

# Don't Drop the Baton

*"Lights, Camera, Ac... Thank you for your patience. The play will begin shortly."*

Aaina Dramatics kicked off a new semester with a double feature titled, 'Crossroads'. The AC Seminar hall was packed with anticipation as some of the college's premier entertainers took stage. The lights were dimmed, the air was tense, and the stage was set for two back-to-back performances.

The first of the two plays was titled 'Reflections', and it began with a scene college folk are much too familiar with – a room where clothes hung indoor with a boy whose midnight slumber slowly festered into an afternoon siesta. The first few minutes of the play saw this boy walking the stage and peering at the audience through drooping eyelids, adding to the languor omnipresent in his room. Soon, this atmosphere of laziness was broken with a plate-glass shatter as his landlady stormed into the room, with a feat of acting that, in equal measure, delighted the audience and irritated the boy.



PC: The Photography Club, Manipal

Much of 'Reflections' was replete with raw imagery splashed with sexual innuendo, with Aaina maintaining its reputation of natural and uninhibited acting. One actor, playing a self-satisfied "Jhanda babu" brought the house down with his brilliant comic timing and ease. The genius of using hanging clothes in the boy's room as a gateway into people's minds is something that few words here can (or should) accurately explain. The audience guffawed at the innuendo, while the deep questions about the existence of our reflection and identity kept taking the laughter into hairpin turns. Thus, the fluctuating mood on stage quickly transmuted to the crowd.

And it all came to a crashing halt. A certain girl who played a woman tired of being used by men took stage. What should have been a powerful monologue that moves the crowd to tears, ended up being a powerless waterfall of stutters and stammers that moved the crowd to yawns – she single-handedly brought down the energy and flow of the entire performance, in a manner that became a slippery slope for the rest of the actors who followed suit. **In considering whether she should at all have been given the role, 'Reflections' certainly went meta.** The Inception-esque ending does add to the latter comment.

The second performance titled "Peele Scooter wala aadmi" was a unique piece on stage. It started off with a basic and simple premise of a young man who painted his scooter yellow because he was afraid of contracting jaundice. This idea was powerfully elaborated into a moving story packed with powerful acting. This play didn't prove to be as big a hit with the audience owing to its lack of humor, but nonetheless rang well with critics.

What should be lauded above all is how well the actors and the men behind the scenes carried on despite numerous technical glitches. There were times when Aaina members in the crowd made sounds to make up for the missing sound effects, in the spirit of Frugal Innovation. The problem that accompanied this

was that often the applause was started by (and sometimes limited to) team Aaina in the audience.

Also, for some reason, the break time between the two plays was totally devoid of any activity. It's understandable that they were busy with logistics and that it's hard to keep crowds hooked. It's not that they're a team of actors trained to do exactly that. Wait a minute...

Perhaps the biggest sentiment that this evening conveyed was how the MIT student clubs are in their figurative autumn season, when the regulars step down and fresh blood takes over. The Aaina regulars took a back seat, but not entirely. For some reasons, they weren't fully prepared to let go.

In the beginning of the both the plays, they made a feeble attempt at explaining the plot and asking the audience to "support us". The latter felt both desperate and out of place. In Aaina's last main production, 'Arsenic and Old Lace', there was an air of confidence present where no one felt the need to ask for support – support came when support was called for. And it was frequently called for.

Through the language of drama, Aaina conjured an illusion of despair, anguish, and control – and not all of this happened on stage. 'Crossroads' should give Aaina plenty to think about. The regulars should learn to let go. The juniors should make letting go worthwhile. Above all, when applause has to be asked for, the only people applauding will be your own.