August Strindberg’s Play: Babai

Playwright: August Strindberg
Adapter & Director: Ishita Mukhopadhyay
Group: Ushneek, Kolkata
Language: Bengali
Duration: 2 hrs 10 mins

The Play
Babai is a trans-creation of August Strindberg’s The Father. Taking inspiration from the original, playwright Ishita Mukherjee has adapted the play into an Indian locale and has given it a relevance to the socio-economic reality of today. The play is about an extremely complex relationship between a husband and a wife, which culminates when it comes to the question of the future of their only child. Not wanting to lose her custody over the child, the wife induces suspicion in her husband’s mind about him not being the real father, thus pushing the husband into an abyss of doubts, and taking over the household and making everybody believe that the husband’s sanity is under question. The husband, unable to bear this painful predicament, gradually loses his mind and in the end the family, under the vigilance of his wife, sends him to an asylum. The play talks about the eternal power politics between man and woman, state and religion, and society and individual.

Director’s Note
Strindberg’s The Father is considered as one of the finest naturalistic psychological drama. Often it is seen as a tragedy of a husband falling into the trap laid by his wife. As a woman director I have a different take on that. To me, Strindberg created sympathetic characters. He created a strong

impression of male dominant society of his era which is quite relevant even today. To me, the wife is also a victim of patriarchy just like her husband is. The proof of fatherhood is instrumental to form a social-respectability which is inspired and instructed by the voice of patriarchy. I found that the play not only speaks about the gender politics but also speaks about the mistrust, unfaithfulness, loss of trust and the general lack of communication between man and society, society and politics, politics and religion, religion and concept, concept and individual.

The Director& Playwright

Active in Bengali theatre for more than three decades, Ishita Mukhopadhyay has created her place as an important theatre director of our times. As a director, she brings a sensibility in her work that is the result of her experience as a woman. She has well-formed views about group theatre, the economy of theatre and the challenges of being political in theatre. Over the years, Ishita Mukhopadhyay has directed a host of plays of which Ghar, Kamalkamini, Gawaharjan, Khela Bhangar Khela, Kallu Mama, Ora Tinjon and Agnijatak deserve special mention. Ishita has received numerous awards as the best director, some of which are Uttam Kumar Award, Pramathesh Barua Award, All India Critics Award, All India Women Association Award, Kalaratan Award and many more.

The Group

Ushneek was formed in 1984 by enthusiastic young theatre lovers and was registered in 1991. Till date Ushneek has produced 14 full-length plays, 5 one-act plays and 3 audio plays. Ushneek has participated in all the major theatre festivals in India like Nandikar Natya Utsav, Natya Academy Natya Utsav, Yuva Utkal International Festival, Sangeet Natak Academy festival, and 8th Theatre Olympics etc. Ushneek has travelled with its productions to almost all the major cities of India, not to mention the small towns. Besides staging plays Ushneek has also organised seminars and held workshops

to enhance its capability to do better theatre. Ushneek has organised theatre workshops for mentally challenged children for two NGOs and has also worked with the male and female sex workers of Kolkata.

Cast & Credits
Professor Dipankar Bose Debshankar Halder
Doctor Samanta Subhasish Mukherjee
Maya Srijata Bhattacharjee
Mashi Chhanda Chatterjee
Mimi Arunika Dey
Dinu Thakur Prabir Dutta
Nakul Majhi Saptarshi Bhowmick

Light Designer Debabrata Sarkar
Music Ablu Bhattacharjee
Make-up Aloke Debnath
Set Designer Sanchayan Ghosh
Sound Operation Kalyan Sarkar
Crew Sujit Chotttopadhyay, Subhojit Bakshi,
Chitra Dey, Shreyashi Barua,
Ayan Debnath, Deepan Roy,
Parthosarathi Ghosh, Arnab Acharyya,
Sourav Ghosh Roy, Sushmita Halder,
Soumen Halde, Pinaki Das,
Sumitra Das, Debabrata Sarkar,
Ritesh Kumar Mondal

Playwright & Director Ishita Mukhopadhyay

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Agnijatak



The Play

The play Agnijatak concerns children who are the future citizens of the world and who happen to be the most marginalised beings as they are exposed to both emotional and physical threats. Being vulnerable and defenceless, they cannot fight the atrocities by adults. The play addresses the burning issues of the globe through allegory. Monika, the protagonist hears from her unborn child that no baby is to be born in this ghastly world anymore. The foetus disturbingly questions the mother about the atrocities taking place world-wide. Throughout the interaction between the mother and the unborn child we get to see this planet in a horrifying light. The play ends in an optimistic note where all hope is yet not lost.

Director's Note

Through directing this play I found an opportunity to convey the disturbing thoughts that come to a thinking mind while observing the terrible degeneration of the world both by physical and metaphysical parameters. Since the play addresses the issues of atrocities, which is becoming a global phenomenon, I, on principle tried to give it a look which is not area, geo or locale specific. Only time is specific here

because the acts captured in this play are very much contemporary. I worked with a big cast which is always challenging for a play which is organically intimate. Though this play has elements of an adult fairy tale, I intentionally crafted pieces of news highlighting the morbidities happening worldwide to transform this play from surreal to real, from soul to skin, from the world of fantasy to the burning realities.

Director & Playwright

Ishita Mukhopadhyay has scripted and directed over 20 plays for her own group Ushneek and other groups as well. She had been associated with Desh, a biweekly magazine as a theatre critic for 3 years. She also has written more than 15 plays which have been aired by all India Radio, also scripted and co- directed numerous programmes of Kolkata Doordarshan. She also showed her multi-direction talent while scripted and directed tele-serials for channel Zee (Hindi). In 1984, at the age of 20, she directed the play Ghar, an adaptation of Jean Paul Sartre's The Room. She also performed as an actor under the direction of Salil Bandhopadyay, Sunil Das, Manoj Mitra, Aloke Ranjan Dasgupta, Wolfram Mehering and others. Ishita has received Uttam Kumar Award, Pramathesh Barua Award, All India Critics Award, All India Women Association Award, Kalaratan Award and many more.

The Group

Ushneek was formed in 1984, and has produced 10 full-length plays, five one-act plays, organized theatre workshops and taken part in various theatre related activities. It has received A.I.C.C award, Pramathesh Barua award, Uttam Kumar award and many more. Ushneek has participated in almost all major theatre festivals and has conducted theatre workshops for mentally challenged children with NGOs. It has also produced a workshop based production Raat Parider Rupkatha with sex workers of Kolkata. Ushneek is

regularly involved in different theatrical activities like organizing workshops, seminars, play reading sessions and arranging lectures by eminent theatre personalities.

Cast & Credits

Monika	Arpita Ghosh
Prof. Harishankar Mohanti	Babu Duttaroy
Biman	Gambhira Bhattacharjee
Deb	Subhojit Bakshi
Bimbo	Arko Sen
Chandrima Sanyal	Hena Chatterjee
Doctor	Debjit Bhattacharjee
News Reader	Subhasish Mukherjee
Chorus	Tuli Chatterjee, Chitra Dey, Sagarika Mondal, Sukanya Chatterjee, Debjit Bhattacharjee, Rittik Patra, Debasish Mukhopadhyay, Ayan Debnath
Child Artistes	Sanchari Dutta, Arkendu Bhattacharjee, Souvik Das, Asmita Chatterjee, Arunika Dey
Set, Costume and Puppet	Sudip Gupta
Music	Goutam Ghosh
Light	Dipankar Dey
Sound	Operation Koushik Sajjan
Make-up	Aloke Debnath
Script and Direction	Ishita Mukhopadhyay