

“Laajo” – A Moving Reflection on Partition and the Dignity of Women



On 7 March, the fifth play of the third day of the **23rd Natsamrat Natya Utsav** was staged at LTG Auditorium, Mandi House, New Delhi. The play "**Laajo**", directed by **Chander Shekhar Sharma**, offered a poignant theatrical exploration of

the trauma of the India–Pakistan Partition and the complex questions surrounding women’s dignity and social acceptance. The entire festival is dedicated to the eminent theatre personality Daya Prakash Sinha.

The play is based on the celebrated short story *Lajwanti* by renowned writer Rajendra Singh Bedi. Set against the turbulent backdrop of the Partition, the narrative reflects on the violence, displacement, and social upheaval that affected countless lives, particularly women who became victims of abduction and exploitation during that time.

At the heart of the story is **Laajo**, who is abducted during the riots and taken across the border to Pakistan. Her husband **Sunder Lal**, left behind and haunted by the memory of his missing wife, begins a social campaign encouraging society to accept abducted women with dignity when they return. He travels among people, urging them to recognise that these women are victims of circumstances and deserve respect rather than stigma.

The emotional conflict intensifies when Laajo finally returns home. Initially fearful and hesitant, she finds joy in being reunited with her husband. She wishes to share the painful experiences of her separation, hoping for understanding and compassion. However, Sunder Lal, who publicly advocates for the acceptance of such women, finds himself unable to confront the reality of her suffering. Instead of reacting as he once did, he begins to treat her almost like a goddess—placing her on a pedestal rather than truly listening to her story. This subtle yet powerful moment exposes the deep irony of societal attitudes: while women may be symbolically revered, their truth and trauma often remain unheard.

The performances added depth and authenticity to the narrative. **Sarita Sharma**, portraying Laajo, delivered a sensitive and emotionally layered performance, effectively expressing the vulnerability and resilience of her character.

Chander Shekhar Sharma, as Sunder Lal, convincingly depicted the internal conflict of a man torn between social ideals and personal discomfort. **Ravinder Singh**, in the role of Jamal, contributed with a natural and grounded presence on stage.

Behind the scenes, the technical team played a crucial role in shaping the atmosphere of the production. **Nikhil Jha's** music complemented the emotional tone of the play, while **Jatin's** lighting design enhanced the dramatic intensity of key moments. The costumes designed by **Mamta Rani**, makeup by **Manoj**, and the production support by **Ashish Sharma** and **Mala Negi** helped create a cohesive and effective stage presentation.

Overall, "**Laajo**" emerged as a thoughtful and moving theatrical experience. Through its sensitive storytelling and compelling performances, the play not only revisits the painful memories of Partition but also raises profound questions about gender, dignity, and society's willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. It stood out as one of the notable presentations of the festival.