Saari Raat: Anuragna Theatre Group Explores the Complexities of Human Relationships

New Delhi | Theatre Review

Theatre is not merely a medium of storytelling; it is an art form that explores the deeper layers of human experience, relationships and emotions that often remain unnoticed in everyday life. **Anuragna Theatre Group's** presentation of Badal Sircar's ***Saari Raat*** at Sammukh Auditorium, National School of Drama (NSD), Mandi House, New Delhi, sought to bring these dimensions to the stage through an exploration of human relationships, circumstances and the questions that arise within the human mind.

Translated by Dr. Pratibha Agrawal and directed by Ashraf Ali,

the production offered a theatrical interpretation of a work that invites reflection on the complexities of human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Through its three central characters, the play creates a dramatic world in which dialogue, silence, physical expression and the interactions between characters contribute to the unfolding of the narrative.

Three Characters, Multiple Layers of Meaning

The production featured **Vinay Kumar** as the Husband, **Kamal Rexwal** as the Old Man, and **Komal Singh** as the Wife. The interplay between these three characters forms the foundation of the dramatic experience, bringing questions of relationships, circumstances and inner conflict into focus.

In a play of this nature, meaning often emerges not only through spoken words but also through pauses, gestures, expressions and moments of silence. The physical presence of the actors and their responses to one another become important elements in conveying the emotional undercurrents of the narrative. These aspects invite audiences to look beyond the immediate action and reflect on the deeper tensions that shape human relationships.

Direction and Stagecraft

Director **Ashraf Ali’s** interpretation brings the focus to the relationships between the characters and the dramatic possibilities inherent in their circumstances. In an intimate theatrical production, the director’s vision extends beyond the performers’ movements to encompass stage space, pacing, dialogue delivery and the overall rhythm of the performance.

Stagecraft plays a significant role in shaping the audience’s engagement with the narrative. The arrangement of the

performance space, the movement of the actors and the transitions between dramatic moments can all contribute to the atmosphere of a production. In a play centred on human relationships and psychological tensions, restraint and simplicity can be particularly effective in keeping the audience’s attention on the characters and their inner worlds.

Lighting Design by Oasis

Lighting is an essential component of theatrical storytelling, shaping the atmosphere of a scene and influencing how audiences perceive the characters and their surroundings. In *Saari Raat*, the lighting design by **Oasis** forms part of the production’s visual framework.

The interplay of light and shadow, changes in illumination and the visual emphasis placed on performers can deepen the emotional texture of a stage production. When working with a narrative driven by relationships and inner conflict, lighting can also help establish mood and direct the audience’s attention towards significant moments on stage.

Together with direction, performance and other elements of stagecraft, lighting contributes to the overall theatrical language through which a play communicates with its audience.

Anuragna Theatre Group: Twelve Years of Theatrical Exploration

Anuragna Theatre Group has been active in theatre for the past twelve years, consistently exploring the relationship between literature and stage performance. Its repertoire reflects an interest in adapting literary works across genres, including drama, poetry, short stories and novels.

The group has presented works associated with writers such as Premchand, Vijaydan Detha, Ismat Chughtai and Rabindranath

Tagore. Its theatrical journey has also included productions such as *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Madhavi*, *Katha Ek Kans Ki*, *Teen Gumshuda Log*, *December 71 Ka Ek Din*, *Chitralekha* and *Khushi Ki Hamari Dardbhari Talaash*. English-language plays, including *The Seagull*, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, have also featured in its repertoire.

This range of productions reflects the group's continuing engagement with diverse literary traditions and its effort to bring different theatrical voices to the stage.

A Gathering of Theatre and Literary Personalities

The performance was attended by senior theatre practitioner Shyam Kumar, Vijay Seth, editor of *Colour Canvas*, and theatre actress Paribhasha Mishra as chief guests. Their presence added a cultural dimension to the event, bringing together personalities associated with literature and the performing arts.

Such gatherings underline the importance of theatre as a space for artistic exchange, creative dialogue and engagement with contemporary cultural expression.

The significance of Badal Sircar's *Saari Raat* lies in the questions it places before its audience. By bringing human relationships, circumstances and inner conflict into a theatrical setting, the play offers an opportunity to reflect on the complexities of human experience.

For Anuragna Theatre Group, the production continues a twelve-year journey of engaging with literature through performance. With Ashraf Ali's direction, the performances of Vinay Kumar, Kamal Rexwal and Komal Singh, and lighting design by Oasis, the production brings together different elements of

theatrical expression in service of its central themes.

Ultimately, the value of a theatrical experience extends beyond the final moment on stage. It also lies in the thoughts, questions and emotions that audiences carry with them after leaving the auditorium. In this respect, *Saari Raat* points towards the enduring relationship between literature, theatre and the human experience.

“Madhavi” – A Stirring Theatrical Reflection on Power, Sacrifice, and Womanhood

The stage of the India Habitat Centre recently witnessed an emotionally charged and intellectually layered presentation of *“Madhavi”*, brought to life by **Anuragna Theatre Group** under the direction of Ashraf Ali. Adapted from the celebrated literary work of Bhisham Sahni, the production unfolded not merely as a retelling of a mythological narrative, but as a deeply resonant exploration of the emotional and social realities imposed upon women across generations.

From its opening moments, the play established an atmosphere of emotional intensity and moral conflict. The narrative of Madhavi — a woman repeatedly sacrificed in the name of duty, ambition, and patriarchal expectations — emerged as painfully relevant even within a contemporary social context. The production questioned the structures that normalize female sacrifice while glorifying male pride and authority, making the performance feel both timeless and urgently modern.

A Visionary Directorial Approach

Director Ashraf Ali handled the text with remarkable maturity and restraint. Instead of relying solely on the grandeur of mythology, he focused on the emotional truth embedded within the story. His interpretation transformed *Madhavi* into a living social discourse — one that examined exploitation, emotional abandonment, and the silent endurance expected from women.

The staging remained aesthetically balanced throughout, with carefully designed visual transitions and thoughtfully constructed dramatic spaces. Every movement on stage appeared purposeful, allowing the emotional weight of the scenes to unfold naturally. The director’s command over rhythm and silence played a significant role in maintaining the audience’s engagement and emotional involvement.

Performances Rich in Emotional Depth

The ensemble cast contributed meaningfully to the production's overall impact, delivering performances marked by sincerity and dramatic conviction.

Bhanu Pratap Singh, portraying Yayati, brought a commanding presence to the stage, effectively embodying the authority and emotional detachment of the character. As Marich, **Gaurav Verma** delivered a composed and convincing performance that added further texture to the dramatic narrative.

One of the strongest performances of the evening came from **Vinay Kumar** as Galav. He captured the character's internal contradictions – his ambition, ego, helplessness, and moral confusion – with notable subtlety. His portrayal allowed the audience to witness the complexity of a man trapped between idealism and self-interest.

At the center of the production stood **Paribhasha Mishra** as Madhavi, whose performance became the emotional soul of the play. With extraordinary control and emotional honesty, she portrayed Madhavi's suffering, resilience, vulnerability, and quiet defiance. Her expressions, pauses, and stage presence communicated layers of pain and suppressed strength, making the character deeply human rather than symbolic. Her performance drew the audience into Madhavi's emotional world and remained one of the most memorable aspects of the production.

Javed Sameer, in the role of King Haryashch, added gravitas to the narrative, while **Khilanand Bhatt** as Raj Jyotish delivered his role with convincing authority.

Vidya Dutta, portraying the maidservant, contributed emotional realism to several scenes through a grounded and natural performance. Meanwhile, **Himmat Singh Negi** as King Divodas

introduced moments of wit and playfulness that offered temporary relief from the emotional heaviness of the narrative. His energetic portrayal created a delicate balance within the dramatic structure.

As the Vidushak, **Bilal Khan** sustained the stage's dynamism with confidence and expressive timing. **Chirag Goyal**, portraying Vishwamitra, delivered a performance marked by calm intensity and dignity, lending the character a powerful spiritual and philosophical presence. **Ankit Sati**, in the role of Tapas, also played his part with sincerity and effectiveness.

Technical Elements That Strengthened the Narrative

The technical execution of the production complemented the performances beautifully and contributed significantly to the immersive quality of the play.

Rahul Chauhan's lighting design skillfully shaped the emotional atmosphere of each sequence, using light and shadow to heighten tension, isolation, and introspection.

The background score composed by **Rajesh Pathak** enriched the emotional landscape of the production, subtly reinforcing the mood without overpowering the performances.

Equally noteworthy was the makeup design by **Ravi Parcha**, which enhanced the visual authenticity of the characters and supported the period setting of the play.

A Production That Leaves a Lasting Impact

More than a theatrical adaptation, *"Madhavi"* emerged as a mirror to society's enduring power structures and gender

inequalities. The production compelled the audience to reflect on the emotional cost of sacrifice imposed upon women and the systems that continue to celebrate such suffering as virtue.

With its layered storytelling, emotionally compelling performances, thoughtful direction, and strong social relevance, the play succeeded in creating a theatrical experience that was not only artistically engaging but also deeply unsettling in the most meaningful way. *“Madhavi”* lingered in the minds of its viewers long after the curtains fell, reaffirming the enduring power of theatre as a medium of social reflection and emotional truth.

Triumphant Tale of Love and Laughter: ‘Mirza Saheb Pyar Ka Dushman Haye! Haye!

What happened when despite all the efforts of Mirza, he could not break the relationship of his daughters Saba and Fiza with their lovers Farhan and Akhtar?

The Comedy Play **‘Mirza Saheb Pyar Ka Dushman Haye!Haye!’** written and directed by Ashraf Ali was staged in LTG Auditorium, Mandi House, New Delhi on 5th May 2024 at 4:30 p.m. The laughter and applause of the audience sitting in the auditorium shows that the audience liked the play very much.

Mirza (Azad Sherawat) who does not want to marry his two daughters Saba (Noor Chawla) and Fiza (Shilpa Das) to their lover boys which are Farhan (Ankit Sati) and Akhtar (Naresh Kumar). Mirza’s wife is Khalida (Shalini Sita) and a hard-working servant is Fakhru (Ritesh). Every scene of the play was very connected due to which the audience remained connected till the end of the play. The audience appreciated the acting of Armaan (Chirag Goyal). The acting of Sharafat Ali (Vishal Shukla) was good. Every character played its role well. Fakhru’s character was full of enthusiasm but at some

places his behavior towards his master seemed too loud. Many times an issue was being repeated again and again, which could lead to editing. Azad Sherawat’s performance in the role of Mirza was quite strong.

According to the play, the background music was selected by the play’s writer and director Ashraf Ali. The backstage partners were Shikhar Tiwari, Manik Sharma, Vinay Kumar, Rajan Kumar, Simran and Amar Shah. Noor Islam was in videography. The stage decoration and lighting concept further enhanced the scenes of the play.

“Mirza Saheb Pyar Ka Dushman Haye! Haye!” was a hit with the audience! It’s always great to hear about successful theater productions. It seems like the actors really brought their characters to life, and the backstage crew did an excellent job too. The director’s choice of background music must have added a lot to the atmosphere of the play. And kudos to the playwright for crafting such an engaging story.

Play ‘Couples Shuffle’ Conveys Message to Audience with Laughter

The husband-wife relationship is considered to be the most sacred in the world. Love and trust bind both, but many times husband and wife quarrel by finding shortcomings in each other and a third takes advantage of it. Something similar was seen in Anuragna Theatre Group’s presentation “**Couples Shuffle**“, written and directed by Ashraf Ali. The play was performed on December 24 at Black Canvas, L.T.G. Auditorium, Mandi House, New Delhi-01.

Sharma ji (Chirag) house where he lives with his wife (Shruti Aastha) Chawla. There is always a tussle between the two over small things. Meanwhile, their neighbor Dubey (Bilal Khan) enters, who tries to take advantage of the conflict between those husband and wife and put a string on Shruti. Meanwhile, Maya (Manisha Sharma) enters. Sharma ji is very impressed by seeing Maya and tries to increase friendship. This dilemma

goes on for a long time and finally it is revealed that Dubey and Maya are husband and wife, and they came to Sharma ji's house to investigate them in search of the Best Couple Award in which both of them failed.

Amidst laughter, this play also gives a message to the audience that 'husband and wife should never leave each other in any situation and should maintain trust in each other'. Chirag played his character well in the role of Sharma, as well as his wife Shruti's character had many shades, which she succeeded in keeping in front of the audience. In the role of Dubey, Bilal Khan kept the entire drama tied with his acting and put many laughs in it, as well as the performance of Manisha Sharma in the role of Maya was also praise worthy.

Behind the stage were Goldie in the music, lighting was done by Manik Sharma, Kamal Negi was in the costumes and Ankit was in the stage material as well as Shamsher Khan and Avinash Tiwari in the set.