

DRAMA

EKHON ANTIGONE : WHOSE TRAGEDY?

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GANAKRISTI AS A GROUP used to be known, perhaps somewhat unfairly, as Bratya Basu's bailiwick. Most prophets of doom had decided to write *Ganakristi* off as it was expected to fold up quietly with Bratya's departure. However, the members stuck to the guns, and, as their latest production *Ekhon Antigone*—a true to the original translation of Evald Flisar's *Antigone Now*—evinces that they have matured as a group and are capable of handling serious themes with elan. This is probably their most important production till now.

Evald Flisar is not a popular name here, but his versatility as a writer/dramatist has made him the best known literary figure to come out of Slovenia. *Antigone Now* is his latest play, and he calls it a documentary. Amitava Dutta's interpretation of the play stresses dilemma rather than documentation, gearing his production towards intra-personal settlements or the reverse, demonstrating implicit sympathy with struggle against displacement.

Flisar is known for his handling of ancient myths to reveal modern conflicts, retaining the structures of the mythical perorations. It is evident in this play as well. By his own admission, he is unable to subscribe to the kind of 'development' that implies control to such an extent that even the size of the cucumber to be grown by the farmer will be decreed by European Union authorities.

In *Ekhon Antigone*, Clara (Antigone) is guarding her brother's grave (Polyneices / Eteocles) from desecration by the encroaching hands of big business who wants to take over the picturesque cemetery in order to build a luxury hotel with a golf course. The would-be developers whose 'philanthropic' building activity is supposed to 'improve' the quality of life of the people of the town and provide 'employment' to them are trying to intimidate Clara, as well as others, into giving up their rights. They try to frighten her and blackmail her into submission, sending in hired killers. Perhaps the Mayor (Creon) himself knows about them, or, maybe even sanctions their actions. What he probably never knew (or cared) was that demons once unleashed can never be controlled. Clara is also his niece and so enjoys some kind of protection, though the bodyguard sent by the police chief is hopelessly inadequate in face of the goons and it is he who ultimately takes her to the place where she will commit suicide. Clara is tempted in various ways by many people to give up her resistance—all except Clara's Professor Master Guido (Teiresias). The tempters include Clara's childhood friend who had a crush on her, her lover (Haemon) who is also the Mayor's son and who fornicated with her sister (Ismene) just before his impending marriage to Clara, her sister begging her forgiveness, the uncle the Mayor appealing to her loyalty as a favourite niece and trying to convince her of her duty to the people who will get jobs and benefit from the setting up of the hotel. Finally, confused and broken, Clara is persuaded to leave the grave and go to her death. The Mayor—torn between his duty and his love for the niece—is heart-broken. However, the damage has been done, the investor has left the project, and the town will see no 'development'.

While one has to differ with the concluding sentiments of the play, the skill with which *Ganakristi* went about the business of production is admirable. Amitava Dutta as director has done a very good job in ensuring almost perfect team-work. All the actors have done full justice to the characters. Bindia Ghosh as Clara projected a superb mix of strength and vulnerability. Subhasish Ganguly as Master Guido, in spite of some mannerisms, came across as a believable intellectual prepared to stand his ground even in the face of all but insurmountable odds. The best performance came from Sanat Chandra as the Mayor. His restrained emotive acting successfully depicted pain and horror at his own actions, the

sense of futile filial responsibility gradually being replaced by ruthless political behaviour. One remarkable element in the play is the characterisation of faceless hostility and violence portrayed in the figures of the two killers, Hillol Chakraborty and Dipak Das doing a fine job depicting them. The picture of the sub-class of Harmad-like lumpen mercenaries delineated in these killers who have no regard even for their employers adds to the partial element of the absurd in the play.

The director, in a note, has talked about the conflict between the need for struggle against depredations of neo-liberal economics and what he calls 'the natural flow of history' which leads to 'a bright future'. This reviewer believes that the director's inherent sympathy with the individual's heroic struggle against displacement and eviction is led astray by his misconceived belief in neo-liberal industrialization's ability to "cater to the majority's dream". He would do well to study the effects of such industrialization across the world and how it has decimated the aspirations of the people. It is not destiny that is ruining our times. Rather, it is the march of big business aided by foreign capital that is killing off democracy. □□□