

Reviving a Queen's Legacy: Theatrical Tribute to Ahilyabai Holkar



(A Review Based on a Conversation with Director Rohit Tripathi)

On 31st May 2025, the two-day theatre festival was organized by Sanskar Bharti, Panchkula, commenced with a powerful and evocative performance of “Ahilyabai Holkar” by **Upstage Art Group** at the Atma Auditorium of Jainendra Gurukul School, Panchkula. The play brought to life the extraordinary story of a visionary queen – a social reformer, protector of Dharma, and a skilled strategist – who rose above the constraints of a patriarchal society to lead her kingdom with wisdom, compassion, and unwavering moral strength.

More than a retelling of history, the production served as a mirror to contemporary society. It reflected timeless themes of women empowerment, religious tolerance, and justice-driven governance. Ahilyabai was not merely portrayed as a ruler, but as a “Lokmata” – the revered mother of the people – who embodied the balance between tradition and progressive change.

Director Rohit Tripathi, in a conversation following the performance, emphasized that the production aimed to present Ahilyabai’s life not as a distant legend, but as a living, breathing inspiration for today’s audience. His strong visual language, disciplined stagecraft, and seamless scene transitions gave the play a grand yet intimate presence. The actors’ coordination and spatial awareness maintained a fluid rhythm throughout, keeping the audience deeply engaged.

Playwright Mukesh Jha infused the script with emotionally resonant dialogues and a well-structured dramatic arc. Through Ahilyabai’s character, he challenged entrenched societal evils like the *Sati* tradition, the denial of women’s education, and the suppression of female agency. His writing was both poetic and purposeful.

Sanpa Mandal’s portrayal of Ahilyabai was nothing short of commanding. Her voice modulation, physical poise, and expressive gaze captured the grace, resolve, and inner turmoil of a leader burdened with duty.

Sharad Tyagi convincingly embodied Malharrao, lending gravitas to the fatherly mentor figure.

Divyanshu brought youthful intensity and idealistic conflict to the role of Khanderao, while Shikha Arya as Gautamibai added warmth and quiet strength.

The supporting cast – Nirbhay, Mohit Bajaj, Sahil Nirola, Vijay Kumar, Arun Amay, Piyush Dwivedi, and Priya Rai – performed their roles with commendable dedication and natural energy.

Costume design by Chandrakanta was both period-appropriate and

visually impactful, grounding the characters in historical realism.

Rajeev Ranjan's music score elevated the emotional cadence of the play, blending traditional motifs with a contemporary sensibility.

Lighting and stage design created striking tableaux, particularly in scenes depicting the royal court, battlefield, and moments of grief.

With an audience of over 500 in attendance, the performance concluded to a resounding standing ovation. This reception was not merely an appreciation of production quality, but a testament to how deeply the story resonated with the viewers.

"Ahilyabai Holkar" stood not simply as a historical drama, but as a powerful reminder of the enduring legacy of moral courage, cultural wisdom, and feminine leadership. It served as a beacon for modern India, where the values of compassion, discipline, and reform still need strong voices.

Rohit Tripathi and his team have not just staged a play – they have revived a legacy. Their effort ensures that the spirit of Ahilyabai Holkar will continue to inspire generations, both on stage and beyond.