

THEATRE FESTIVAL '19

THE FESTIVAL OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING



Veendum Bhagavante Maranam

Based on K.R Meera's short story of the same name

Language: Malayalam

Director: Hazim Amaravila

Company: Kanal Samskarika Vedhi, Thiruvananthapuram

Kanal Samskarika VEDI, Trivandrum, recently staged their widely acclaimed adaptation of KR Meera's short story 'Bhagawante Maranam' at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala 2020. The story was inspired by the assassination of renowned Kannada scholar M.M Kalburgi and it invites contemplation into several present day political and social predicaments, which makes a theatrical adaptation of the same an effective medium to discuss these issues. The play takes the format of a play within a play where a theatre troupe is rehearsing for the play, 'Bhagawante Maranam.' Every character has two roles, that of the actors in the play and the play within the play. The setting of the play juxtaposes the social apparatus with that of a rehearsal space, also reminding the audience about the relevance of theatre as an art form in time of a social or political revolution.

The most intriguing, yet captivating aspect of the play was its transition between the two contexts. The play within the play is narrated from the perspective of Amara, a young man who set forward to assassinate another Kannada scholar, K S Bhagawan. However, what awaits him after his encounter with Bhagawan, forms the backdrop of the play within the play. In the interludes between the narration of this story, the conversations in the rehearsal space is brought in. In the beginning, the interludes appeared to disrupt the tension and suspense that the play within the play evoked, but as the plot developed the transitions became flawless. The genius of this adaptation works in two ways. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for the audience to receive an insight into the functioning of a professional theatre troupe. The interests and conflicts between the members, makes it possible for an audience to empathise with the actors as individuals. Secondly, it invited attention to the conflict in identity within the members of the troupe. Is the actor different from the individual? To what extent does an actor internalize the character that he/she is playing. This was efficiently done through the portrayal of different characters; some who could easily get into character because of their ideological similarities and some who found

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becoming the character extremely challenging due to difference in ideologies. Therefore, the play not only addressed socio- political issues but also the challenges one would encounter in a performance space.

The play makes quite a few bold statements about the political and social status quo of the country, which evoked diverse responses from the audience. The way one would perceive the play heavily depended on one's political affiliation since there were no attempts to look at the issues from an objective point of view. An actor states in the play that theatre is like a mirror that is held against the society and the play has done justice to every word of this statement. Social issues like religious segregation and communalism are heavily criticized in the play, in a way that would leave the audience disturbed and unsettled after the play ends. It calls out those who are silent and indifferent towards injustice. Even though satire was used in some scenes as connotations of the same, it was mostly delivered as direct, blatant statements. The most debated aspect of the play was its title. Literally, the title says, 'Bhagawante Maranam' or the 'Death of Bhagawan' (K S Bhagawan). However, in a metaphorical sense, it translates to 'The Death of God' or 'God's Death.' (Bhagawan in Malayalam means God). To an audience who is not familiar with the short story, the title in itself would only convey the metaphorical meaning. Only after sometime into the play would one realize that the play is talking about the death of K S Bhagawan. The different layers of meaning in the title also reflects the several dimensions that the play takes to make the audience contemplate the roles that each individual plays in maintaining the equilibrium of the society.

In short, the play is an excellent exemplification of modern political theatre and more so because it juxtaposes the theatre space with the political space. The fine line between the personal and the political was efficiently burred and this, according to the director, was the greatest challenge he faced while adapting the script. Striking the balance between the two becomes possible only when the personal message it intends to convey is in tangent with the socio- political one. The play successfully and efficiently fulfills this parameter, which makes it a piece of art that speaks for its time.