

Theatre from Home?

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Ahmed believes that theatre today differs heavily from what it was in the 70s and 80s. "People no longer have the luxury to spend their evenings at theatre plays. The lack of community spaces in this country and the traffic congestion restricts them from travelling to the available conventional venues that usually stage plays," he explains.

As a result, Spardha decided to take the theatre experience to people's doorsteps.

"Intimate theatre", although a popular form of entertainment in other parts of the world, is quite new to Bangladesh. "Bismaykar Sabkicchu" is intimate as the

participation of audiences has a crucial role in steering the narrative. Most shows of the play have been held in people's drawing rooms till date.

However, intimate theatre plays can also be staged in conference rooms and studio offices, given that these indoor spaces are 25 feet long and 15 feet wide, and can block out noises from the outside. The minimalist productions are monologues, and require only a few props that can be carried around easily.

"Theatre is a representation of life.

When a person encounters another person, there is an effort to understand one another, without that lively element, theatre is not possible," asserts Ahmed.

One of the main reasons that he chose "Every Brilliant Thing" to translate and adapt is that it addresses important issues through a simple narrative, following a child who faces mental health struggles.

"It is a subject that resonates with our lives, and needs to be addressed without any hesitation. Macmillan uses humour as a tool to alienate audiences and at the same time, brings them closer through a chronological narrative," adds Ahmed.

"Bismaykar Sabkicchu" has a Bangladeshi setting, with a carefully selected soundtrack that adds a local touch to the narrator's list of things that make life worth living, including "bakorkhani", "bela biscuit", and "Hajir biryani". Ahmed talks about the livelihoods of the middle-class and upper middle-class through the story.

Akhter exudes brilliance with her engaging performance that keeps one glued to their seat for an hour and a half. Her ability to lose herself into the character is evident in the way she makes one laugh by depicting the innocence of a 10-year-old as she responds to her mother's depression to a heart-wrenching portrayal of a mature woman on the edge of divorce, and having her own mental breakdowns. Her performance as a woman in distress evokes empathy in a manner that makes one feel as though they are conversing with a dear friend.



▲ The narrator interacts with the audience at different points of the play.

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Audiences are seated in a circle throughout the play, often finding themselves playing minor characters like the father, teacher, vet or lover.

"Interactions are quite limited in a proscenium, where the expressions of audiences are unexposed to the performer, but in this particular play, as audiences are directly under the light and are expected to participate, I make sure that they do not feel any discomfort and participate without any hesitation," shares Akhter.

As audience participation moves the narrative along, a fair amount of improvisation on the actress's part is required, which is quite challenging.

"Each interaction varies as per the viewers and the environment and I have to

improvise accordingly," she adds.

Be it audiences playing characters that have profound effects on the narrator's journey or lending their voices to "500 Miles" at the end, "Bismaykar Sabkicchu" touches one deeply.

The minimalist play shares an important perspective on parental depression and the ways of battling it. As the narrator's list reaches one million things with the audience calling out the entries in collective compassion, she gives us hope, encouraging us to share with others the burdens of our grief, and urging us to choose life.

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Spardha's third production, "Bismaykar Sabkicchu", is a single-act intimate play, usually staged at people's living rooms.

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