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TALK**Theatre Cannot Change People...****Sumati Mehrishi Sharma**

New Delhi, February 5: Veteran actor and director Naseeruddin Shah usually visits the Capital with his theatre group the Motley. This time around, he surprised everyone by not accompanying Motley at NSD's Theatre Utsav held last month. The actor was here yesterday to inaugurate Sheher.com, a festival of street theatre, music performances and exhibitions held by Hazards Centre — a Delhi based support group involved with urban issues. Headed by environmentalist Dunu Roy, the group provides consultancy services to community organisations on urban issues. After watching Naseer in the audience for the first time ever, SUMATI MEHRISHI SHARMA managed a hurried chat with him.

Are you interested in the activities of the Hazards Centre?

I was impressed with the issues the group is dealing with. Their work

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mostly involves making people aware of urban problems. Mumbai is also grappling with similar problems. Besides, I was very curious about stories on both sides. People involved with development in metros might have an entirely different approach to such issues. I might get involved with their activities.

Will your contribution be through theatre?

(Laughs) Certainly. That's the language I know. And if I have to get my thoughts across to people, the medium certainly will be acting. I'm also thinking on the lines of collaboration with a new group of actors for the same. Though I do not relate much with street theatre, I'll work out my own story based productions with street children.

But you believe that theatre cannot change people...

I will always maintain my stand on this. Had films and theatre changed people, we would have got rid of many social problems by now. You can only interact with people on an issue. You can't expect them to change their views after watching a mind blowing performance on stage. But my job as an actor is to make an initiative. I wonder why I never involved myself with any such cause. Probably the money I got from films stopped me.

Even Safdar Hashmi tried changing people's views...

Yes. He was successful in his mission, and the fact that people felt the loss after he died proves it. He was different because his involvement in the causes he believed in gave an ideological backing to his theatre.

Are you satisfied with your recent projects?

I am happy about my work in Iqbal. Parzania, the film based on Godhra Violence shown at the International Film Festival (IFFI) Goa was well accepted. Meanwhile, I am trying to grow in theatre.

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