

srinivas

written by
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Synopsis

srinivas is a play inspired by Parvatha Vardhini and her love for her son, Srinivas Kuchibhotla.

Playwrights' Note

srinivas is a 10-minute play inspired by the true story of Srinivas Kuchibhotla. Throughout the monologue, Parvatha addresses the court, the murderer, her family, and Srinivas' picture.

Setting and Time

Jonson County Court, Kansas on August 7, 2018

Character

Parvatha Vardhini

A small framed Indian woman,
Early to mid-fifties,
Srinivas' mother,
Speaks with a Southern Indian accent

Dedicated to Srinivas Kuchibhotla

March 9, 1984 – February 22, 2017

Rest in Power and Peace

(In one corner a U.S. flag is illuminated. In the other a large photo of Srinivas Kuchibhotla is illuminated. In the center, Parvatha Vardhini stands in front of the court. She is wearing a traditional sari.)

PARVATHA

When he faced challenging times as a little boy in India, I would always impart to my son, Srinivas, the same advice my mother gave me when I was a child facing difficult times. I would say, "Srinivas, give Vishnu your weakness, and they will always give you great strength..." I'm using my angel son's strength to face you...

It's unnatural for a mum to outlive her child... There are some griefs so loud they can bring down the sky and there is grief so still none of us truly knows how deep it lives until we face it...

This is the last mile we have to run in what has been the most difficult race of our lives... facing you in this courtroom today, as hard as it may be... is something that I... we owe our Srinivas.

An act of love...

An act of courage...

An act of healing!

In my culture, we believe the dead are only dead when we have forgotten them and we want you to know that Srinivas, although gone, will never be forgotten! Death leaves an unimaginable heartache that no one, no time, nothing can heal including any verdict you can render today.

My son, Srinivas, and his beautiful bride, Sunayana, were recently married... In India it's tradition to marry young, but Srinivas waited until he was ready... He would often say to me, "Mum... good things come to those who wait... especially in the game of love. Sunayana is my one true love and she was worth the wait..." He would speak like that... This was their time in life to live their fairytale as young newlyweds often do... out of the blue you, your hate, and bullets destroyed everything... You walked up to Srinivas - with no more than six cold inches of metal between you and him - and ended his life... Why?... Why are you still alive and my son is not?!

I never wanted him to come to America. Srinivas would always say to me, "Calm down Mum... you're going to have a stroke!... Olathe Kansas is a wonderful place filled with good people... Mum, Each day I'm learning that the U.S. does not only belong to white people, it belongs to all of us!" So many days and nights my husband and I begged Srinivas to leave Kansas and come back home to Hyderabad... He, like so many immigrants saw America as the land of milk and honey... Srinivas believed deeply in your American Dream. You stole that dream from him...

Tell me... what crime did Srinivas commit in the bar that night?... My son came to the U.S. to study and work as an engineer... How and why are such horrific incidents like this still happening in one of the oldest democracies in the world?... Please, someone tell me why and how is this still happening in America?

“Get out of my country!!”

“Dot head!!”

“Get out of my country!!!!”

“Camel Jockey!!”

It’s what the Olathe police told us you screamed at the top of your lungs at Srinivas and his friends! The monstrous words of hate you spewed at my son before firing your gun... and if your evilness and ignorance could not get any more despicable, you had the gall to tell the world you thought you had killed “Iranians!!”

The killing of Indians, immigrants, and people of color across America has not stopped... in fact, it’s only increased since my son’s murder... Things are bad... and every day it seems it’s getting worse... We are in a war... honestly... There are many sides and humans willing to kill for what they believe in, even if its hate!

This constant battle makes my son, Srinivas, a casualty of war that he and so many of us not just in America but across the world have been fighting against for so long...

White supremacy!

White domination!

White hatred!

My Srinivas should be saluted and given a military funeral... Sunayana should be given a war widow’s benefit... Sunayana should... but will not... and we all know why! Because in America, time and time again we see a white life is more valuable, more important that a brown one or a black one...

(She turns to the photo of Srinivas.)

Srinivas... oh how I wish I could go back to India and tell our family and friends that your legacy lives on and that your murder was not a drop in the ocean... Oh son how I wish I could do that, but I can’t lie... I’ve never lied to you and I won’t start now... All I can say is that the reverberations you left, son... the rings on the surface... are spreading larger and larger! They continue to multiply, bumping into other rings and causing constructive interference from so many lives that have been destroyed by white hatred and white supremacy... Maybe, Srinivas, this all sounds hollow, but it’s what I hold on to every day to get through the day without you.

When the American history books get rewritten again, I hope, son, with all my heart and soul that you will be included. Not only as an immigrant and parent, but as a citizen soldier who risked your life every day to live in a country you chose to live in in pursuit of your dreams of a better life for you and your wife! Son, the country you died for hasn't yet come to be, but maybe, when it does, you'll be seen as one of its founding figures!

There are so many vivid memories of my son that continue to resonate since his murder. Particularly summertime in Hyderabad. Summer in my country can be very, very hot. For some it's unbearable, but my son, he loved it. Throughout Srinivas' charmed life, I was always so impressed with his ability to adapt to whatever his situation was, and marveled at how much he loved the summer. Many summer nights we would sit outside our home in Hyderabad and just look up at the night sky... which was filled with dazzling bright stars... It's only since his murder, I realize perhaps they were not stars in the night sky, but rather tiny openings in Heaven where the love from our ancestors whom have passed on can now and always shine down on us...

To let us know that they are with us always lighting a path for us forward...

That we are not alone...

That in our darkest moments, their light shines on us and comforts us...

That the overwhelming sense of grief my family feels is the price we pay for the overwhelming love Srinivas gave each of us throughout his life...

Now, whenever I need him most, all I have to do is look up at the night sky and feel the closeness we once shared in life.

It has been said that time heals all wounds... but that's untrue... there are some wounds and scars that, no matter what, always remain... My scars are deep and abounding... they vary in their depth, size and scope. They all share in common a strange healing power that reminds me that even though my son is gone,

Srinivas was real...

Srinivas was ours...

Srinivas Kuchibhotla was my heart beating outside of my body...

I will miss him...

I will miss you, son...

Thank you all for listening...

(Lights fade on her. A small light illuminates the flag and Srinivas' photo which slowly fades as news reports fill the air announcing the verdict.)

(Blackout)

END OF PLAY