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A daily knock on the public conscience

Madhur Tankha



A file photo of theatre person Arvin Gaur.

The Hindu

With people from all walks of life expressing anger and helplessness over the gang-rape and murder of the 23-year-old medical student, Akshara Theatre is presenting a street play on atrocities on women at its Baba Khark Singh Marg premises here this Friday.

Titled *Dastak*, the play has been directed by Arvind Gaur. It focuses on articulate interactive communication and talks about violence against women at public places. It explores why working women as well as female students in the Capital feel unsafe throughout the day.

According to Arvind, ever since the barbaric assault on the medical student came to light, his group has been staging this play 10 to 15 times every day. "We involve the public and urge them not to sit quiet but become active and take part in the public discourse. There is drama as well as discussion. We performed at India Gate during the protest to demand justice for the gang-rape victim. However, the police did not spare our group members who were beaten up. Today we staged our play in Delhi University, Pitampura, Ashok Vihar and Noida Sector 16. Day before yesterday we had performed at JNU."

Though the play has been staged in the city innumerable times, some alterations have been made after the shocking gang-rape incident.

"Shilpi Marwah, who has been at the centre of the protest in the city, is one of our main actors," he says.

Apart from this street play, Akshara Theatre is starting the year with continued runs of the popular comedy *The Revised Kamasutra*. It revolves round a young boy who is growing up in Mangalore.

As a sort of New Year resolution, the theatre group seeks to have a theatrical, musical, dance production or a film on the stage every day. It believes a play needs to be presented in a serious or comical form. However, the immediacy of contact and interaction with a live audience make it a very powerful tool of communication.

"Akshara has announced an exciting and challenging calendar for itself, and a surprising number of spectacular innovations created by its founder and inspiration Gopal Sharman – playwright, poet, craftsman in stone, wood and metal, theatre director and television director – and others. There are too many to list," said a spokesperson of the group.

This year there will be two Hindi language production groups – ‘Saksham Arts’ led by Sunil Rawat and ‘Anusaar’ founded by Sunil Kumar Kukreti – and Madhav Mehta’s English theatre company Epic Shit Theatre. “These are young groups full of talented and fearless artistes who are determined to make their audiences sit up, listen and laugh long and loud at our absurdities and with us,” the spokesperson added.

“Akshara Filmfest”, a festival of short films, is an added attraction this month.

Keywords: [Delhi gang-rape](#), [Delhi protests](#), [Akshara Theatre street play](#), [violence against women](#), [Dastak](#), [Arvind Gaur](#)

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