



“When the laws of the heart have been broken, what can the laws of the society do?”: Exploring the Fragility of Conjugal Intimacy and Marital Erosion in Bratya Basu’s *Who?*

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Abstract

Theatre in India after independence, particularly in Bengal, is largely characterised by its engagement with social and political issues, and therefore, it remains a contested space marked by rupture and continuity. Alongside the erosion of the agitprop theatre, the emergence of global economic liberalisation and the new media scenario mark the Bengali theatrical spectrum since the 1990s as a space for radical experimentation with language, props, settings, and other forms of dramaturgy. It is in this rich labyrinth that the emergence of Bratya Basu makes a significant contribution to the evolution of Bengali theatre. Characterised by a self-reflexive and pastiche approach, Basu’s works blend socio-political critique with a penetrating psychological exploration of human relationships in the modern urban Indian context. The paper attempts to explore how Basu presents the play, *Who?*, as a trenchant indictment of domestic intimacy, leading to conjugal erosion. A scathing critique of the inherent fallibility of human connection in a contemporary milieu marked by deceit, emotional abandonment, and the pervasive residue of patriarchy, Basu’s play remains a narrative where dark humour, absurdity, nihilism, and psychological realism frequently and deliberately interplay. Basu’s play is also a commentary on the hidden side of contemporary human relationships in a rapidly evolving world. By making a close reading of different characters and their experiences, the present paper attempts to explore how Basu’s dramaturgy frames marital failure not merely as a result of individual ethical or emotional shortcomings, but as a direct symptom of larger social transformations, including existential instabilities. The present paper thus seeks to show Basu’s *Who?* as a socio-political critique of an innate ethical fiasco placed within modern Indian urban domestic life.

Keywords: Bengali Theatre, Bratya Basu, Angst, Despair, Absurdity.