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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