

In Shakespeare's 400th Death Anniversary, alumna Sughanda Sehgal Srivastava is Gertrude in *The New Hamlet : Confused Stell , But in Leather Jacket ...* Director K Madavane



(L-R) Actors Sughanda Srivastava *nee* Sehgal (BA Eng Hons HR MA Eng HR Professor of English MH) as Gertrude, Saif Ansari (Hamlet) with director K Madavane. (Ravi Choudhary/HT Photo)

Hamlet, arguably the most celebrated of Shakespeare's tragedies, is back on the Delhi stage. Veteran playwright and director K Madavane's Hindustani adaptation for the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts (SRCPA) Repertory runs for more than two hours. Though he has directed plays in several countries including France, Africa and Australia, this is the first time **Madavane, 71**, has directed a Shakespeare play.

Very simply, *Hamlet* is the story of a young prince visiting home in Denmark to attend his father's funeral. He is stunned to find that his mother, Gertrude, has married Claudius, her late husband's younger brother. He starts seeing his father's ghost who declares that it was Claudius who murdered him. Hamlet vows to avenge his father's death.

Madavane, who retired as the head of the Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for French and Francophone Studies in 2011, said very few scripts have got him as excited as Hamlet. The depth and layers in the character make it possible for the director to experiment. "One of the sentences in the play is that something is rotten in the kingdom of Denmark. You take out Denmark and put in any other country. The meaning will remain the same because there is always something rotten in every part of the world. In that sense, the appeal of the play is universal," said Madavane.

Madavane and his team's interpretation of a rotten kingdom is one in which no one tends to believe anyone; everyone is suspicious; there is no black and white; good or bad; there are only shades of grey.

In June end, Madavane conducted casting workshops for the play with the SRCPA repertory. He selected 24-year-old actor Saif Ansari, who has been with the repertory for four years to play Hamlet. Madavane had earlier directed Ansari in *Tughlaq* and *Tartuffe*.

Ansari said Hamlet is his most demanding role so far. "There is so much to this character. Every time I read the script, I learn something new about him."

Madavane has taken a few creative liberties with Hamlet. His **Gertrude is a mother of the 20th century. He has lifted that character to that of a modern woman** who claims her rights. “I am against a play based heavily on one character. It is unfair,” said Madavane. “Gertrude believes that it is within her within her rights to get married two months after her husband’s death,” he added.

Unlike Shakespeare’s Claudius who is manipulative, Madavane has created a Claudius who is fighting a dilemma. The villain of the play admits that he killed his brother but he wants people to ‘understand’ him. “There are many angles to that crime. Morally it is wrong but politically it is correct. There are many examples of a man killing his close ones for power.. .In India Aurangzeb did the same,” said Madavane.

In this adaptation, you will see Hamlet wearing a leather jacket and boots. Madavane’s idea was to project a **young rebel** who wears his attitude on his sleeve.

For Madavane and his cast, the play throws new challenges. Apart from working on details of various characters, the set—a set of rectangular blocks—is something the cast has not dealt with before. “The set is moving continuously. All the actors devise their movements according to block and the shadows they see on the stage. It is a very fluid situation. *There is an organic relationship between the actors and the blocks.* They have to see that the set is an extension of their own body,” said Madavane.