

REVIEW

# Engaging, but not uplifting

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*Satyameva Jayate* (Truth Alone Prevails) is a quote from the Hindu holy book *Mundaka Upanishad*, we are told in the introduction of the play.

*Satyameva* is a two-actor play by Sudipto Bhawmik, a Jersey-based Bengali playwright of astonishing fortitude, and directed by Indranil Mukherjee. Bhawmik stunned audiences at the South Asian Theater Festival 2006 with his play *Ron*.

It is not fair to expect the same thrill from all his works, but, unfairly, we actually do. *Satyameva*, one of three plays presented at the Edison Playhouse in Edison, New Jersey recently is no *Ron*; but it has its moments.

Sudipto *babu* writes about 'issues' of immigrant Indians living in the United States. His *Ron* was about a young Indian-American man fighting in Iraq and how that affected everyone he knew. Another play, *Kaal Suddhi*, is about a smugly settled Indian American and his involvement in the erstwhile Naxalbari movement. *Satyameva* is about Sanjay, a young software professional who works for a software 'body shop-

ping' company operated by another Bengali American: 'Bill' or Biplab.

The play opens as Bill (Bhawmik) fires his employee Sanjay (Pinaki Datta). From then onwards, it is a tightrope walk between fact and fiction by young Sanjay who begs, reasons with, threatens, and blackmails his boss to let him keep his job.

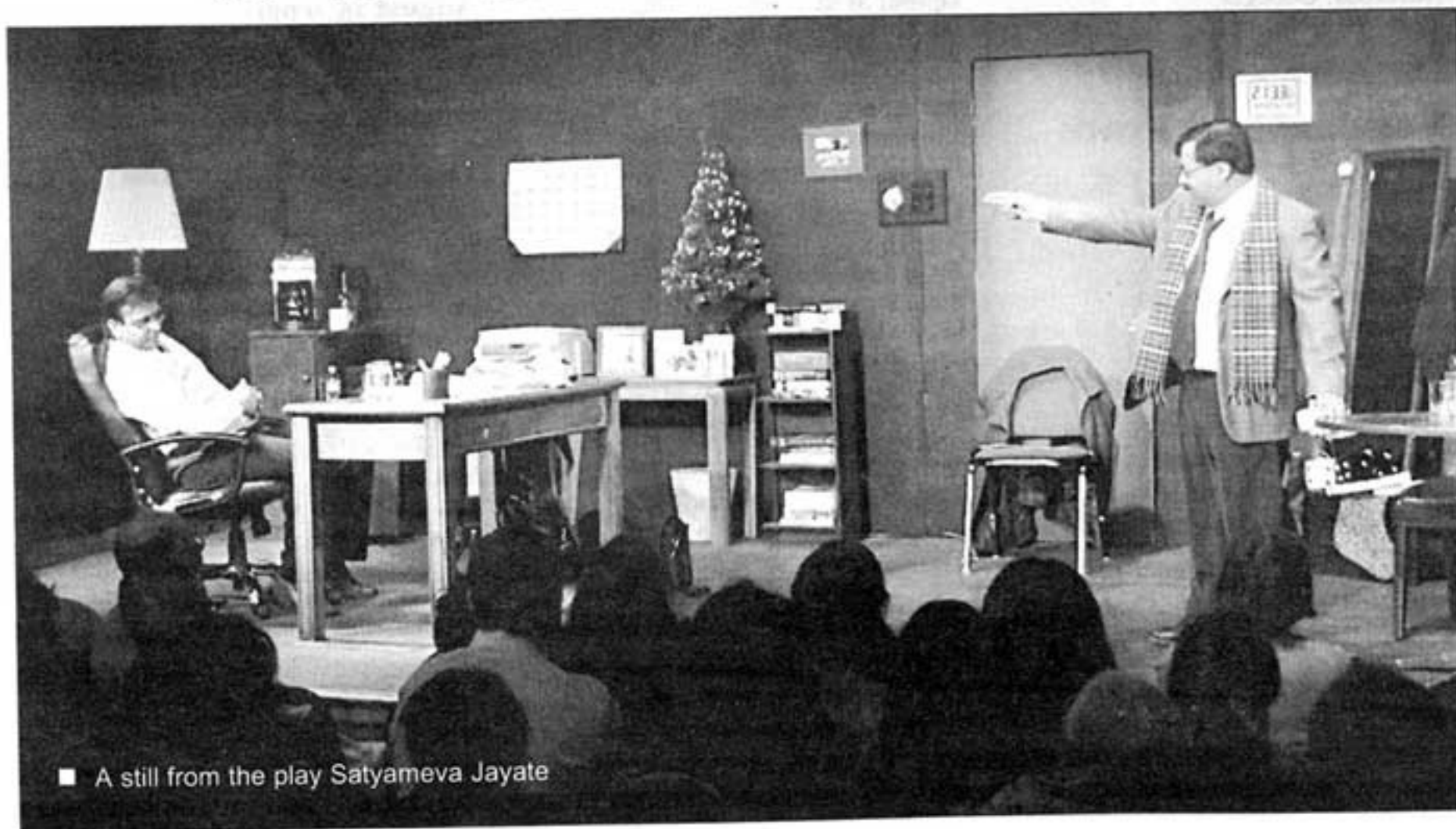
Bill, in the process, transforms from an arrogant employer to a sniveling, lonely old man holding on to his character flaws like a drowning man clutching straws. It starts out as a con game and becomes a subtle study of human nature towards the end when Bill begs, the younger man to stay even if his resume was padded and his sto-

cunning sense of plotting. One bonus of this play was to see the shy Bhawmik shout, snort, sigh and simper. This production was directed by stage and screen actor Mukherjee, who played Sanjay in its Kolkata production with Sankar Ghoshal as Bill. There are plans to do this play in other languages, said the playwright.

ries embroidered.

To this reviewer, the conclusion seemed too well rounded, too traditional. Also, the theme is a bit overdrawn for a single scene with only two characters. It is unfair — though inevitable — to say that *Ron* had multiple stories and hence multiple characters which made it a richly complex work of theater. While *Satyameva* is an engaging essay, it is an essay nevertheless. That said, Bengali plays in general and Bhawmik's efforts in particular in the trisate area are far superior to pitiful Gujarati offerings although Gujaratis here outnumber Bengalis or Marathis.

Sudipto *babu* is a self-effacing man who looks more like a real estate agent than a writer with social relevance on his mind. One is startled by his masterful use of the Bengali language and



■ A still from the play *Satyameva Jayate*