THE RENAISSANCE OF SUB-CONTINENTAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE IN AJOKA PLAYS AND PERFORMANCES

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Abstract

It has been the tradition in the history of nations that whenever some powerful invasion occurs, the history and heritage of the inhabitants got in danger. The invaders try to shape the heritage of controlled people in their own way. From the dark ages till present, there has been observed great influence of the colonizers over their dependent and weaker colonies. The impacts of “Anglo-Normans or French literature” on English history, is its best evidence. As the controlled people are being tended to believe that the ruling powers are civilized possessing great knowledge, remarkable history and marvelous heritage. The local people have to depend on them for learning their language and adopting their styles. In this way, the imperialist got succeeded in making such nations not only physically and geographically but also mentally slave. This mental slavery is more painful as it lasts for many generations. They are being tamed in every aspect of life which rips down their true history and identity. It has not only been the technique of imperialists but even the rulers of any free nation adopt the same method to get a noble recognition in the history. The original and true history of such nations disappears as it has always been reframed by the emperors to get their good names. But the fact is that history never dies though it is removed from the scene for some time. When such colonies get freedom, the revival of the history and heritage of such nations occurred that help them to assert their identity at world level. There are some departments which consider it their responsibility to revisit and present the original history by uncovering all the artificiality from its face. The purpose of present study is to highlight the struggle of Pakistani theatre named “Ajoka” for the renaissance of Sub-continental History and Heritage in Ajoka Plays and Performances.

Keywords: Renaissance; subcontinent; history; heritage; geographical boundaries.
Introduction:
From the beginning of human history, an unending war of superiority and inferiority started which ruled human race till present era. This idea of superiority and inferiority fed the later ideologies of ‘otherness’ ‘racism’, ‘hegemony’, white and black’ ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism. This war was more a war of ideas rather than of weapons, as in this war of ideologies, the writers have been performing as front men soldiers fighting for the protection and survival of their identities, cultures, history, heritage, and language. When this particular conflict appeared with the civilized mask of imperialism, the so-called superior nations promoted such discourses which gave air to the ideology of supremacy of their race, color, culture and civilization. Their purpose behind this have always been to inject in the minds of colonized nations that they are the superior and they have the right to lead and rule them. Such types of writings were being projected at the time of colonization. On the other hand, the writers, artists and poets have been playing their roles to reject these ideas and securing their native culture, history, civilization, heritage and values. Later on such writings were being named as postcolonial writings. The basic agenda of such writers have been to restore and reassert their looted identity and lost heritage. History and heritage are the important treasure of any nation as both these work to assert one’s recognition at international level. The literary figures and many organizations play their vigorous part to present the truths of history in front of people. It is a daring step to wash the spots from the screen of history. The Indian or subcontinental history has ever been the center of great attention for the world writers and critics. There are numerous layers of Indian history which make it richer and more dominant. The great names like “Akbar Baadsha, Tipu Sultan, Humayoun, Ashoka, Bahadur Shah Zafar and the Mughal” dynasty are the glory of Indian land. Such great historical emperors are very like Shakespeare’s King Lear” and Marlow’s “Tamburaline”. As the present era is full of anxiety, biasness, corruption and conspiracies, so the remembrance for such great forefathers becomes essential for future guidance and direction. After facing the decay and destruction of world wars, the nations are now looking backward as Turkey’s remarkable production of “Artugal Ghazi” is its best example which has recorded viewers. The viewers and readers of modern era also want to blink in the windows of History to know their own selves and to have the recognition of their originality. Such organizations and groups are at their mission to value their own history and heritage at international level. In Pakistan, “AJOKA” is performing the leading role for the revival of Subcontinent’s history and heritage. This eminent theatre group was founded by Madeha Gohar and Shahid Nadeem in the late twentieth century. Since the day of its creation, it has taken the charge to erase all the misinterpretations of Indian history and bring it in its real form. Its struggle for accomplishing this task is considerable. This group of dramatists and writers are trying to revise and revive the shared history and heritage of people of Pakistan and India. The theatre has been used as a platform from where the layers of history are unfold and theaters like Ajoka group presents history in epic forms of drama. Both history and drama go side by side in the literary field. History has always played a vital role in the
world of theatre since Odysseys to the present era. Pakistani liberal group which was established with the name of Ajoka Theatre has also presented many historical plays as it has paid a great tribute to a great historical figure of subcontinent and the great legendary Bhaghat Singh by using the songs, qwalis, focusing his fight for freedom and humanity in the subcontinent. Ajoka Theatre believes that one should give honor and value to the histories ignoring the biasness of geographies and religions. Historical patterns help the theatrical messages to be clearer, more comprehensive, and historical conflict work as soul in the theatrical practices. Drama becomes more interested, attentive and relatable to the audience when it is presented with historical references. Ajoka theatre has presented many plays on historical figures as “Bullah Shah, Bhaghat Singh, Dara Shikhu, Tipu Sultan, Saadat Hassan Manto”. Such performances by Ajoka team are the vital proof of their commitment to endorse the message of humanity, harmony, freedom, forbearance and other morals for the last three decades at national and international level. The plays performed by Ajoka theatre are the best enactments of subcontinent’s history and traditions. Theatre works as a platform to represent the heritage and history of a specific nation as does “Ajoka theatre” by bringing on stage the human being who is free from all the ties of history, religion, culture and nationality. It presents on stage the human being of every era and every place.

Ajoka group’s main purpose has been the presentation of Indian civilization, heritage, and traditions by observing the history of subcontinent and to present history combining it with the modern day myths of Pakistan. Historical events are common property and available for any writer to use. History has always played a vital role in the literary world. People have been using it both for positive and negative purposes. In the world of theatre, history has always been presented, accepted, and appreciated in the form of presentations like “The Jew of Malta”, and “Tamburlaine by Marlow”. In the era of 1960s when theatre was at its peak and Shakespeare’s historical plays like “king Henery IV Part 1-1597-98, Richard II-1601February 7 and Richard III-1600-01 were being performed at the stage. It shows that the history and theatres are well embedded. History has done a lot in literary world. The early dramas were the adoption of historical episodes presenting the moral and human values. Usually history has been presented in the genre of drama. The question of both history and drama as acts of representation observes that theater is embedded in history. Ajoka theatre has used history in a very excellent way and has made its best effort to spread good values like love, peace, and humanity across the world.
Literature Review:
Ajoka theatre has made a good attempt to promulgate the history and heritage of the subcontinent through its works and writings. In order to spread positive and good vibes, this group of artists has used history as an important source. It has presented on stage the dignified heroes of history from pre partition era which can be equally valid at present time. Ajoka theatre is optimistic in this particular approach that the renaissance and revival of history and heritage of subcontinent will surely put a new spirit in the present generation to work for the betterment and glory of their homeland. Ajoka theatre is such a broad vision that it cannot be limited by the specifications of geography and era. Ajoka theatre's performances are equally important and applicable for the people of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh and for the generations of 1980z and for present day people. Moreover, it is also appreciated by the audience of all over the world because the centre of this theatre has always been the human being whether he belongs to Asia, Africa or Europe.

A well renowned critic and an important scholar and reviewer of History of Islam Professor Tamara Sonn, who at present is serving at The Georgetown University, appreciates the efforts of Ajoka and praises the scene of “Darbar-e-Shahi” the court scene in its performance of drama “Dara” as he says: “As gripping as the trial of Socrates, ‘The Trial of Dara Shikoh’ documents the final days of the wise and virtuous Mughal prince, son of Shah Jehan and his wife Mumtaz. Like the trial of Socrates, ‘The Trial of Dara Shikoh’ allows the audience to experience both the logic of the accusers and the piety of the accused, bringing into sharp focus the tragedy that results when right and reason, compassion and judgment collide. This play depicts actual events that occurred in the 17th century in the subcontinent. ‘The Trial of Dara Shikoh’ could well be set in the 21st century, so deftly does it portray the inner conflicts that grip the Muslim world today.”

Ajoka Theatre has presented the history of subcontinent through its play Dara which is based on the Mughal History. “The National Theatre of London” picked this play to perform at its own. The credit of this goes to the Pakistani theatre, Ajoka theatre which revives the South Asian history by creating such a tremendous performance. Ajoka theatre was the first Pakistani theatre which achieved this award. It was the time of great honor and pride in the history of Pakistani Arts and theatre. The director of the play, Shahid Nadeem said that it was a great achievement of Pakistani

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artists, writers and theatres. This theatre has been denying the misinterpretations about Pakistan at world level that being a nation Pakistan is culturally dependent and historically bewildered. Ajoka Theatre's remarkable play “Dara” received positive response from the audience of all over the world. The play represents the revitalization of Mughal history in the subcontinent. But the play preaches the positive values that are equally valid for all ages as Professor Stanley Wolpert, a prominent historian of South Asia, says about the relevance of “Dara” to the world of today: “Dara Shikoh, is not only a fascinating Drama, but a most important, highly instructive study of the major forces within Islam that continue to reflect the fatal struggle between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb that grip our modern world and may help to decide our global future.” (Wolpert, 27)

Madeeha Gouhar shares the objective of organizing this theatre group in one of her interview that they have picked such characters from the history who give the feelings of recognition to the audience. They have presented such ideals which have association with the present real world of audience. The writers of India and Pakistan and other colonies like South Africa feel a great affection towards their indigenous language. They give much value to the local customs, traditions, words, accents and values. As in Ahmed Ali’s “Twilight in Delhi”, there is a lot of usage of native tongue words like Zanana & Mardana “loo”, “sherbet”, “jinn”, “barrake” The writers who witnessed the dying history and culture of Muslims and native Indians at the hands of colonizers tried to secure it through their writings. It is a deliberate and daring effort by the Indian writers at the time of colonization to take their history and heritage in their lap like a mother for its protection and life. In modern times, Ajoka group is also participating in the revisiting and rehabilitation of subcontinent’s history and legacy in its own way. It has celebrated the great and heroic deeds of heroes like Tipu Sultan, Dara, the traditional dresses, styles, rituals, Mughal architecture and native languages. The intentional use of local accents of subcontinent and the native tongues like Punjabi, Saraiki, and Urdu languages by Ajoka group is an attempt to show that Pakistani nation has its own language, history and heritage and they are proud of it as it is the part of their history and culture. The audience of Ajoka theatre is not an objective viewer rather Ajoka theatre's audience is actively involved as its plays address the issues related to audience. It presents the real reflection of their forefathers which give them great satisfaction and pleasure at heart. Ajoka theatre has worked in politically unstable, socially oppressive period atmosphere as its plays “TeesriDastak, JaloosJaloos, Barri, and Acquittal” are the best presentations of that period of time. Ajoka theatre wants an active response from the readers as it wants to bring change in the society with the revival of history and heritage.
Ajoka theatre considers Pakistan, India and Bangladesh tied in blood relations that cannot be denied. These nations cannot be separated from one another as they are knotted in same ties of history, heritage and culture. So this group feels proud to celebrate the subcontinent’s shared history and heritage collectively with the cooperation of other art groups of Bangladesh and India. The well recognized play of Ajoka group named “Dukhni” is its one of those plays which is presented with the support of Bangladeshi theatre and artists. In this play the Bengali language has been used which gives the idea that Ajoka theatre is the true preacher of sub continental values as it has defied all the boundaries of time, space, and rejected the language barriers in order to preach the shared history and language. Ajoka Theatre has presented the plays to support the kind and universal values without any bias attitude as while watching its plays and performances the audience not only enjoy it but also feel it. Its productions give the feelings of recognition to the audience of every era and every place. Ajoka theatre has been bringing on the stage the real characters who are dealing with issues relevant to contemporary Pakistani society.

Research Methodology:
This research is carried out through the textual analysis of the plays and performances of Ajoka Theatre. The research is an effort to bring closer the neighboring countries of Pakistan by celebrating on stage the shared culture, heritage, and history. This study is aimed to foster a sense of honor for the historical figures of the subcontinent by exploring the different layers of history. This article is an effort to make the masses conscious of their heritage and history. An effort has been made to dig out the answers of the following questions.

1) How does the Ajoka group defy the geographical, racial, and cultural boundaries?
2) What role does Ajoka Theatre play in the revival of Sub-continental History and Heritage?
3) How does the Ajoka Theatre depict the history of the subcontinent in its plays?
4) How does Ajoka Theatre present the historical figures in its dramas?

Discussion and Analysis:
Ajoka Theatre's Freedom from Historical, Cultural and Geographical boundaries:
It is said that the best piece of literature is the one which is free from all the historical, geographical, national and cultural boundaries. These boundaries are like the jail cells about which Foucault implies the term “panopticon. The human bodies have to act according to the given particular pattern by ignoring their willingness. The geographical, cultural, and historical boundaries work like such prison cells in which the citizens of particular community are entrapped. In this way human beings
are not free even if they are living in an independent nation. Generally, the geographical boundaries in literature are those ones that introduce such type of literature which becomes like “White Man’s Burden”. Geographically bounded literature is restricted to present the human being of one particular land. The creators and artists of such literature want to show that they are superior to other nations as they are geographically free and more powerful than other adjacent countries. The same idea was practiced by the colonizers at their occupied lands. It becomes partial towards its presentation of art and literature. Such type of literature always offers the one sided picture and ignore the other perspective. The geographical based literature breeds the cultural and historical boundaries of literature. The literature which is produced under the cap of cultural boundaries presents the particular culture by denying the basic similar and universal issues of human beings. Besides the geographical and cultural margins, there are the historical and national limitations which are more dangerous than these. The historical and national boundaries propagate such ideas which arise the senses of superiority and extremism. For example, both Pakistanis and Indians share same history but some extremists in India depict negative image of Quaid and some extremists in Pakistan depict the negative image of Gaandhi in Pakistan. In this way, such literature is used as weapons to gain some personal interests and this type of literature proves more dangerous than bombing as it misleads and misguides the young generation. As the history of subcontinent is its best proof when the British colonizers used literature to make people slave mentally and psychologically and its effects are observed even after seven decades.

Pakistani theatre Ajoka theatre is one of those theatre groups that have been producing such literature at worldly level that propagates morality, universality and humanity by ignoring all the national, cultural, geographical and historical boundaries. Ajoka theatre has become an international symbol of Pakistani Theatre which has made much effort to bring Pakistani and other Asian theatres closer. Ajoka has performed “Bulla, Dara Shikho, Mera Rang De Basantichola JhalliKitheJawe, Kala MedaBhes, DukhDariya, Jam JamJeeve and Toba Tek Singh, JaloosJaloos” in various South Asian countries to promote the culture, history and heritage of subcontinent. Ajoka theatre has collaborated with theatre groups in South Asia, in particular from India and Bangladesh to enhance the feelings of love, peace and cooperation. Ajoka theatre has been very influential in that as it has worked with renowned theatre stars from other countries, such as “Anuradha Kapoor, Safdar Hashmi, Ratti Bartholomew, KewalDhaliwa and KamlaBhasin”. Ajoka team has shown its sincere adherence to the ideals of peace, humanity and tolerance through its partnership with theatre groups.
and actors in India. The people attached with this group believe that it is necessary to be in good relation with India to have peace and prosperity on this part of land as India is our brother country, and foremost neighbor. Ajoka Theatre and its stars are putting a lot of try to create peaceful and pleasant environment between these two countries. For this purpose, it is the good initiative which Ajoka Theater has taken to perform and present the shared culture, heritage and history of subcontinent. As this renaissance of same history, heritage and heroes will surely help them to recall their good passed days which will put good impact on present situation. So, they will remind that Quaid-Azam is not only the leader of Pakistanis but at the time of colonization his efforts for Hindu and Sikh community are also likewise praiseworthy. How can they forget that this Quaid has been the true ambassador of hindu-Muslim unity? Similarly, people of Pakistan cannot ignore the efforts of Gaandhi. So both Quaid and Gandhi are the great treasure for the history of subcontinent. Ajoka theatre played a vital role in strengthening the ties between both next-door countries by presenting the same and combined history and heritage of people of subcontinent. For this purpose, this group rebelled against all the existing boundaries as their mutual threads of history and heritage cannot be limited to any boundary. Ajoka theatre presented the great historical figure like Dara, Bahghat Singh to represent honestly the factual history and heritage of undivided India without any biasness of religion or race. It has worked with the collaboration of other theatre and art groups of India and West Pakistan as its presentation of “Dukhni”. Rather than this, it also has visited different festivals and seminars conducted by Indian artists. Most of the times, this group with its team members visited India and other neighboring countries to polish its skills and to create an atmosphere of love and trust. In this way this group is working as ambassador of love and peace from Pakistan. So it is true that Ajoka team has made a good effort to bring Pakistani and South Asian particularly Indian theatre closer.

**Ajoka Theatre's Presentation of Sub-continental History and Heritage**

It is fact that there is not such a stronger medium of human interaction in the field of literary art rather than theatre. Theatre has been a popular form of creative expression in which live performers collaboratively communicate an experience, real or imaginary, through speech, song, music, dance and movement before a live audience. The audience is very actively involved in the theatre performances as the real characters, powerful dialogues and local languages put direct impacts on viewers. As a forceful field of literary world, theatre can also provide entertainment and relaxation within the given framework of society. It also can serve as a medium through which daring men
and women use their creative imagination to question the colonizers, political oppressors, military rulers and authoritative landlords. The works and presentations of Ajoka group are notable in this regard as it addresses the very sensitive issues in its plays. It has performed very daring presentations like “TeesriDastak” and “Dara”. Ajoka Theatre's play “TeesriDastak”(Third Knock) is the presentation of Pakistan's history of continuing dictators from 1970s to onward. The play “TeesriDastak(Third Knock)” was performed first time in 1971. It is the best depiction of Pakistan's history which uncovers the faces of the dictators in Pakistan. Symbolically, it represents the colonizers as manipulators who looted the assets of this land and put it into the worst economic condition. It was conspiracy from the imperialists’ side so that these colonies remain at the mercy of these exploiters for their needs. At present framework of history, it highlights the merciful and poor conditions of the people in the realm of nineteen fifties. In the play, the landlord is killed by the people repeatedly which represent the outraged audience of that particular time of dictatorship in Pakistan. The repeated entry of landlords symbolizes the chain of military dictatorship in Pakistan after its independence. Its performances are remarkably interwoven with political and domestic's subjects, national and international issues, mixed present with past, Muslims and Hinduism philosophy, challenging and daring characters with soft hearted and humanity lovers. Its plays and performances are excellent and complete presentation of subcontinent heritage and culture.

Ajoka theatre’s performance of “Bullah”is the presentation of two great historical figures of subcontinent, one is a mystic, saint poet Bullah Shah and the other is Bhagat Singh. In the history of subcontinent, though they have been living in same era and same place but they never met. The director of this play Shahid Nadeem takes a step further to enhance the feelings of tolerance, peace and love among the people of different religions and presents them in the play meeting and talking with each other. He wants to show the positive and blurred image of the indo Pak history which has been ignored intentionally to create extremism between India and Pakistan. The purpose of Ajoka group is to erase such misconceptions that they are the bitter enemies of each other but they are one from their roots. He writes such lines to create a new spirit of peace and cooperation between Indians and Pakistanis. Here is the dialogue between the characters of two different religions. These dialogues show the moderate and humane aspect of Muslim saints who are the true lovers of humanity by defying all the religious, political and historical boundaries. it also gives the picture of that India where the people of all religions live like brothers and sisters without having any bias.
attitude towards other’s religion, color, race and cast. The talk between Belleh shah and Banda singh as below:

BANDA: “So you are Bulleh Shah!”
BULLAH: “and you are Banda Singh!”
BANDA: “Yes I am.”
BULLAH: “Then why are you standing, please sit down. Sona, Chandi, take care of our guest, bring him something to eat and drink.”
BANDA: “You saved my life for which I should be grateful.” (240).

Presentation of the Historical figures in Ajoka Plays:
This Pakistani Liberal theatre Ajoka Theatre has brought on stage the heroes of history by ignoring all the religious, political and geographical differences. It has presented to the people that not only Bullah is the hero but Bhaght Singh is also the sincere leader and pride of this land which cannot be ignored due to religious biasness.

Shahid Nadeem said that the main objective of Ajoka theatre is: "To do socially meaningful theatre and thus contribute to the struggle for a secular, humane, just and egalitarian society in Pakistan". This theatre group was established under General Zia-ul-Haq's politically and culturally repressive regime. This was the time of dictatorship in Pakistani history and it was very difficult to conceive of such a democratic and liberal theatre. At such time Ajoka had to struggle hard against many socio-political boundaries but its will power and commitment to promote humane liberal and universal values should never be limited.

In these days Ajoka Theatre Group is not merely working as just a theatre group, but has appeared as a platform and a mission for a secular, democratic, humane and egalitarian Pakistan. The Ajoka team has been dealing with bold subjects and revolutionary ideology by revisiting the history of the Subcontinent. This theatre group is the supporter of liberal humanist values as while depicting history and social issues in his plays, the director of Ajoka’s plays Shahid Nadeem puts the human being in the center.

The play TeesriDastak is the best presentation of Pakistan's history of late nineteenth century. It has been said that this play has worked as fiery protest against the economic, political and social oppression prevailing in that era. The setting of the play is very realistic as it is set in the filthy surroundings of late nineties Pakistan. In the paly, Mansoor's rebellious attitude represents Shahid Nadeem's and Pakistani young generation's hatred against so called religious leaders who misused
the teachings of Islam. As Islam is such a universal religion which talks about the welfare and prosperity of whole humanity. Haji's character in the play represents the dictators and upper class of Pakistani society which has brought the other classes at the margin. Ajoka theatre has brought on stage the rebellious and daring characters that have the courage to question their cruel leaders. They are representing the 1970s Pakistani youth who wanted freedom, democracy and wanted to get rid of dictators. Jamila and Mansoor are defying all the political and social boundaries to get their rights.

The dialogues are:

MANSOOR: No, we will not.
HAAJI: (surprised): keep your voice down.
MANSOOR: No I will not keep my voice down any more. We will have been silent for too long. We will shout now. So loudly that your eardrums will burst. (30).

The reaction of Jamila to the oppressor Haji is also very rebellious as the dialogues show:

JAMILA: (hysterically) and you think you are God Almighty. You can reward whoever you please and punish who displease you. You are beyond reach and accountability? But your day will come. You will have to pay for each and every dirty deed you have done with me (29).

Another young man in the play clearly says that oppressor and dictators are no more acceptable to them and they challenge Pakistani Dictators as


The play TeesriDastak depicts the time of post partition in Pakistan when in 1970s there were many conflicts between Pakistan and present day Bangladesh. The Bengali people were not given respect and honor in Pakistan. The people thought that they would be able to get liberty after getting a separate land but all their hopes failed as the inner contradiction of Pakistan broke it into two pieces. As a nameless character, an old man says in TeesriDastak:

OLD MAN: When we left our own Sharanpur in India at the time of partition, we left behind a thriving tailoring business and a beautiful and a happy house. I thought that at lead I will get a small shop here but I was not able to rise above the footpath. I submitted to Fate and now, (look to
\textit{Munshi}) now you say vacate. Will we have to become refugees all over again? (17)

There is a character in the play with the name of Bengali. Bengali is depending on other characters that consider him inferior and treat him as a third person and breeds the feelings of homelessness in him by saying that his home is in the East and he must return to his home.

\textbf{BI:} Hey you, Bengali. You have made this place filthy and suspicious. Now there is no place for you. Get out of here instant. And take your entire filthy luggage.

\textit{He gathers his belongings and goes out}

\textbf{OLD MAN:} Bengali has left.

\textbf{OLD MAN:} But for where? He has no place to go. (47).

Haji's character in the play represents the dictators and upper class of Pakistani society which has brought the other classes at the margin. Mansoor and Ejaz’s dialogues present the poor economic condition, political upheaval and social trauma of dictatorial chapter of Pakistan's history.

Jameela is another character who is suffering from fever. She is struggling for survival as she says to Haji, the oppressor landlord who exploits the poor people. The character of Ijaz in the play is representing the youth of Pakistan in 1970s when revolutionary idealism was still alive and radical youth and workers still hoped that the situation would change and their wishes would be fulfilled. But some young men like Mansoor, a rebellious character of the play are angry and wants to get rid of oppressive and cruel leaders by force as he says to Haji

\textbf{MANSOOR:} No I will not keep my voice down any more. We will have been silent for too long. We will shout now. So loudly that your eardrums will burst. (30).

\textit{TeesriDastak} is the story of the shattering dreams and hopes of Pakistani generation who were the victims of partition riots and target of military dictatorship.

\textbf{EJAZ:} (angrily): You damn well know I got first division but the board did not release the result because of non-payment of dues. If my father hadn’t died, I would have been studying Law. (8)

\textbf{OLD MAN:} Law? You are dreaming of places, while living in slums. You'd better stay on ground. (10).
Besides this, Mansoor and Ejaz's dialogues present the poor economic condition political upheaval and social trauma of dictatorial chapter of Pakistan's history. There is another character in the play, a woman who is being used by the Hajji to fill his sexual appetite though she is suffering from fever. She is struggling for survival as she says to Ejaz.

JAMILA: If I could get a job, then (coughs) then...(coughs again)

EJAZ. (softly) Jameela, you should not work so hard. All day and then this night duty. Your cough is getting worse and worse.

JAMILA. The cough is part of me now.

EJAZ. Why don’t you take medicine at the hospital? You take so much care of the patients and neglect yourself.

JAMILA. I take medicine but the medicine at a free hospital is useless. The poor patients get well by their own will. Even death is not free here. (11)

As the story of the play unfolds, the audience watches that the residents of an apartment in *The Third Knock* are planning to kill their landlord after he raises rent which is beyond their ability to pay. They kill him when he comes to them but after some time there is a knock second time at the door and they see that the landlord has returned in living condition. They kill him second time and return to their rooms, but at the same time there is a third knock on the door. This time also landlord has appeared. The ever returning landlord symbolizes numerous dictators who were overthrown throughout Pakistan’s early history only to return to leadership in a different form and person. While such a storyline does not make a clear statement regarding the country’s state of affairs, but the audiences viewing the play can observe its economical, political and social connotations as well as Ajoka’s aim to proliferate the liberal humanist values.

Ajoka Theatre's another play *Dukhni* is a critique on Pakistani society presenting the worst chapter of Pakistan's history. This play depicts the episode of partition of Pakistani history, when East Pakistan departed from West Pakistan and became Bangladesh due to illegible leadership and unjust government policies. Dukhni is the name of the central character in the play that is representing the tragedy of every women of post partition era. Dukhni is a lady who is lying dead on the border and the Bengali soldiers refuse to take that dead body by saying that she is not Pakistani and Pakistani soldiers’ refused to take it by saying that she is not Pakistani lady. *Dukhniis* neither accepted in Pakistan or in Bangladesh. She is lying dead but nowhere can find the place for her burial. Shahid Nadeem has raised the question that it was that worst experience of
partition in Subcontinent's history that divided this one nation into three nations and they started to use words like "ours", "yours", and "theirs", even if they were sharing same history and culture. At the time of partition of West Pakistan and East Pakistan there were some people who migrated to East Pakistan but were not accepted there and they returned to West but they were being humiliated here. They were in between condition and suffering from the pain of homelessness. As the character Dukhni suffers in the play Dukhni.

She is in the state of neither here nor there. She is lying dead at the border but soldiers of Bangladesh and Pakistan refuse to take the dead body of that woman by saying that she is not from their country. The play is criticism on the torn Pakistan and the dialogues of both police officers are very painful as they say:

**PAKISTANI OFFICER:** But our graveyards are already overcrowded with foreign dead bodies, coming from Europe and the Middle East.

**BANGLADESHI OFFICER:** Many illegal officers enter our country from all sides. We cannot accept Dukhni.

**PAKISTANI OFFICER:** We too cannot accept Dukhni. If we allow her to be buried here, the doors of graveyards will be opened for other foreign dead bodies. Our land of pure (Pakistan) will be turned into the Land of deads. (*Qabristan*)

**BANGLADESHI OFFICER:** I am sorry, my country is helpless.

**PAKISTANI OFFICER:** I am sorry, my country is helpless too. (208)

*Barriis* also a historical play as this play was composed in the context of General Zia's Hudood Ordinance. The women were entrapped in so many boundaries. At that time, they were not allowed to go to shrines and to participate in the rallies and protesting activities. In the play there are three women who are sitting in a cell. They are being insulted and humiliated by the police officers. They are describing their stories as Marium tells that she was imprisoned because she danced at the shrine of Madhu Laal Hussain. As the title of the play *Barris* symbolizes the turn and acquittal of these poor ladies. They know that they will be used by the constables turn by turn. The play is the realistic presentation of inhumane and unjust attitudes of people and officers in the 1980s. Their conversation shows their miserable condition as:

**JAMILA:** who is the father?

JAMILA: All the officers of the jail are its fathers. (213)

Ajoka theatre has performed the historical dramas based on the lives and struggle of great saviors of humanity like Baba Bulleh Shah, Raja Rassalu, Dara Sheikhu, Saadat Hassan Manto, Bhagaht Singh and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. These plays have great importance in the modern era as they give the message of harmony, unity and love. Shahid Nadeem has unveiled the history by defying all boundaries to eradicate the violence and other issues that can limit Ajoka’s performance opportunities, outside of Ajoka’s control may challenge the organization’s ability to produce effective theatre and promote liberal and humane values. This Theatre has presented the performances based on the lives of historical figures to incorporate the message of humanity and universality.

Ajoka Theatre’s play *Rang De BasantiChola’* is another important historical drama performed by Ajoka theatre in which the scenes from Bhaghat Singh's life have been portrayed. MdeehaGohar says about this play that the viewers connect he play with that historical episode of the colonial rule in the subcontinent where the leaders like Jashwant Singh, Bhaght Singh, Dara, Tipu Sultan made much struggle to make the nation free from the imperialists. Ajoka Theatre has equally paid a tribute to all these Muslim and non Muslim great leaders by ignoring all the religious and cultural conflicts.

Ajoka Theatre's another historical drama *Dara Shikoh* unveils many contradictions of Subcontinent's history. The play emerges between the two lead characters which promote the message of humanity, love and peace. Shahid Nadeem says that the play *Dara* has corrected many historical contradictions in the history which help them to portray the democratic, liberal image of Pakistan to the world. It has presented the idea that Islam is a peaceful religion as it is an important historical episode of Mughal era in the subcontinent.

Ironically, there is a comparison between General Zia ulHaq and Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and *Dara* has been portrayed in the play as a precursor to Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. The maverick civil servant argued that in the clash of ideology, Zia's coup was symbolic of religious power. “Pakistan suffered from Zia's assumed divine right to rule in the name of Islam for eleven long years, during which intolerance, bigotry, sectarianism and dictatorship shook the foundations of this country”(46). Intellectual voices and activist groups such as Ajoka have to constantly contend with Zia's legacy, and the wily servants of the state are always eager to provide legitimacy to retrogression.
In the historical play *Dara* the royal themes, rich characters and poetry promised by all accounts of the production takes the audience very close to the scenes and power practices of King Lear. The play is also a portrayal of two fundamental Muslim ideologies as Dara is a poet who preaches balance between faiths, representing the Sufi branch of the religion. Aurangzeb interprets the faith to enforce the strict Shariah law. The story of historical figure Dara has been presented in dramatic form to show that Islam is not the religion of extremists. It is not about hatred or prejudice but instead it is the religion of love and peace. Throughout productions in Pakistan and India, *Dara* has provoked debates about the modern interpretations of this ideological divide, which is practiced on a daily basis in Middle Eastern conflict.

The question raises that why a play about an actual episode in Indo-Pakistan history was so threatening? The conflict between Dara, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor best known for building the Taj Mahal, and his younger son Aurangzeb, symbolize the two types of ideology prevailing in Pakistan. Dara refers to the liberal class of society who believe in tolerance, peace, harmony, and creative expression, and Aurangzaib repeasants the religious fundamentalists and extremists who believe in strict application of Islamic Shariat and ban music, arts, and rights for women. Performing Dara in Pakistan has been considered threatening because Pakistan’s political and ruling history does not favor him, rather emphasizes his brother Aurangzeb and his adherence to strict sharia law. General ZiaulHaq's regime is one of its examples.

Aurangzeb has been presented as a Muslim hero, as a role model by partial historians and some biased scholars, while Dara who was a great scholar, a sensitive artist, a liberal, a passionate and devoted Sufi, patron of arts, the prince of the people and visionary has almost been wiped out from the history books. Writer and director of the play, Shahid Nadeem puts the question in front of audience that what would have been the course of Indian history if Dara Shikoh become the Emperor instead of Aurangzeb.

Nadeem said “If we want to reverse the retrogressive process of religious extremism and bigotry, we have to revisit that circuital and dramatic turning point in our history,” (Nadeem 19). The drama on Dara is an attempt by Ajoka theatre to bring into surface the excellent though tragic period, reviving the historical episode and to present the cultural consciousness and original facts of subcontinent's history.

Besides this, Ajoka Theatre’s most popular and historical play, ‘*Mera Rang De BasantiChola*’ was a tribute to Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary who was hanged by the British imperialists on March
23rd, 1931. He was one of the most influential revolutionaries of the Indian independence movement. The play was performed and got Bhagat’s message across and received a positive response from the audience. Some other plays by Ajoka Group were performed including *Kari, Dekh Tamasha Chalta* which addresses the various political, historical and social issues and reviewing the crucial scenes of history that Pakistan has faced over the years.

**Conclusion**

The efforts of this Pakistani Theatre Ajoka to promulgate the message of love and peace for whole humanity by denying all the hurdles of geography, culture and history are internationally appreciated. It believes that culture, land and history are not the possession of only one specific nation though it represents the people of a particular land. This group advocates the idea that literature must be represented by nations in such a way that it will not breed the germs of superiority and hatred against the other nations. It must not be used as a tool to exploit and colonize the nations by creating the sense of inferiority in minorities in order to make them psychologically paralyzed and colonized. Literature must not be represented as in the sense of "White Man's burden" but in such a way that through its presentation of a specific identity and history, it will cultivate the feelings of love and peace for all human beings. The literature must be produced with such universal, human and liberal ideology that will help the nations to erase the feelings of otherness against other people. The research highlighted the fact that the purpose of Ajoka Theater using historical figures like “Dara, Banda Singh, Bullah, Jashwant Singh” in its plays was to revisit the history in order to correct many misrepresentations of the history of subcontinent. Rather than this, the purpose of portraying such great leaders from history was to create a relation of mutual cooperation, peace, love, unity, and similarity between India and Pakistan.

**References:**


