

# AIMS AND OBJECTS OF ASIAN THEATRE INSTITUTE

## Smt. Kamala Devi's Statement

THE following is a statement made by Smt. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Vice-Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, on the aims and objects of the Asian Theatre Institute which has recently been taken over by the Akademi:

\* \* \*

The first World Theatre Conference was organised by the Bharatiya Natya Sangh (Theatre Centre, India) in Bombay in October, 1956, largely with a view to bringing together the theatre movement in Asia and in turn make contacts with the international theatre movement.

Sponsored by the International Theatre Institute, it aimed at broadening this organisation in order to make it truly international in character. It was hoped that the discussions would help spotlight some of the problems facing the theatre movement in Asia. In the summing up, it was stated that in the field of popular theatre there was a general paucity of training facilities, especially advanced and specialised knowledge in the various aspects of the theatre. It was also felt that in many cases the indigenous forms of the theatre were divorced from the contemporary forms making the latter unrelated to the life of the people and, therefore, artificial and uninteresting. This had unhealthy repercussions, particularly on the youth and its theatre. It was, therefore, unanimously decided that the best impetus to the movement could be provided by organising an Asian Centre for theatre study which would strengthen the roots of the theatre movement in the countries of Asia and offer opportunities for understanding the various indigenous theatre forms out of which could emerge the contemporary forms closely related to the life of the people and expressing the traditions and ideals of each culture.

### The Objectives

The objectives of the Asian Theatre Centre were to be:



*Shrimati Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya.*

- (i) To study the different dramatic forms of Asia;
- (ii) To conduct research in the classical drama, technique, method of presentation and trace the development of decadence through the centuries;
- (iii) To conduct a research and compile information on the Asian dramatic principles and practices;
- (iv) To conduct advanced post-graduate courses in dramatic arts for those students who have either studied drama in a school or have acquired considerable experience in the dramatic activities;
- (v) To conduct special classes for the training of school teachers, college professors and such other persons with a view to help establish and conduct dramatic groups in schools, colleges, community projects, special welfare centres, etc;

(vi) To maintain contact with the entire dramatic field in the East or co-ordinate their activities as a wing of the ITI so that there is a 'Continuous Bridge' of understanding between East and West;

(vii) To conduct workshops and seminars in playwriting with a view to stimulating theatre activities all round.

Its scope was to be very wide, not only to be a pioneer in the field of Asian theatre but to rejuvenate and strengthen the cultural streams in the Asian countries and bring about better cultural interchange between them and the countries of the world. Notwithstanding the diverse traditions and circumstances obtaining in each country, it is equally recognised that there is a fundamental relationship between them. The upsurge in the Asian countries, particularly since the advent of freedom for most of them provides a meeting ground for the common ends and aspirations of the people.

#### Departments

The Asian Centre was to take the shape of an Institute covering the following departments:

*Information and Research:* The information would be on the various theatre forms of Asia for the purpose of compilation of duly documented material, both historical as well as cultural. The research would be not only in the traditional theatre but related to current studies and experimentation in the theatre.

*Training:* Provide courses in advanced techniques and specialised work.

*Experimentation:* This would follow as a result of the earlier steps and provide the real basis for a creative movement in the theatre world. This would provide co-ordination between research and production and the experimentation would be with different forms of drama and the stage obtaining in different countries of Asia.

It was proposed to start the Institute in India with the assistance of the Unesco and the International Theatre Institute and as a preparatory step to run as an Indian Centre until the unfolding of the proper Asian Theatre Institute. It was to offer training for the educational theatre and community development programme by providing courses to school

teachers for use of drama in schools and to social workers in community development projects, particularly in the rural areas. For this, the Unesco was requested to obtain the services of two experts for the two courses

The Unesco accepted this proposal at its General Assembly in 1956. The Bharatiya Natya Sangh (Theatre Centre, India) on the request of the Government of India, took steps for its implementation and the Institute was formally opened on 20th January, 1958, by the President of the Indian Union in New Delhi. The Institute has been working with 26 students drawn from all over India. For 17 of these, the Bharatiya Natya Sangh (Theatre Centre, India) has provided scholarships; the others have been deputed by various State Governments. The Unesco has provided the two experts to conduct the two courses on the 'Rural Theatre' and the 'Children's Theatre'. The Institute has been transferred to the National Sangeet Natak Akademi.

The Institute is not a school of drama but rather a centre covering all aspects of theatre work, theoretical as well as practical. The work is organised largely on the workshop system: the actual working out of problems, practical application of research and demonstrations by the students themselves of what they have learnt. Each student does intensive work one day a week on a particular project of his or her own choice and these projects cover a wide range.

#### Advisory Board

The time is now come to lay the foundation for the Asian Theatre Institute as originally envisaged. For this purpose it would be necessary and desirable to have an Advisory Board with representatives of various Asian countries on it as also a representative of the Unesco whose continued assistance is expected. This Advisory Body could appoint an Expert Committee to draw up the blueprint for a full-fledged Asian Theatre Institute. The functions would be largely along the lines indicated in the resolution of the World Theatre Conference: to educate and train inter-Asian students in various forms of the Asian theatre, and experimental work (the experimentation could be, to begin with in terms of pure experiment rather than in terms of programme of theatre acti-

(Continued on Page 25)

## Smt. KAMALA DEVI'S STATEMENT

*(Continued from Page 23)*

vity), to facilitate the inter-Asian and International exchange of artists, technicians and companies; to form a research centre, library and experimental laboratory theatre as well as to run specialised courses and an advisory service.

The Institute should be in a position to place its research facilities at the disposal of any country which wants practical help on a given theatre problem. Over and above this, it should be in a position to offer travelling experts who can either work for a short time in a set region to help building up a theatre development scheme and/or to run short seminars in districts or countries in specialised techniques such as stage lighting, scene construction and so on. Within a year the whole work of the Institute would be completely orientated to the entire Asian field.

### **Exchange Programme**

Gradually the Asian Theatre Institute could channel its work towards the rest of the world. The Western and other non-Asian countries' students and research scholars could

participate. Fellowships could be granted to Western students to study Asian Theatre at the Centre and contributory countries could be helped to arrange scholarships, etc., in their own countries. The Institute should also set up an exchange programme for artists and companies throughout the world.

It would be desirable and beneficial to gradually reorganise and expand the Asian Theatre Institute to serve as a centre not only for the Asian theatre but also Asian music and dance as well.

And sound reconstruction must be based on the co-ordination of the traditions surviving in the different countries of Asia and the new influences that are sweeping in. A large part of the ancient stage technique which has either been lost or has become attenuated in one country or region lives in another country or region of Asia. Today when we plan to reconstruct our arts and culture, the need for an Institute like this becomes most impelling. It will serve to draw closer together the most powerful and popular ties that can tie countries and people together.