

A soul-searching solo

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WHEN the Chennai-based M S Swaminathan Research Institute approached theatre artiste Aditi Desai for a solo performance for their annual festival 'Women and Theatre', she accepted the invitation without wasting a minute. Perhaps she smelt an opportunity to address two problems at one go by using the powerful medium of theatre. "I wanted to do address women's problems in the backdrop of the communal violence that rocked the state last year," she says.

Hence Desai decided to come up with a 55 minute solo performance based on Abhijat Joshi's acclaimed play *Marmbhed* which talks about the communal divide in Ahmedabad. "His (Abhijat's) younger brother Saumya has adapted the play. Called *E-Loko* (They), the script deals with the two powerful women characters of the play — Saфина and Shanta — who live under

the same roof and yet, hate each other," says Desai, who will perform at Natarani today.

The play, directed by well-known actor-director Rajoo Barot and supported by Drishti Media Collective



Aditi Desai

and Fade-in Theatres, talks about how the two women open the communication channel between them and solve their problems. "Shanta's difficulty is that she cannot reconcile with the fact that her only son has married a Muslim. The hate campaign between the two continues till the time riots break out in the city. The chain of events outside force the two women to sit together and discuss their problems and solutions," says Desai. However, the

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root cause of the problem surprises both. "Both of them discover that it's some of their own people who are their enemies and not the 'other' community. Both of them realise that "we fought against each other but never thought of fighting the evil marring our own societies," she says, adding, "the need of the hour is to open the communication channel between the two communities."

Under its Kulvai project, the institute has been organising this festival since 1996. This time, nine artistes from across the country have been invited for solo performances. "The theme has been liked by people there as they feel there is an urgent need to address the problem," says Desai.

Besides performing at the festival, Desai will also do two more shows of *E-Loko* — one for National Federation of Indian Women (Tamil Nadu chapter), where around 500 women will gather for the meet on communalism and the second for Nalandana, a women's organisation.

However, while the various organisations are looking forward to the performance, there is one hurdle which even Desai is aware of. "Since the play is in Gujarati, those who don't understand the language may find it difficult to follow. But we have worked a way out. A short summary of each scene will be read out before the performance," she says.

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