aesthetic pleasure. Besides this, the team is working on to associate Pakistanis culture and traditions linked to the pre partition history and values of presenting culture and art. At the time of its creation, Pakistan's some fundamentalists defined the nation as totally different from India. This idea can be noted in all the discipline like religion, and geographical and lingual lines. For this purpose, the Pakistani leaders created a wave of extremism in Pakistan which leads to crucial circumstances regarding the relationship between India and Pakistan. In such situation, a huge gap came between the two countries which created a wave of distrust between India and Pakistan. This thought created a cultural division between two countries and to deprive Pakistan from its heritage. At such critical time, Ajoka theatre took the step to turn this wave of enmity into the pleasant environment of peace, love and cooperation between two countries. Ajoka theatre wanted to reconnect Pakistanis with their cultural and identical artistic lineage which it experienced with India. Ajoka theatre had been presenting the culture of Punjab through very realistic situation, village scenes, qawaalis, Punjabi, songs, costumes and real presentation of characters.

The writer of Ajoka Plays, Shahid Nadeem uses the words like Opra, khoi shah, sukka pend, piran Ditta. Allah wasaya, chela, watta satta swang. In the play *Kala Meda Bhes* and the words like Amant, Izrael, Israfeel, Bangalipara, babaji in the play *Dukhni* which put the real reflection of indigenous culture in front of audience. The qwali is sung almost in every play of Ajoka Theater which entertains the audience which is the part of their culture and heritage. The setting of the plays,

colorful and bright costumes, the lightning, uses of qwalis and songs are arranged according to the expectations of audience which remind them of their beautiful and glorious culture.

Shahid Nadeem writes in his play *Bullah* the lines from a sofi poet that is another real aspect of this culture as:

“Raati jagain karain ibadat

Te raati jaggan kutty

Tain thee uttay

Bhonkono mool band na kardy

Ja roori ty suttay

Tain thee uttay

Khasham apny da dar na chad-dy

Phanwain wajan so so juttay

Tai thee utty

Chal Bullha chal yaar mana lai

Nai te bazi lay gy kutty, ten thee utty”. (246)

4.2 Audacious presentation of Native Culture in Ajoka Plays:

Cultural organizations like Ajoka theatre activists often take the step to go beyond oppressive state crossing all the national and geographical boundaries ‘national’ to create their own strategies of presenting broader cultural projects with the cooperation of other cultural activists. This is fact that cultural consideration would be generated by founding such type of theatrical entertainments and artistic movements and publishing the works different writers.

The theatre supports its approach to favor an incorporation of manifold skill, cultural celebrations, social and political realities embedded with aesthetic pleasures and audiences active response. It is said that there is no stronger medium of human interaction in field of literary and

visual art rather than theatre. This group is on its journey to offer as a good chance for the teams members of this group. Such type of contribution help the readers to connect with the performance in a range of connotations as they get the message more perfectly when music is played, some readers and audience enjoy the cultural celebration and colorful costumes. Ajoka theatre's productions share the cultural splendor that has a social political relevance by using multiple art forms. Such presentations entertain the audience along with spreading the positive vibes reflecting its culture and civilization.

Ajoka theatre has artistically presented the culture of subcontinent in its plays and performances. As in the literary field, cultural celebrations and festivals work as an integral part of any nation. Ajoka theatre's best presentation of Pakistani culture can be viewed in the scenes of celebrating *Basant* as it is an excellent performances of the love for colors, gathering with the relatives, the typical noise of 'Aaiiii Bo kata', the Lahori food, the local dresses, traditional foods and the whole Basant atmosphere seem very joyful and pleasurable for the readers and viewers. Such performances bring all Pakistanis at one platform and give them aesthetic pleasure by reminding the fine culture of this land. Ajoka Theatre has presented the festival of Basant in the play, *Lo Phirr Basant Aai*. It was a good effort by Ajoka group to present this most celebrated event of the subcontinent culture on the arrival of spring which helps to add more color in this lovely season.

Ajoka theatre has been producing socially and politically meaningful art and has been participating with other liberal organizations for promoting its original culture and ideology. Ajoka wants to promote theatre in Pakistan by combining the traditional and cultural theatre techniques, with modern art forms and to provide entertainment which has a political and social relevance with Pakistani community. Pakistani liberal theatre, Ajoka theatre is one of those cultural groups that have been working at international level with the cooperation of other cultural groups to promote the liberal humanist values. An important literary figure named Anwer Akhter of the "Samoosa Media Project and RSA Pakistan Calling" worked as a prouder and advisor for this theatre and had good collaboration with Ajoka team. While talking about the significance of the modified plays in England, commented that the people of England have greater interest in the languages and culture of the communities South Asia. He says that according to an estimation "There are at 1.4 million British citizens with Indian heritage and 1.2 million British citizens with Pakistani heritage in the UK and also a large Bangladeshi community, these communities have very strong ties to South

Asia.” “The play coming to London also completes a circle of UK and South Asian culture, art, diversity, excellence and audience”.²

Ajoka Theatre has made the people familiar with the techniques of theatre, artistic moods, And cultural introduced people to new theatrical values and gradually converted them to the idea of cultural streams. Ajoka Theatre has played an active part to develop peace and cooperation among the people of different nations through its plays and performances. The discussion among the directors and organizers paved the way to multinational theatre dramas like the "The Sixth River" which was a prominent work of Pakistani theatre Ajoka, and “*Dukhini*”, a mutual plan of Ajoka and the “Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA)”. Theatre has always worked as a creative art which gives the way for better cooperative projects on a larger level. The cultural performances of Ajoka group are mostly presented in the regional tongues, specifically in Punjabi not just in single kind rather many subgenres related to particular communities. The dialogues are decorated by using the local language techniques as metaphors, similes, songs and qwalis. The culture of subcontinent has been presented by Ajoka theatre through its presentation of cultural and historical performances like “*Dara*”, “*Dukhni*”, “*Bullah*”, “*Mera Rang Dy Basanti Chola*” and “*Kala Meda Bhes*”.

The presentation of indigenous identity in Ajoka Plays:

History and culture go side by side as both are important in establishing any nation’s identity. The process of historical adaptation has many complexities and issues as Shahid Nadeem says: “The narrative of “*Daara*” has many complications, as the relations terms and the Shariyat examinations of Dara had to be checked with great care and genius and its very fortunate for me to resolve it as the prepared valid and reliable to the Urdu creative description but it will help to have good understanding for the people of Britain”. (Nadeem, 28)

Ajoka group has collaborated with other groups in “South Asia”, in particular from India and Bangladesh to celebrate the culture of subcontinent. Ajoka theatre has shown a great effort to incorporate the ideals of peace and tolerance by arranging cultural celebrations, arranging theatre festivals, and presenting projects with the help of other theatre groups of Asia. The writer wants to

² Shoaib, Ahmad.”Culture Circle” *Ajoka’s Dar to be staged at National Theatre*. London. Dawn. October 19, 2014.pp2

show that Bullah and Banda were both fighting against oppression but their methods of fighting were changed. Both admire each other and have acted differently in different situations to achieve the same ideals. Their identity is that they are the true preachers of love and liberty as Banda Singh says about Bullah

BANDA: “This is my friend, my benefactor, this is my brother. You morons, this is a member of a sacred tribe of saints like Baba Farid, and Mian Mir, who are as holy to us as Muslims. This is the same Bullah who abandoned and cursed his own village forever, because the villagers” (249).

Bullah's remarks about Banda Singh are very important as he says to a soldier when he refers to Banda Singh as the worst enemy of Muslims. Bulla is working here to remind them their true identity as he says in response to soldiers.

SOLDIER: “He is a dangerous criminal, the worst enemy of Muslims, Banda Singh”.

BULLAH: “well, I thought Muslims were their own worst enemy but this one is Sikh”. (241).

Bullah is advocating tolerance, love, equality and humanity through his poetry as he says to soldiers when he watches Bandha Singh in cells,

BULLAH: “Who is in this cage”?

SOLDIERS: “This is Banda Singh, the rebel”.

BULLAH: “Banda Singh Bahadur!”

SOLDIERS: “Yes, that is him. There is a long list of crimes that he has committed. But finally he was thoroughly defeated by Mughals”.

BULLAH: “But why have you put a human being in a cage?” (268)

Such great characters appeal to the readers as the writer has revealed that it is their identity that they are living like brothers by denying all the extremist point of views. Such dialogues from a Muslim show that the people living in subcontinent were free from religious biasness. The character

in the play, Bulleh Shah has appeared as an icon of hope, peace, and humanity in an age of trouble and sufferings. He gave the message of unity, humanity, peace and prosperity. A character in the play named Sona says about Bullah:

SONA: “Bullah was giving voice to the oppressed humanity through his poetry”. (248)

Bullah Shaah stood against the unjust social and political order. He says to Banda Singh that they all are human beings; they all are suffering from British oppressive colonialism. They all are the target and there is no use of killing one another as he says to Banda by giving him the lesson of forbearance, love, humanity and peace.

BULLAH: “This sword has killed so many innocent people. You killed those helpless Muslims farmers who were themselves victims of their Muslim rulers. The Mughal sword did not make a disconnection between the Muslim throat and the Sikh throat. Tell me, Banda Singh, how will you account for all this bloodshed?” (245)

Ajoka Theatre has searched out all the remedies for peace and justice with the reference of the play Bullah. The realistic depiction of characters represents the public of nineteenth century's Pakistan which was the victim of inhumane forces of intolerance and hatred.

The play “*Bullah*” preaches the values of love, peace and universality by defying all the boundaries of time and space as when it was performed in Iran, the audience stood up and started to say “*Bullah Shah Bullah Shah*” at the end of performances. This is the proof that Ajoka's plays are not only presenting national issues but addressing the need to cultivate the moral values for the betterment of human beings. The play has great significance in the contemporary ages when religious extremism is at its peak and the terrorism, religious prejudice, narrow mindedness, and suicides attacks are threatening human society. People are punished at the name of religion whether it is in India, Pakistan or Europe. In India the Muslims are killed if they slaughter a cow and in Pakistan the leaders are hanged when they talk about the rights of minority. This is the issue that is not only the problem of contemporary age or of a particular society but the human being of every era and every society has been its victim. The most pathetic point is that humanity has suffered in all ages. The religious extremism is at its peak as the people of one nationality or religion consider

themselves superior to other and this otherness breeds the germs of colonized and colonizers. Ajoka theatre has presented the play *Bullah* which has moral lessons with aesthetic pleasure. The play gives the spiritual relief as Baba Bullah is in the quest of his inner self. He says to Band Singh about his identity.

SOLDIERS: “Sardar, we found this fakir wandering about suspiciously. He appears to be a Muslim”.

BANDA: “Aren't you Bulleh Shah? You know me, don't you?”

BULLAH: “I'm having problems in knowing myself, my friend”.

BANDA: “I am Banda”.

BULLAH: “I am also Banda, servant of God.” (253)

Bulleh Shah was a pious man who gave the teachings of forgiveness and forbearance in his life. The writer of the play has tried to depict the Sufi poets of Punjab to extend the idea of love, harmony and peace.

Ajoka theatre's first production was “Badel Sercar's *Jalous*”. The drama is an excellent presentation of the socio-political oppressions and disloyalty of the people by the political and religious organizers. The play was with the reference to western Pakistan. It attracted the audience as it was relevant to the Pakistan of the early eighties. Shahid Nadeem says about this play that he created it with the help of “Badal Sircar in Delhi in 1982” and it was established with the idea of Third Theatre. Ajoka theatre had been in search of such script and this play proved great inspiration”. The play “*Jaloos*” attracted a reasonable audience as the audiences experienced have shared through such performance. Madeeha recalls the circumstances as the play is the real reflection of Pakistani people for the assertion of their identity after their twice partition. The audience listen the inner voice which represents their feelings against the politically unstable and tyrannical rulers. The playwright's selection of local language for this performance makes the idea more authentic. As the procession sings in these words:

“*Juloos, juloos... har gali, har mohalle/, har sadak par juloos...naaro aur jhando mein kho gaya hai mera astitva, mera wajood, meri identity...*” . (Nadeem 26)

Ajoka theatre has worked as such platform and raised the voice against injustice, inequality, and guides the people to know their worth and value in the society. It gives them realization to recognize and to establish their unique identity. Baba sings a patriotic song in “*Teesri Dastak*”

“Come children let us go on a tour to Pakistan/ The land for which sacrificed a million lives (Nadeem 13).

In this way Ajoka theatre is making great effort to present Pakistan a democratic and peaceful homeland at world level. Another important step which was taken by Ajoka theatre to promote the Pakistan's culture was its arranging of “Peace Festival”. The “Humsaya Theatre for Peace Festival” by Ajoka group was arranged in Delhi to promote the spirit of love, peace, and friendship between the two countries. It was arranged with the cooperation of “Delhi” promoting peace and equality, “Routes 2 Roots”. The four plays of Ajoka Group “*Bullha, Daara, Kon Hei Ye Gastakh and Lou Pir Basnt Aei*” was performed there. This effort from both sides helped to lessen the stiffness and misunderstandings among the masses of these countries. This festival gave a new way to promote peace in Asia by arranging a seminar on ‘Theatre for Peace’ which was arranged at Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University. This seminar brought closer the two countries India and Pakistan as the presenters like “Praan Navile, Ushaa Gangoli, Bansi Koul and Kewel Daliwal from India and Asgar Nadim Sayed, Madeha Gohar and Shahid Nadeem from Pakistan participated in the seminar”.

A Tribute to Heroic figures of Subcontinent:

Shahid Nadeem recalled that they went to another country with the note of harmony, unity and love from Pakistani nation and they believed that this festival would prove an initial step for promoting the serenity procedure in these nations. At that crucial time, Ajoka’s Artistic Director Madeeha Gauhar's comments attracted the audience from both nations as she said that she was proud of sharing Pakistan’s history with India as both Indians and Pakistanis have one history and culture. She said the plays to be performed at the festival include “Bulha”, based on the life and works of Baba Bulleh Shah and the story of Mughal prince Dara who was a Soofi, a poet and an advocate of religious agreement and the great hero of both nations. Madeeha Gauhar and Shahid Nadeem took courageous step for the right of humanity and challenged the oppressive ideology fostered by the state. The regime was not only ruthless and hostile to its social and political institutions, but also oppressive and cruel for the cultural and intellectual freedoms. But Ajoka theatre rebelled against

such authoritative policies and brought on the stage the plays like Barri, Teesri Dastak and the bold and rebellious characters like Mansoor, Opra and Zahida.

The play *Bullah* by Ajoka team has paved the way for the practice of liberal humanist values as the touching dialogues of Bullah Shah put everlasting effects on audience and they seem impressing by it. It is true that the great mystic poets like Bullah in the world have played a vital role in human history to preach love and peace in the world. Such people have proved the well wishers and lovers of humanity. They focus on Human being without thinking about any differences of cast, color and religion as Bullah says to Banda Singh:

BULLAH: “Be always truthful. Never leave the path of truth for that will destroy the line” (244). Ajoka theatre has highlighted the human and universal values by bringing on the stage the Sufi characters like Bullah, who is the central character of the play who is the symbol of optimism and humanism for the audience in the present era which is full of intolerance, jealousy and hatred. . Ajoka Theatre has made an effort to present the true identity of Muslims through this play “*Bullah*” at international level in order to convey the message that Muslims are not the terrorists’ and Islam is not the religion of extremists. Islam is a peaceful religion which gives the message of love and peace for whole humanity.

BLLAH: “You are right Muradi Begum, I must be strong. This *takia* has to stay. This is the centre of an alternative hope for people. This foundation of brotherhood and love should not be allowed to dry up. The lamp of truth should always burn. The game of love should never end. I will not be quiet. I will keep feeding the flames of truth.” (274-275)

As the play is based on the life of Bullah Shah .He is a historical figure from subcontinent that has proved as the leading light of a rich Sufi tradition of Punjabi poetry and has spread the message of religious tolerance, social peace, justice, communal harmony, liberalism, humanism and love. The performance of this play is best presentation of the tunes of folk and classical music, compositions of Bulleh Shah and other Punjabi Sufi poets. It is a remarkable piece of literary art that highlights the complicated issues, human emotions and experiences in a very simple and familiar language by using the terms and metaphors of rural Punjab. The play has been proposed with the purpose of not just to entertain but also to enlighten the hearts and minds of the audience. “*Dara*” is

another important presentation of Ajoka group which depicts the original history and highlights the culture of subcontinent. The era of Mughal Empire in Indian continent is the everlasting stamp on the page of history which cannot be eliminated. This play is the real production of Mughal era in the subcontinent but Ajoka theatre has presented it in such way that when it is performed in front of Indian audience, they feel it is for them and when it is viewed by Pakistani audience, they also own it equally. The secret behind the popularity of this play is the presentation of indo Pak culture as both countries have same culture and heritage. Such great heroes of history are their indigenous identity. “*Dara*” is the first South Asian drama that was performed at London’s most popular location, the National Theatre. The audience of London gave much appreciation at the performance of this play embedded with historical and cultural presentation of Subcontinent’s history and multiple art techniques. Initially, Ajoka group could not get the permission to perform this play in Pakistan. The Minister of Culture was concerned that Nadeem might make Aurangzeb, the younger brother of the play’s hero Dara Shikoh look badly, but the Senate Committee for culture overruled him, and the play premiered in Lahore in 2010. The drama was an attempt to relive the glorious, though tragic period, bringing back Dara into “collective historical and cultural consciousness and redress a monstrous historical wrong”. (*Dawn*, 30 July 2007).

According to Nadeem, the play is not just about a battle to rule India or family conflicts rather it is about an encounter of ideologies that have been intermingled in South Asia for long time. The play highlights the code of life in Islam, relations with the other faiths and cultural traditions in the region and its consequences on the state and masses. Shahid Nadeem says “This is a major National Theatre production, not touring of an exotic play as it is a great opportunity to present Dara’s Islam, a religion of peace, love and beauty, as opposed to Aurangzeb’s narrow-minded and violent interpretation of Islam”. It will be a good chance for the British people of Indian and Pakistani origins, to mutually praise and relish Dara and ponder what course history would have taken if Dara had prevailed over Aurangzeb. Nadeem explains that the custodians of the Pakistani ideology have projected Aurangzeb as a model Islamic ruler and dismissed Dara as a heretic. Ajoka Theatre’s another play ‘*Kaun Hai Ye Gustakh*’, was presented on stage. This play was based on the life of a moderate, optimistic, intelligent, sensitive and very creative writer and artist who always talked about spreading love, peace and equality among human beings. The mentioned writer was none other than Saadat Hassan Manto and the act represents Manto’s own stories, efficiently intertwined with a character playing Manto himself, as the narrator. The culture of Mughal regime in

subcontinent has been beautifully presented by Ajoka group through this play as the setting, dialogues, costumes, language, accent, complexities and action are very accurate, alive and realistic.

Conclusion:

Besides examining the struggle of Ajoka group to promote the equality, love, tolerance and forgiveness through its publications and productions, the study explored its celebration of indigenous culture and identity. The research discovered that the objective of Ajoka Theater's selection of local languages, village side areas, story narration style is to represent its unique culture and identity. The study highlighted Ajoka Theatre's presentation of culture through its dramas which ultimately will help to make the morals of Pakistan high at international level. The depiction of Sub continental culture is very true and real that the viewers spontaneously become the part of it. Its presentation of the Pakistani culture becomes really powerful through its stunning setting, its actual characters, its familiarity of subjects embedded with Pakistani and Indian customs, civilization, colorful costumes, local languages, Punjabi accents, folklores, songs and *qwallis*. The present study opened innovative ways to look at the pre partition and post partition effects of India. The study did not highlight the universal issues of humanity but captured the ups and downs in the history of nations. The research is unique as it investigated with the idea that how culture and history are integral for the formation of any nation's identity and how both these schools are being controlled by the ruling authorities to stamp their desired image of a nation.

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