

THE FESTIVAL OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING



Elephant in the Room

Language: English

Playwright: Sneh Sapru

Director: Yuki Ellias

This reimagined fable of the Elephant God follows the story of Master Tusk and his endeavour to find his little baby boy's head which fell from the sky four days ago - or so the falcons say. By his side on this journey are his kidnappers-turned-consultants: Makdee and Moorkh. They find along the way cheetahs who make telling prophecies about the climate change to come the forest's way; hyenas refashioned as Punjabi gossiping aunties laughing at their own miserable jokes about their impending doom ("We're E for Excellent, except we're going to be E for Extinct!"), and old wise elephants that call themselves WordsWeight and like to paint.

It's difficult to believe that one woman alone plays all the diverse characters of the play, but she does, and she does it impeccably. Yuki's mesmerizing performance is inspiring by all angles - excellent vocalization, tremendous physicality and perfect timing. The smooth transitions from Makdee to Moorkh to MasterTusk and back to Makdee are so clever they had the audience in awe and left us wondering how she still had the energy to take on Chitra, WordsWeight and other characters too. Sound and light fell in line with the performance with perfect timing, with not a single beat missed.

Through the telling story of Master Tusk, Sneh Sapru weaves together an intricate narrative that comments on today's socio-political environment with masterful subtlety. Capitalism and industrialization are critiqued, the human capacity (and tendency) to destroy 'others' is questioned along with their blind worship of Gods (Chitra warns not to hurt MasterTusk even by mistake: "for if he's hurt, the gods will come for us because of their kin and the humans will come for us because of their Gods"). The question of the body v/s the head is resurfaced and is reminiscent of Girish Karnad's 'Hayavadana' (it's no surprise that play starts with Ganpati Vandana). When MasterTusk realizes that the baby elephant whose head is on his shoulders was also sacrificed without consideration, questions about relative morality are raised. At the core of the story is the question of ethics - of environment, climate change, religious fanaticism - and a request to be more kind.