

Amitava Dasgupta's "Kaheke", recently mounted in Delhi, is a sensitive play on the emancipation of the lower castes, says

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BRECHTIAN MIRROR has been in existence for about 23 years and on an average has given us one major production a year. For the last two years or so it has also been involved in reviving and researching different folk forms of Himachal Pradesh. In the process, some of its repertory members have been working with traditional artistes and researching folk legends and music while exploring the possibility of using folk forms in contemporary theatre and also as tools for social change.

Sometime back Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy for Administration in Mussoorie invited Amitava Dasgupta, the director of Brechtian Mirror

for a talk on the possible use of different folk arts such as theatre, music and dance to create awareness for social change. And so came about Brechtian Mirror's latest presentation "Kaheke".

The play is based on two folk forms Kaheke and Harinartak popular in the Upper Kullu Valley and the playwright tells us that Kaheke, meaning human sacrifice, was very much present in the Upper Kullu Valley as late as 70 or 80 years ago to punish thieves and other criminals.

It was banned only after Independence but Kaheke continues to be performed as a ritual after drugging the 'victim' and as he regains con-

sciousness after sometime there is much dance and song. Harinartak is celebrated to welcome the return of herds and herds of deer from the higher regions to valleys for the deer is considered a protector of environment.

Song and dance

The production opens amidst song and dance as the deer came on the stage. There is much gaiety and some beautiful singing. As the scene fades out, Viram (Nishant Ohjha), son of a traditional metal sculptor, Kauta, (Anshuman Chakrovarty) is returning home after completing his studies at the Delhi School of Arts where he was on a government scholarship. Along with him are his friend Girish who runs an art gallery and a painter colleague, Jyoti (Pankumari

Dasgupta). It happens to be the day when the local deity Jamlu Rishi's murti made by Viram's father is to be installed. Jyoti is shocked to know that the sculptor himself will not be allowed to enter the temple for he is an outcaste. She protests against the dictates of the upper castes. Thunia (Anuran Dasgupta), Viram's brother, inspired by Jyoti's stand, steals the murti at night.

Next morning hell breaks out in the village. A search is ordered and the murti is found. Ishwari Gur (Rajendra Nautiyal) through whom the local Devta speaks goes in a trance and demands a human sacrifice; otherwise he will destroy the village.

Everyone expects that Kauta who had made the murti

December 2004 124

For just an egalitarian society

2019.01.10 12



would be named but the Gur in connivance with the village Thakur selects Viram, for, in the young and educated they smell danger. Jyoti tries to get official help but the magistrate says his hands are tied since the permission papers were in order. Viram does not wake up even after a long time and when he does, it is only to collapse again and die.

Without moralising, the playwright and the director make Viram's death a turning point in the life of the village.

The weaker sections join hands to live with self-respect and the right to make their

A scene from the play "Kaheke".

own choices.

Amitava Dasgupta's overall production design is tight and his music and songs like those of Brecht underline the parallel situation as it was then and is today gives strength to the production.

The trance scenes are well choreographed and the cast as a whole plays well while some of the actors like Pankumari, Anuran, who is just 14-year-old and also sings well and Anshuman are brilliant. Rajinder Nautiyal as the Gur when in trance and Sachin Verma as the pujari live their roles beautifully. And of course Noor Zaheer in the mother's role is as good as ever.

"Kaheke" is something different from the usual run of plays on the Delhi stage and must be kept alive. Now that Sahitya Kala Parishad Repertory has been in a limbo for some months surely it could sponsor some shows in and out of Delhi.

