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Portraying the contemporary teenage mind

Jun 22, 2012 - Kavita Nagpal | Age Correspondent

Share | लाइक करें | आपके दोस्तों को क्या पसंद है, यह देखने के लिए साइन अप करें.

The third-year NSD students presented an unusual play, Tenderness, at their Bahumukh Hall.

Director Amitesh Grover had converted the hall into a skatepark which is in America populated by undesirable elements from the city. Unlike other sports, skateboard has no rules and no design template. The parks are built in a haphazard manner with additions made as and when wanted. The parks are supposed to be places where the young and the restless can burn their frustrations as they line ride over the undulating ways and paths. With the help of architects Madhav Raman and Vaibhav Dimri, Amitesh has created a mini-version of a skatepark with graffiti (Roy Sanjib and Anpu Varkey) and sculptures (Rishu Shankar); an evocative backdrop for the enactment.

Amitesh takes two short plays Ugly and Slut and excerpts from screenplays of Kids and Ken Park by Larry Clark, to make this play an exploration of "the labyrinth that is the contemporary teenage mind."

In his play Ugly, Christos Tsiolkas studies the frustration of a high-school dropout who kills a man in apparently a senseless act of violence. We see this boy Slim with his rich girlfriend trying to make her realise how much he cares. After killing the man at night Slim goes to her house but she asks him to leave.

The second play, Patricia Cornelius' Slut, takes its cue from a real life shooting incident. Also, after visiting some schools and colleges she saw that when a girl is "overtly sexual" she is diminished disregarded and sneered at. Boys think of her as a "easy lay". The world will have no sympathy for her no matter what happens to her. She brought it upon herself. She deserved it, she was responsible for it. A few days later a front page article dubbed the young woman and her friends as "party girls". This became the starting point for the play.

The play details a fictitious history of the killer's lover, dubbing her "Lolita" and speculates on what kind of personal story might lie behind that tabloid of a "party girl". The name Lolita brings to mind the novel by Vladimir Nabokov. Perhaps it would have been better to have given the girl another name, unless it was given by a design to project a precocious girl. On stage, there are three boys and one girl. The boys become female impersonators as they simulate what has been happening to Lolita since she was born. As they grow up and Lolita become nine years old sexual arousal takes place. It was interesting how it was depicted. The four of them stand in a row tentatively groping each other.

The energy the actors exude was superbly controlled in choreography by Rajan Rathore. Every nook and corner of the stage is used in the action designed by Amitesh Grover who provides a new concept for the use of actors to convey an idea, a thought, through the body in space.

Ironically, the notices for the play mention it unsuitable for persons under 18 years of age which is the period in life the play deals with. Does Amitesh hope to examine the "labyrinths of a contemporary teenager's mind" without any feedback from them?

Baghdad Wedding, a first play by Iraqi writer Abdul Razaak, won the award for the best play at the META Awards for Excellence in Theatre this year. Though I was responsible for short-listing it for the awards I had only seen a video recording. I got an opportunity to see a live performance, intelligently directed by Akarsh Khurana, recently.

From cosmopolitan London to the chaos of war-ravaged Baghdad, the play narrates the tale of three friends who grapple with their cultural, political and sexual identities, torn between two worlds. The play opens with the wedding of the protagonist's friend, as played by Karan Pandit, to attend which the protagonist, enacted by Faisal Rashid, has come all the way from London. The conversation between the buddies reveals how close they are. Faisal advises Karan to be kind to his bride and not to take her from behind. Suddenly they hear the sound of planes. It is an attack by the Americans who strafe the procession. The bridegroom is declared to have died in the firing. Celebrations turn into mourning.

In a long flash back we see the friends meeting quite unexpectedly in London where Karan has already established himself and is currently in the midst of controversy for having written a novel on the culture of Iraq which only talks about the homosexuality of the Iraqi males. There is no mention of the war. Karan takes Faisal to a pub where he meets a fellow Iraqi. The girl (Nimrit Kaur) he meets is free and easy. He falls in love with her. They explore London together and soon develop a relationship. The clash between the two cultures, one he is born into and the other imbibed, was brilliantly manifested in Faisal Rashid's sensitive performance.

Everyone is shocked when Karan returns from the dead. Apparently left for dead in the firing he was later taken prisoner by the Americans who did not spare anything to humiliate him.

He vents his rage at the captain who rapes him. The language he uses is full of such strong invectives that the director superimposes sounds to make it less clear. Karan was in his elements, as an actor, after he returns from the dead. The end, where Faisal goes to the hospital in Baghdad where the girl Nimrit is working as a doctor and asks her to come away with him to London and the answers she gives while refusing him, made a beautiful scene. She knows what Karan is like but she prefers to marry him and stay in Iraq.

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Shiv Visvanathan

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Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* didn't make the cut. Neither did Shaji Karun's *Piravi*, which bagged 31 international awards.

Khalid Mohamed