Dangalnama: black humour at its best

There were very few dialogues, and the story was told in actions. Like a father looking for his child gone missing in the riots. All he has is a photo and the words ‘have you seen my son?’

Dangalnama is a well-presented, well-performed play. The coordination of actors on stage was professional — a tribute to the director and the practice of over nine months has paid off. The costumes and set were minimalistic. All characters were dressed alike in black t-shirts and grey pants.

Small props were used to denote the type of character being portrayed, like a minister would wear a nehru topi.

(Abhijeet Choudhary is the director of Swatantra Theatre group.)

The play, Dangalnama, in progress at Yeshwantrao Chavan Auditorium on Tuesday. The play, about communal riots in the country, has been directed and conceptualised by Prasad Varanasi (inset)

ABHIJEET CHODHARY

Dangalnama is a play about communal riots. It talks about incidents that transpired after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 to the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 followed by Mumbai riots in 1993 and to the more recent events that took place in Godhra.

Enacted by students of Flame (Foundation for Liberal and Management and Education), the play has been directed and conceptualised by Prasad Varanasi.

They started off by telling us how their play progressed — from early practises to their recent show in England where Dangalnama was the only play from India at the London International Festival for Theatre (LIFT).

The whole play has been shown through the eyes of a photo-journalist writing a resignation letter. “I am emotionally swamped,” he writes and then goes on to describe why through skits, some of which brought to mind

the Naseeruddin Shah-starrer Parzania and the the Bhishma Sahani play Mriwze.

Photographs depicting each scene he is about to describe are projected on the black backdrop adding to the emotions.

Dangalnama is enacted in English, Hindi and Marathi, depending on what the skit and character demanded. Mumbaiya Hindi prevailed in the scene depicting the 1993 riots in the city.

The play was a successful satire. It is difficult to depict something so serious with humour and they managed to pull it off. The music highlighted it. Film songs were used to caricaturise situations. Main hoon na played in the background while the politicians appealed for votes.