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Editor of
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Prof. Abhijit Sen
Professor, Department of English
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal

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Author(s): Bidhan Mondal

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Cold within the Heart of Children & the Doom of Parents: a Review of the Jatrapala *Briddhyashrame Kadche Baba-Maa*

Production: "Briddhyashreme Kadche Baba-Maa" (Father and Mother are lamenting in an Old-age Home)

Produced by: Muktomanjuri Opera

Song/ Lyrics: Swapan Pakrashi and Ujjal Biswas

Cast: Biswajeet Chakraborty, Baijayanti Kairala, Kumar Siddhartha, Somnath Ghatak, Lata desai, Ms. Pamela and others

Story: Manjil Banerjee

Direction: Nepal Sarkar

----- Bidhan Mondal

Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of English, Visva-Bharati,
Santiniketan.

Muktomanjuri Opera of Kolkata staged *Briddhyashrame Kadche Baba Maa* in Bolpur Dak Bangla Moidan on March 08, 2017, organized by Bolpur Adyashakti Sangha. The inhabitants of Bolpur and its surroundings had the extra amount of pleasure of witnessing the performance of Biswajeet Chakraborty, as the main focus of this jatra was the glimpse of this celebrity who has mastered in Tollywood film and serial/Television industries. Moreover Nepal Sarkar being a veteran director of famous jatra palas, this jatra added a cherry on the top of the cake to the audience. The poignant news regarding the ill-treatment of the elderly is horrifying in numbers in our country. Elderly parents being abused and abandoned is not just an urban phenomenon but it has reached in the rural areas as well. In rural India, the family



system is eroding with the younger generation, increasingly heading off to cities with their spouses and their children to start a new life. That led to the helplessness of elderly parents who mostly leave their own home to take shelter in a briddhyashram or old-age home, this jatra deals with one such unfortunate elderly father Biswajit and mother Lata.

At the very beginning Nachiketa's epoch-making song "amar thikana briddhyashram" [my address is old-age home], strikes the keynote of this jatra theatre. The first scene opens in Somnath babu's (Biswajit's brother) house at Palashdanga village, Somnath babu with his extraordinary grasp of dialogues, highlights the major concern regarding the assault done by younger generation to their elderly parents. His strong barbs on the frailty of human relationship like "monuswatto hariye gelo, social mediar juge hariye geche somporko, maa-baaba der dukkho aj chorom ...taito baba-maa kadche geche briddhyashram" (We have lost humanity, we have lost relationships in this age of social media, today parents are suffering the most. So, the parents have gone to old-age home only to cry). In fact, it is interesting the way the director through Somnath babu has deliberately mentioned the references of ideal sons like Shrabhan Kumar, Vidyasagar to attack the careless children of present generation, who have no concern for their parents. Biswajit babu, a retired teacher, has two sons Sushanta and Siddhartha, Sushanta being an insensitive businessman makes a shameless deal with his father to earn by shoe-polishing (his pension being stopped) and his mother to earn by doing job as a maid servant. On the other hand, Siddhartha is dedicated to his parents and in spite of being physically challenged, he is talented in singing.

I must say the organizers had appropriate reason behind their decision of staging the play on 8th March, which is celebrated as International Women's Day. The theme of this jatra



theatre has ample scope to proliferate women empowerment both in rural and urban level, as the plot is centered on three major women characters Koyel, Baijayanti, Pamela and their deep-seated desire for Siddhartha. Koyel is an educated village girl who has completed her masters in English from Calcutta University, on the other hand Pamela, the daughter of village doctor Subha Parui, is a convent educated girl of Kolkata who has just returned at Palashdanga. In spite of lack of infrastructure and facilities in village areas regarding education, it's good to perceive these two village girls have overcome these hurdles, tackled with all sorts of odds and defied stereotypes to become educated. These girls are in fact not timid or submissive like the conventional village girls, they can protect and protest as Koyel slams Soumyajit with her dialogue—"Ami jat sonkhochur ek chobole tomar namer age chondrobindur chand bosiye debo" [Stay away from me; I am a king cobra, who can kill you with a single bite]. Baijayanti on the other hand, has been appointed as an English teacher at a school in the village; her character is the epitome of the economically independent women of our country who are gradually leading in all the fields. She has supported Biswajit babu's family especially his son Siddhartha to become physically fit and both of them become popular singing duo.

It is somewhat incredible that even after seventy years of independence the crisis of identity and the problem of homelessness for women have barely changed at all in India. An Indian woman spends her entire life in quest of her own home in her father's, husband's and son's home respectively. But Lata debi, Biswajit babu's wife moans the grim fact that a woman never finds a "home" of her own. Rape is one of the most vulgar ways through which patriarchal society dominates women by treating their bodies as commodity. While



Siddhartha has saved the honour of Pamela when she was about to be raped by Soumyajit, his brother Sushanta raped Koyel in Siddhartha's absence that lead to the stigma on her character. The villagers forced her to marry Sushanta, leaving her love Siddhartha to marry his rapist brother, that verdict has become tough for her to tolerate as she commits suicide. Although sweeping changes have promoted the status of newly developed India, the number of gender related crimes and the crimes of deceiving the elderly parents have been increasing day by day. This suggests that although we are bragging the eminence of modern India in the world, we are not modernized in our behavior in our attitude as Somnath babu's dialogue exposes the farce—"baba korche juto polish, maa majche bason/ er poreo naki bharat pabe jagat sobhar srestha ashan!" [The son is insisting his father to polish the shoe and his mother to serve others; still Indians do believe that India will be sited on the top of this world!]

Soumyajit, Dr. Shubha's brother has done an outstanding role of villainy under the disguise of a wicked transgender (hijra). His activities, expressions and dialogues like "mrityumichiler sure ami behala bajabo" [I'll play violin in the tune of the procession of death], again comedian Shakil from Bangladesh has affixed fun elements in this jatra through his stammering. Along with Pamela's mindboggling dance in the track of "Oh balma", choices of some of the songs like "biswapita tumi", "amaro porano jaha chai", "toot jata hai" deserve audience appreciation. But there are loopholes as well; firstly, the plot is entangled with too many issues like the conflicts between city and country, English language and mother tongue, home and old-age home which lead to a rambling and incoherent ending. Secondly, Somnath babu's speech was fraught with direct political references like the steps of chief minister Mamata Banerjee to eradicate the practice of taking bribes by the police



which was misleading. Thirdly, Biswajit babu's acting was not up to the expectations, maybe he couldn't cope with the codes of jatra.

In spite of these loopholes, I must say the direction especially the use of the stage and light by the director was adorable just as the message. Biswajit and Lata are just two of the millions of elderly people with uncaring family members who take their limited riches before throwing them out of the home. The numbers of elderly parents, who are moving out of their homes to old-age houses that cater to their needs, are increasing day by day. But there are not enough old-age homes in India to house all the abandoned elderly people. I remember many moist eyes among the audience after the end of the show which clearly tells the impact of this jatra in its reception.