

# Zanani theatre festival ends amidst calls for more

AA  
Daily Times  
15.3.89

LAHORE: The first Indo-Pak Zanani Theatre Festival concluded here on Saturday night with the participants showering praise on the Ajoka Theatre group for arranging the event to highlight women's issues and promote interpersonal contact.

The seven-day festival was dedicated to Khadija Gouhar, mother of Ajoka director Madiha Gouhar, because of the causes she fought for throughout her life - women's rights and peace in South Asia. The festival was also a celebration of Ajoka's 20 years in existence.

Special awards were given to the directors of plays performed during the festival. India Punjab Minister for Culture and Tourism Ashwani Sekhri was the guest of honour.

Mr Sekhri assured his and his government's support for any theatre groups from Pakistan intending to perform in Indian Punjab. He said the two Punjabs had a common culture and heritage which would help promote relations between India and Pakistan.

Mr Sekhri called for more people-to-people contact. He also hinted that the governments of



the two Punjabs were talking about an exchange of students and artists.

The concluding ceremony included a performance from an Islamabad dance group and participants lighting torches and singing songs for peace.

In brief speeches, Indian artists showered praise on Ajoka and Lahori hospitality. "I'm reborn after visiting Lahore," said Usha Ganguly, a Calcutta-based artist and director of the Rangakarmi group

She said the festival was a notable achievement, but there should be more to promote the causes of peace and women's rights. She said she had participated in 19 women's

theatre festivals, but was overwhelmed by the Zanani festival in terms of performances, audience and the love she and her team received in Lahore.

Kewal Dhaliwal of Manch Rang Manch and Neelum Mansingh Chowdry vowed to continue fighting for women's rights.

Mr Dhaliwal said the festival put Indian and Pakistani theatre groups on one stage and this collaboration should continue and be strengthened. "This should be the job of the governments but it is the artists who have done it," he said.

Ms Chowdhry, director of The Company, who performed Kitchen Kath, said she was "at a loss for words" to describe how much she had enjoyed the festival, which was "a rare and unique opportunity to see the work of other groups from India and Pakistan and to interact with them".

Ms Gouhar and Mr Dhaliwal announced the launch of a joint platform, Punjab Artists Association, consisting of artists from both East and West Punjab, which would hold theatre festivals in the two provinces.

An earlier performance by Tehrik-e-Niswan, Ab Jang Nahi Ho Gi, was criticised by the audience for its "cheap presentation" of a good theme.

The play is based on Aristophane's Greek classic, Lysistrata, written in 411 BC. Jang Ab Nahi Ho Gi was adapted and translated for Tehrik by well-known poet and writer Fehmida Riaz and was directed by Sheema Kermani.

The play revolves around two tribes, Khaebani and Phool Machhi. The story goes that having gained independence through a joint struggle against colonial rule, the two tribes are now in a constant state of strife among themselves because of their chauvinistic rulers.

Disgusted by the state of affairs in this patriarchal set up, the women of the warring tribes unite to bring about a change by refusing the men their conjugal rights. The male actors portrayed their frustration at this by rubbing up against props, drawing a couple of screams of protest from the audience. Some who had come with their children said it was embarrassing and unsuitable. —Staff Report