

ROCKING THE RAJ

**A Stage Play
by Gurmeet Mattu**

The play is set in a small Indian village in the mid 1960s.

Characters :

Ravi - A male Indian student, around 20 years old.

Ma - Ravi's mother, around 40.

Baba - Ravi's grandfather, around 60.

Leo - A male English hippy in his early 20s.

Rainbow - A female American hippy in her early 20s.

Smith - A Scots engineer, in his 50s.

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THE SQUARE OF A DUSTY, PRIMITIVE, INDIAN VILLAGE. VARIOUS HOUSES SURROUND IT.

PEACOCKS SHRIEK IN THE DISTANCE. A COW MOOS.

AN OLD, DIESEL TRUCK ENGINE COUGHS AND SPLUTTERS BEFORE A LOUD BANG SIGNALS ITS DEMISE. SMITH ENTERS FROM STAGE LEFT, WIPING HIS OILY HANDS WITH A RAG.

SMITH

What a shower... what a bloody shower. Would you listen? Would you listen? No, not a bloody chance. And I know, I told ye, didn't ah ... didn't ah?

But youse knows best, it's your country efter aw, bloody miracles happen here ... like gettin' fifteen ton o' cement intae a ten ton truck. That's a broken axle yiv got there, son an' there's nae point prayin' tae yer great god Rama Bama noo ... no' unless he's a qualified mechanic.

Listen.... there's no a chance in hell that four wee skinny broon fellas like youse is gaun tae be able tae lift that, it's a cran ye need Jesus wept, whit's the point o' takin' five ton o' cement oot noo, the damn thing's broke, an' we've lost a days work, an' if ahm gettin' cheeky letters frae some fat babu sittin' in an office, wonderin' why the contract's not finished in time, you'll feel the toe o' mah boot up yer black arses.

QUIETLY, TO HIMSELF

Children... that's aw they are... puir wee black children wi'oot the sense tae see their mistakes... how they got that Taj Mahal up ah'll never know, must've contracted oot the work.

SHOUTS AGAIN

Aye youse ... wan guid fenian navvy is worth twenty o' yis ... an' ah know the Irish is lazy bastards.

A guid mick dis mair work in his day aff than yis aw day in a week ... ya shower o' shite-hearted wogs ... are yis listenin'? Don't bugger aff tae make the tea while ahm rantin' an' ravin', Abdul, just you stop there an' listen. Naebody's askin' ye tae like it... aye, two sugar...an' make it the way ah showed ye, no' thon milky soup yir aye tryin' tae palm me aff wi'.

QUIETLY

Noo, whit wis ah sayin'...god, it's nae wonder yer aw daft in this heat... aye, it's awright flingin' the British oot an' gaun back tae yer spinnin' wheels wan minute. But

when ye need a factory put up, when ye need the white man's know-how, then it's ' step this way, bwana, stick this wad o' rupees in yer back pocket, an' build us a wee factory, we've an awfy notion tae be listenin' tae the transistor radio.'

SHOUTS

Ali, ya coon, stop gien thae weans the cement, ah don't care if they want tae play wi' it, that's government property. Ah swear... ah swear... every wan o' yis is gettin' yer jotters at the end o' the week, ya useless bunch o' darkies.

Ali ! Tell that wean tae stop eatin' the cement !

SMITH EXITS

BABA ENTERS FROM HOUSE.

BABA

Who is making bloody noise?

MA ENTERS FROM STAGE RIGHT CARRYING A BUCKET OF WATER.

MA

It is the gora, the Britishman, Smith. The legs of his truck have broken.

BABA GOES TO FRONT STAGE AND SHAKES FIST.

BABA

Quit India, you imperialist, get back to your own country ! Get back to your rain and your fish and chips. Get back to your septic isle ... and take your tonsils with you, noisy bloody bloody noisy... bloody...

HE RETREATS TOWARDS THE HOUSE.

MA

Never mind him, come and eat, there's a lot to do.

(HE SITS DOWN CROSS-LEGGED AND MA BRINGS HIM A PLATE.)

You're very late, the animals haven't been fed yet and you'll need to get some water up from the tube-well. There's a full day's work there alone.

BABA

Don't fuss, woman.

MA
(SORROWFULLY)

Oh, fate ... karma ... kismet why have you brought me to this, there'll be hunger this year, if not the next. The ground's dry, the crops are parched. Didn't I pray, didn't I sacrifice... rice and ghee, all burnt for the gods.....

BABA

And she complains about hunger. **(TO MA)** The gods do well enough without my rice and ghee, thank you very much. If they want to eat my food they should come and sit with me like ordinary visitors.

MA PUTS HER HAND TO HER HEAD.

MA

Oh oh oh, the sacrilege. What kind of harvest do you expect if you insult the gods so.

BABA

Five thousand years of civilisation we've had in this country, for this. **(TO MA)** The same harvest as everybody else. Allah doesn't keep Rafiq's land wet just because he's a good Muslim. It goes dry just like everybody elses.

MA

It is true, there are many gods. Insult one, you insult them all. They stick together, the gods... a lesson for mankind.

BABA

Woman ! Woman ! Look, which is the richest country in the world ?

MA

British ? No, America... in America everyone has a car and the women are shameless hussies. Ravi read this to me from a magazine.

BABA

Yes yes, but tell me, which religion do the Americans follow ?

MA

The Americans have religion ? Well, they are white men, so I suppose they are the Christians.

BABA

Exactly. So if the Christian religion can bring such success to the Americans, why don't you follow it?

MA

You want to see me become a shameless hussy! I am a moral woman, I follow the gods my mother followed before me.

BABA

Your mother, hah, now there was a shameless hussy!

MA

You goat ! If my father were alive today, he'd beat...

BABA

It was your father who told me about your mother!

MA

Liar ! My mother was a saint ! You are not fit to grace the ground she walked on.

RAVI ENTERS FROM HOUSE, YAWNING AND STRETCHING.

RAVI

Good morning, mother ... grandfather.

MA

(POINTING TO SELF)

Ma-ji.

BABA

Baba-ji. Save your English culture for the college.

RAVI

What is the point in gaining this expensive education if I am not to use it ?

BABA

True. Forget all about it. From now on you can join me in the fields. I'm getting too old for farming.

MA

Babaji, shush! The boy must have an education, he will be a great engineer.

BABA

You are blind. Every day's education takes him another step away from your world, away from the land, away from your gods...

MA

No no, he loves his mother, he understands. The education is one thing, but his heritage is another.

BABA

If he would only spend a fraction of his time on his heritage .. plough a field perhaps ..

MA

It was his father's wish that Ravi become an engineer. His last wish ..

BABA

Ha, last wish, if I know my son he's living with a dancer in Brazil.

MA

He was lost at sea, it was in the newspapers.

BABA

It was never confirmed. An Indian sailor fell overboard, and the shipping company didn't even keep records of its Indian seamen. It could have been anybody. I'm telling you, my son is with the dancer, and good luck to him.

MA

You are a cruel, evil, old man.

RAVI

Maji, we do not know. We will probably never know .. for a fact. If it pleases Babaji to think father is alive in Brazil, then that is his affair. And if you think he is dead, then that must be your decision.

MA, SOBBING, RUNS INTO HOUSE.

BABA
(TRIUMPHANTLY)

He is with the dancer !

BABA AND RAVI SIT AND EAT

RAVI

Do you truly wish me to leave the college and join you on the farm, Baba?

BABA

Do what you want. Be an engineer, or an acrobat, I don't care.

RAVI

But if the work is getting too much for you.

BABA

Are you saying I'm old ? Do you think I'm ancient ? Get out in the courtyard there and we'll have a wrestle, we'll see who's old.

RAVI

No, Babaji, you always were as strong as a bull.

BABA

A wager, if you beat me you can take over the farm and do all my work. You'll have proved that I'm too old.

RAVI

I shall keep my pride and my education by not wrestling you.

RAVI

You didn't learn that horse-sense in college. Your father would have taken such a bet, he was stupid.

RAVI
(GETTING UP)

In Brazil with a dancer? I'd call him a genius.

BABA
You're too young to be thinking of dancers !

RAVI
As long as I'm only thinking. **(HE COLLECTS BOOKS)** I have to get to college.

BABA
Hurry up and be an engineer and build me a tractor.

**THEY WAVE TO EACH OTHER AND RAVI EXITS, STAGE RIGHT.
BABA GETS UP AND SHOUTS AT HOUSE.**

BABA
All right, I apologise ! Do you hear me ? I apologise ! I'm a nasty, cruel, evil, old man, and I shouldn't treat my daughter-in-law this way. She's a good woman, she takes care of me and my grandson, she cooks well.
I'm sure she'll bring me a lovely lunch to the tube-well where I'm going now to start work. **(HE TURNS AWAY)**

MA
(FROM HOUSE) He's not with the dancer!

BABA
No, no, he's dead. Dead at the bottom of the sea.

GO TO BLACK