INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Themes And Techniques

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Edited by
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Dedicated

To

My Sweet Daughter Diya

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

Of all the literary forms, drama earns the most distinctive place. All other literary forms except drama provide reading pleasure and have audible effect lacking to produce visual effect upon the minds of the people. Only drama as a literary form gives us dramatic pleasure in the form of theatre along with reading pleasure and thereby generates audio-visual impact upon the minds of the people. Textual words of a drama take the form of concrete shape and become living and animate when they are used and performed by the actors on the stage. There is hardly any literary form that gives so sensory pleasure as drama. Addition of eye to ear makes a drama highly pleasurable that is hardly seen in any literature. Other literatures only involve ears and stimulates inner eye instead of outer ones and thus become more imaginative than realistic but in the case of drama realism attains the height of supremacy combining at a time ear and outer eyes of the people. Infusing life into action, drama not only presents the life as it is, but also gives the vision of seeing it. All social problems and issues are presented through drama in such a way that they become very effective.

Opposite to novels where novelists involve themselves directly into the narrative design as narrators and poetry where poets do the same thing as personas, dramas claim no direct involvement of the playwrights into the actions as there are performers who become the vehicles for their ideas or values. Structure is more important than content and language in drama. Novels and poetry appear taking into consideration its content and language respectively but dramas rather take structure into account- not only the structure of the unfolding story, but also on the interrelationships of characters. It does not mean that content and language are of no importance in drama. They are only sidelined as regards structure. Along with content and language, a drama also has some additional elements- actors, designers and director. Due to all these factors, drama, as an art becomes a very singular form and claims a special skill both from its writer as an artist and its actors as performers. Drama is enjoying popularity since its very origin. Even at the present age of digitalization, drama has not lost its growing popularity. Though modern men are taking more interest in digital media like cinema, television, internet etc., there is still a group of people who are taking more interest in drama where audience and performers, both real and living divided only by a line between onstage and offstage can easily merge to each other in the bond of nearness and familiarity. The same is also true to Indian English drama. In recent years Indian English drama is seeing its glory of performance drawing comparatively more people than past years into the theatrical arena. The present full flowering of Indian English drama has not occurred in a day; rather it has to walk a long path to reach this present stage. Right from Aurobindo, then Rabindranath Tagore to contemporary wide ranging artists like Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar , Mahesh Dattani, Badal Sirkar, Mahasweta Devi, and Usha Ganguli, it has attained its present position.

Before the Indian English drama made its appearance in the literary scene, drama had been pre-existing in other languages in some form or other since the Vedic period. If we trace back to history, we see the long line of development in Indian drama

beginning its journey with the Sanskrit plays. As in Greece, England and many other countries, the drama in India had a religious origin. It emerged out from the different episodes taken from *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagvadgita* as the ancient Greek tragedy came into being with the ceremonial worship of Dionysus and the same happened in the case of English drama with the dramatizations of major events in Christ's life. Same as Latin and English dramas which initially served as tropes or additional texts to religious and ecclesiastical music, Indian dramas also made its journey with music and dance at the beginning. The same is still existing and somehow seen in practice during religious festivals like Dussehra in present India. Bharata's *Natyashastra* in Sanskrit which covers all the major aspects of dramatic art is the most pioneering work on Indian dance and drama written in the Vedic period. The importance of *Natyashastra* lies in serving as the oldest of the texts as regards the theory of the drama. Bharata regards drama as a divine origin and assigns it to Veda calling it the 'Fifth Veda'. Bharata hardly misses any element that requires for dramatic art in *Natyashastra*. From the dramatic text to the stage setting, everything is discussed in detail in *Natyashastra*. The combination known as drama is, according to *Natyashastra*, a blend of *Rasa* (Flavour), *Bhava* (Emotion), *Vrittis* (Styles), *Pravittis* (Trends), *Siddhi* (Occult Power), *Svaros*, *Abhinayas* (Leading an Audience towards), *Dharmis* (Performances), instruments, song and theatre-house. Sanskrit Literature comes into two groups on the basis of *Natyashastra*: *Drishya* and *Sravya* and drama, being visible came under the category of *Drishya*, whereas poetry, being audible came under *Sravya*. Sanskrit dramas had three primary constituents: *Vastu* (Plot), *Neta* (Hero) and *Rasa* (Flavour). *Vastu* (Plot) as a constituent of Vedic drama was either *Adhikarika* (Principal) or *Prasangika* (Accessory) or both. *Adhikarika* (Principal) concerns the main characters and pervades the entire play concentrating on the main action, whereas *Prasangika* (Accessory) focuses on minor characters and adds supplementary action to the main action. When *Prasangika* (Accessory) focuses on minor characters, it is called *Parkari* (Incident) and when it adds supplementary action to the

development of main action, it is called *Pataka* (Banner). *Neta* (Hero) comes next as the one of the three major constituents in Sanskrit drama. *Neta* (Hero) as characterized by *Natyashastra* must be *Vineeta* (Modest), *Madhura* (Sweet Tempered), *Tyagi* (Sacrificing), *Daksha* (Capable), *Priyamvada* (Civil in Talks), hailing from *Taptaloka* (Noble family), *Suchi* (Pure), *Vagmi* (Articulate), *Sthera* (Consistent), *Yuva* (Young) tended to *Buddhi* (Intellect), *Utsaha* (Enthusiasm), *Smrthi* (Good Memory), *Kola* (Aesthetics), *Maana* (Pride) , *Shura* (Brave) and *Dridha* (Strong). The foremost of all is *Dheerodatta* which means the combination of brave and sublime is the most requiring principal for all the heroes of Sanskrit Drama. Finally comes *Rasa* (Flavour) which, according to Bharata, is produced only in *Natya* (Drama), other forms of art- *Kavya* (Poetry), *Nritta* (Dance) and *Nritya* (Mime) in life are *Lila* (Play) that produce *Bhava* (emotion). There are nine *Rasas* (Flavour): *Shringara* (Love), *Hasya* (Humour), *Adbhuta* (Wonder), *Shanta* (Peace), *Raudra* (Anger), *Veera* (Courage), *Karuna* (Pathos), *Bhayanaka* (Fear) and *Vibhatsa* (Disgust). The most remarkable dramatists of ancient India were Kalidasa, Ashwaghosh, Shudraka, Bhasa, Harsha, Vishakhadatta, Bhavabhuti, Murari, Mahendravikramavarman and Bhattanarayana whose dramatic works which claim special place in the history of Indian English drama are Bhasa's *Urubhangam*, *Karnabharam and Madhyamavyayoga*, Shudraka's *Mricchakatika,* Kalidasa's *Abhigyana Shakuntalam* and *Malavikagnimitram*, Bhavabhuti's *Uttar Ramacharita*, Vishakhadatta's *Mudrarakshasa*, Mahendravikramavarman's *Mattavilasa* etc.

Till 15th Century, Sanskrit drama reached to its glory but afterwards it almost ceased to be written as well as performed due to foreign invasion. In the 17th century and onward, drama revived in the form of *Loknatya* (People's Theatre). As a folk theatre, *Jatra* and *Kirtan* in Bengal, *Bhavai* in Gujarat, *Tamasha* in Rajasthan, *Raas* and *Jhoomer* in Punjab, *Bidesiya* in Bihar and *Nautanki, Ramleela and Rasleela* in Maharashtra and other parts of Northern India earned a wide popularity during the time. Loknatya (People's Theatre) went on to be performed in some form or other in different parts of India in folk languages till the British came in India. With the arrival of the British, Indian drama took the road of modernity. In

1765 one Russian drama lover Horasin Lebdef and Bengali drama lover Qulokhnath had staged two English comedies *Disgaig* and *Love Is The Best Doctor*. But the real beginning of staging English drama took place in 1831 when Prasanna Kumar Thakur set up *Hindu Rangmanch* at Calcutta and staged Wilson's English translation of Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit drama *Uttar Ramacharita*. In 1852 1853, the famous Parsi Theatre was launched in Bombay which influenced the entire country rapidly. Postagi Pharmji was the pioneer in establishing the Parsi Theatre company in India. Many new theatre experiences were brought upon stage during Parsi Theatre's evolution in India. On the other hand, the amateur theatre also developed with the works of Bharatendu Harishchandra, acclaimed as 'the Father of Hindi Drama'. Writing Indian English drama started with Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted* in 1837.

Only after the appearance of Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilization* on *The Literary Horizon* in 1871, Indian English drama made its true journey. In 1920, a new drama largely influenced by prevailing movements like Marxism, Symbolism, Psychoanalysis and Surrealism appeared in almost all the Indian languages. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo who deserves the first Indian dramatists in English in the true sense belonged to this time. Tagore's plays mostly written in Bengali are also available to us in English. His remarkable plays are *The Post Office, Chitra, Sacrifice, Red Oleanders, Chandalika, Muktadhara, Natir Puja, Sanyasi, The King of the Dark Chamber, The Cycle of Spring* and *The Mother's Prayer*. Being well-rooted as regards the Indian ethos and ethics in their theme, these plays received wide acclaim among people. Sri Aurobindo who is one of the major voices in Indian English drama enriched theatre during the time with his five complete blank verse plays along with six incomplete plays. His complete plays are *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta, Radoguna, The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric* and each of these plays is written in five acts. His incomplete plays are *The Witch of Ilni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The Maid and the Mill, The House of Brut, The Birth of Sin* and *Prince of Edur*. The length of these incomplete plays varies from one scene of fifty two lines to three acts. The feature that strikes most in Aurobindo's plays is

that they deal with the different cultures and countries in different epochs, ringing with variety of characters, moods and sentiments. *Perseus the Deliverer* is based on the ancient Greek myth of Persues, *Vasavadutta* is a romantic tale of ancient India. *Rodoguna* is a Syrian romance. *The Viziers of Bassora* is a romantic comedy which takes us back to the days of the great Haroun al Rashid. *Eric* is a romance of Scandinavia, a story of love and war between the children of Odin and Thor. Romance, heroic play, tragedy, comedy, farce, all find representation in Aurobindo's plays and thus the scale of his plays is large and the themes are diverse.

During the colonial era, other eminent playwrights who have made significant contribution in the growth of Indian English drama are Harindranath Chattopadhay, A.S.P. Ayyar, P.A. Krishnaswamy, T.P. Kailasam, Bharati Sarabhai, J.M. Lobo Prabhu and Sudhindra Nath Ghose.

There are seven verse plays to Harindranath Chattopadhay's credit published collectively in *Poems and Plays*. They are grounded on the lives of Indian saints. Along with verse plays he also wrote five prose plays published collectively in *His Five Plays*. His prose plays reflect his socialist bent of mind in theme and structure. A.S.P. Ayyar wrote six plays. *In the Clutch of The Devil* is his first play and the last one is *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*. Ayyar's plot and characterisation are subordinated to the message and he employs the drama as a mode of apprehension of reality pertaining to contemporary life. The fame of P.A. Krishnaswamy mainly lies on his unusual verse play *The Flute of Krishna*. T.P. Kailasam wrote both in English and Kannada. Though Kailasam is regarded as 'the Father of Modern Kannada Drama', his genius finds its full expression in his English plays such as *The Burden*, *Fulfilment*, *The Purpose*, *Karna* and *Keechaka*. Bharati Sarabhai is the modern woman playwright during the colonial era of Indian English drama. She has written two plays *The Well of the People* and *Two Women*. Of these two plays, the former is symbolic, poetic and is besides a significant contribution to the Gandhian social order, while the latter is realistic, written in prose and probes the private

world of a sensitive individual. J.M. Lobo Prabhu is the last great name in Pre Independence Indian English drama. He has written over a dozen plays but only *Mother of New India: A Play of India Village in three Acts* and *Death Abdicates* appear before Independence. His *Collected Plays* was published in 1956. Lobo Prabhu is capable of writing dialogues with felicity, situation–creation is also admirable but his characters do not appear life like, soothing and convincing to the audience. Up to post – independence era, drama in

English on Indian soil could not hold the ground firmly as poetry and novels had done. The same went on even after Independence and still now drama has not attained the same status as poetry and novels.

In the Post Independence era Indian English drama develops a bit in comparison to early years but still cannot come up to the place of poetry and novels. The main factor for this poverty is the composite form of drama that gives rise to many problems and issues involving the playwright, the actors and the audience all at a time, whereas poetry and fiction are free from such compositeness. However, the Post Independence Indian English drama has gained currency by the increasing interest of the foreign countries. A good number of plays by Indian playwrights Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in England and U.S.A. Indian drama took another step to its growth and development when Kendriya Natak Akademi in 1953 and next National School of Drama established by Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1959 started working. But no change came over the status of Indian English drama as no noticeable effort was taken to establish regular school of Indian English drama in our country. Theatre being monopolized by the Indian dramas written in native languages, Indian English drama is continuously failing to come up to equal plain with native dramas. Still development comes due to growing interest among people. In the Post colonial era, poetic plays also developed side by side the plays written in prose. Among verse playwrights, Manjeri Isvaran, G.V.Desani, Lakhan Dev,

P.A.Krishnaswami, M.Krishnamurti, S.D.Rawoot, Satya Dev Jaggi, Pritish Nandy, Hushmat Sozerekashme, Sree Devi Singh, P.S. Vasudev and S.Raman are mentionworthy. The number of prose playwrights is larger in comparison to verse playwrights. The most prolific playwright of The Post Independence period is Asif Currimbhoy, who has written and published more than thirty plays. Some important plays are *The Tourist Meeca*, *The Restaurant*, *The Doldrumness*, *The Coptives*, *Goa*, *Monsoon*, *An Experiment With Truth*, *Inquilab, The Refugee*, *Sonar Bangla*, *Angkeer* and *The Dessident M L A*. Pratap Sharma wrote two prose plays *A Touch Of Brightness* and *The Professor Has A War Cry*. His plays were staged even abroad successfully but they failed to be staged in the country. Sex, moreover remains the prime theme of his plays but Pratap Sharma shows a keen sense of situation and his dialogue is often effective. Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* including *Nalini: A Comedy, Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy* and *The Sleep Walkers: An Indo American farce* are considered to be a welcome addition to the dramaturgy of Indian English drama. *Songs of Deprivation* is also a short play by Ezekiel. His plays can be appreciated for symmetrical construction with abundance of irony. They unveil his sharp observation of the oddities of human life and behaviour.

A new and completely original drama has appeared with the appearance of contemporary dramatists Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Badal Sirkar in the literary scene of the nineteen eighties. They have paved Indian English drama towards the path of modernity. Deviating from classical and European models, contemporary Indian drama is now experimental and innovative in terms of themes and techniques. Instead of following the footsteps of traditional dramatists, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Badal Sirkar have made their experiments over the traditional themes and techniques from present socio political perspectives.

The well known plays of Girish Karnad are *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Tale Danda*, *Hayvadana* and *Nagmandala. Yayati* reinterprets an ancient myth from *The Mahabharata* in modern concept. *Hayvadana* is

adopted from *Katha Saritsagar*, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. *Tughlaq* is Karnad's best historical play mingled with facts and fiction dealing with the complex personality of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. *Tale Danda* is a discovery on the vital relationship between contemporary society and literature. *Nagmandala* presents the conflict between patriarchal and matriarchal views of society focusing on female sexual liberty. Girish Karnad is indebted to history, mythology and old legends for his plots but with intricacy of symbols, he makes most of them relevant in contemporary situation.

Vijay Tendulkar is called the avant garde of Marathi Theatre. Tendulkar, a journalist in his early profession later becomes more famous as a dramatist than a journalist. His dramas present the problems and sufferings of man, concentrating on the middle class society. The major theme of his plays is the isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar, relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable but rather keeps it row and natural. The plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache*, *Kalojanchi Shalai*, *Ek Holti Mugli* reflect Tendulkar's concern with authority and the idea of exploitation of individual. In the plays *Silence! The Court Is In Session* and *Ghasiram Kotwal*, the theme of oppression is the dominating theme all over the plays. *Sakharam Binder* is a study in human violence amounted to powerful dramatic statement. *Kamala* and *Kanyadaan* follow the naturalistic tradition. Along with a study of marital status, *Kamala* is also a study on the theme of exploitation. *Kanyadaan* is a complex play about the cultural and emotional upheavals of a family.

Mahesh Dattani is credited to be the first Indian English playwright who has won Sahitya Akademi Award for his valuable contribution to the growth of Indian English drama. The theme of his drama mostly deals with familial relationships. His *Where There is a Will* analyses the negative love of a father for his son.

Family relationships tend to be prominently displayed again in *Do the Needful.* The enigma of generation gap constitutes the crux of his drama *Dance Like a Man. Tara* depicts characters suffering from repressed desires, slavish mentality to unreasonable traditions and cultural construct of gender. Another play concentrating upon gender issue is *Bravely fought the Queen*. Through his plays, Mahesh Dattani succeeds in persuading the audience or readers to examine their individual and collective consciousness raising several questions about woman's condition in Indian society.

Badal Sircar, a prestigious name in the realm of contemporary theatre is the representative of New Theatrical Movement in India. His dramatic career that began with humorous play like *Solution X* attained full of maturity with the publications of *Evan Inderjit*, *That Other History* and *There Is No End* dealing with political, social, psychological and existential problems. *Evan Inderjit* is a tale of a playwright struggling in vain to write a play. In *There's No Need*, the thesis that "*We are all accused*" and so sharing the burden of guilt is developed by Sircar. Sarcar's *Pary Konodin, Jadi Aur Ek Baar, Palap* and *Pagla Ghoda* came out next. Last plays in Sircar's dramatic career are *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News* based on the concept of Third Theatre. *Procession* is about the search for a 'real home' in a newly born society standing on equality. *Bhoma* is the dramatization of the life of oppressed peasants.

In the growth of Indian English drama, the role and influence of Mohan Rakesh cannot be denied. Nearly all his dramas written in Hindi are translated into English and other regional languages. His most popular plays are *Ashadh Ka Ek Din, Leharon Ke Rajhansa* and *Adhe Adhure*. The last play of his dramatic career was *Pair Tale Ki Zamin* completed by Kamleshwar after his death. As a dramatist, the main concern of Rakesh was to depict the crisis of contemporary man caught in the inescapable web of uncongenial surroundings and the persistent threat to human relationship.

Along with contemporary male dramatists, contemporary female dramatists also took efforts to complete another half of Indian English drama that remained incomplete for a long time by

infusing feminine psyche into it by their co-participation with their male counterpart and thus made it truly complete. In this regard, the contribution of Usha Ganguli and Mahasweta Devi is undeniable. Mahasweta Devi wrote five plays *Mother of 1084*, *Aajer, Urvashi O' Johny*, *Byen* and *Water*. *Mother of 1084* is a heart-rending account of the anguish of an apolitical mother who had witnessed and experienced the horrors of Naxalite Movement of 1970s. In *Aajir*, Mahasweta Devi concentrates on the issue of the fast and rapid deterioration of values and their impacts on society, especially on uneducated people. *Urvashi O' Johnny* is a play written for emergency through the love affair of Johnny with Urvashi, a talking doll. *Bayen* presents a touching account of a hard and stern reality of a woman's life in rural India. *Water* is the story of a professional water diviner, Maghai Done, an untouchable boy. Her plays represent a deep and profound concern for human predicament and sincere hope for the better future of mankind.

The present volume *Indian English Drama: Themes & Techniques* covers twenty seven well explored articles written by researchers and academicians. The first chapter in this volume written by Tirthankar Sengupta presents how the eminent Bengali playwright Badal Sircar has restructured the theatrical space and experience in his third theatre play *Michhil*. Next Thulasi Das B's paper attempts to analyze Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* in the Foucauldian genealogical method and traces back the problem as a historic problematic of the socio-political system of India from Vedic antiquity to the present. Rafseena M's paper makes a re-reading of Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Harvest* on the basis of the theoretical proposition of The Uncanny by Sigmund Freud, taking this study out of the clichetic futuristic rendering. Sreetanwi Chakraborty's paper makes a critical and comparative analysis of major plays of Usha Ganguly and Mahesh Elkunchwar. Next Dr. Seema Sarkar's paper makes a feminist study on the character of Leela Benare in Vijay Tendulkar's '*Silence! The Court is in Session'*. Shruti Roy Chakraborti's paper presents how the children's plays of Vijay Tendulkar ponder on various problematic questions along with entertaining the children. Dr. Shachi Sood's paper makes a feminist

study on the agony and suffering of HIV positives in Indian society as shown in Mahesh Dattani's *Ek Alag Mausam*. Dr. Irum Alvi's paper shows the use of myths to depict the human dilemma between reality and illusion in Girish Karnad's *Naga Mandala*. Dr. Prachi Priyanka's paper presents a study of gender dynamics in select plays of Mahesh Dattani. Gunjan Gupta's paper makes a comparative study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* and Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. Ragini Kapoor's paper makes a thematic study on the dramatic works of Rabindranath Tagore. The collaborative paper of Tanveer Qureshi & Ashraf Karim presents the dynamics of power relations, greed, and an insatiable thirst for material possession and above all the role of Divine Providence in the lives of human beings in Manoj Mitra's *Banchharam's Orchard*. Next Dr. Archi Madhani-Patel analyses the dramatic techniques employed by Mahesh Dattani and the idea of violence as conceived by Vijay Tendulkar in his play *Vulture*. Armeen Kaur Ahuja's paper *Retracing leftovers of Leftist Theatre in retrospect through Habib Tanvir* attempts to trace the rise of leftist theatre in colonial India, its visionary emancipatory attempts to consolidate the nation through birth of IPWA and IPTA and the change in governance and rise of Indian bourgeoisie during initial years of independent India and the resultant middle-class theatre along final burial of people's theatre in modern India through examining changing taste of audience and performing techniques. Next in the volume is Dr. Mangesh Madhukar Gore's paper on presentation of victimization of woman through innovative symbols and technique in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Shubhra Ghoshal's paper throws some light on *Jatra,* a *popular folk-theatre* form of Bengali *theatre*. Next Dr. T. Sasikanth Reddy's paper examines the marital and familial conflict in terms of the communication styles adopted by the different characters in Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*. Milda Mary Savio's paper studies Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajith* in the light of Sartrean existentialism. Dr. Brajesh Kumar Gupta's paper shows Utpal Dutt's greatest contribution to the theatre. Next follows Supriya Mandal's paper on Usha Ganguli's *Rudali* showing the transformation of its protagonist from a helpless

victim towards an empowerment and agency. Sujoy Barman's paper deals with multiple aspects of gender discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's plays. Subhrajyoti Roy's paper studies Vijay Tendulkar's *Tara* on the different levels of human conscience. Anupam Das's paper presents the existential study of self in Badal Sircar's Plays. Saurabh Debnath's paper presents gender studies in Girish Karnad's *Naga -Mandala.* Amrita Datta's paper *Violation of Human Rights and Values in Mahasweta Devi's Aajir and Water* presents an analytical study on expansive human rights and value concern in a distinct pattern. Finally, Dipak Giri's paper examines on the shift of power structure in respect of sex, religion and politics in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal.*

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1

RESTRUCTURING THE THEATRICAL SPACE AND EXPERIENCE IN BADAL SIRCAR'S *MICHHIL*

Tirthankar Sengupta

Badal Sircar is best known for developing the 'Third Theatre', an experimental mode of theatrical presentation which made him one of the most influential dramatists and theatre directors of independent India. In seeking to define the 'Third Theatre', one needs to be aware of the dichotomies that are harmonized in it. The traditional forms of rural, folk theatre from different parts of India, most notably the *jatra* are considered as the First Theatre while the western-influenced (primarily urban) theatre that uses the proscenium stage is considered as the Second Theatre. Sircar was working towards creating an art form that would synthesize the two as well as have qualities beyond them. His dramaturgy stressed on the need for a more direct and live communication of the performers with the audience and also sought to make theater 'free' (inexpensive), portable and easily accessible to the masses of both urban and rural regions. With regards to the content, almost all his plays seemed intent on raising contemporary socio-political

issues, especially highlighting its effect on the impoverished sections of both rural and urban Bengal.

These aims led to two different unconventional modes of theatrical presentation that was mastered by Sircar's theatre group Shatabdi (established in 1967). One was *Anganmancha*, where the performance was held in an empty room; the audience sat on chairs or benches scattered across the room kept on the same level as the performers in such a way that the performers performed all around them and often came in physical proximity or even made contact with the audience. The other was the concept of *Muktamancha*, where the performers played out in open spaces like fields or public parks, surrounded (generally in a circle) by hundreds of interested spectators. Shatabdi gradually began undertaking rural tours, taking their theatre to every corner of Bengal.

Direct communication was the primary technical objective behind these dramatic forms. However, this often gives rise to complex consequences with multidimensional implications. This paper seeks to investigate, analyze and highlight it with regards to one of Sircar's most well known Third Theatre plays—*Michhil* (1974). It is one of Sircar's plays that have been translated in English. So, for textual purposes, I will refer to Sri Samik Bandyopadhyay's translation of the play—'*Procession*', available in the book *Three Plays* by Badal Sircar with an introduction by Ella Dutta.

In my analysis, I will be using certain concepts and observations from the noted theatre critic and performance theorist Richard Schechner; more specifically from an extract '*The Street as Stage*' from the book *Writings on Culture and Performance*; the essay has been reproduced in the book *Performance Studies*, edited by Erin Striff. Interestingly and coincidentally, Badal Sircar had himself worked with Schechner in a series of experimental workshops during Sircar's trip to U.S.A in 1972 (Katyal 104). Schechner had befriended Sircar during his trip to India and was an admirer of Sircar's experimental thoughts and ideas regarding theatre.

The basic premise and point of the essay referred to above is a distinction made between the structures of official (generally

state-sponsored) and unofficial movements, exhibitions or performative demonstrations. Schechner comments that official movements such as those by the army, organized by governments and establishment authorities are often orderly and regimented while unofficial demonstrations tend towards the chaotic and the carnivalesque. I intend to borrow Schechner's point and apply it to the basic ordered and structured nature of the proscenium stage (and theatre); and show how Sircar's departure from it imparts added dimension to his simultaneous critique of conventional theatre as well as pro-establishment ideology.

The proscenium stage has specifically demarcated areas for the performers and the audience. The actors perform on a higher level/plane; there is a definite distance separating the two. The very architecture of the proscenium is posited on the construction and maintenance of a 'desired distance' between the actor and the audience; the use of light and darkness is another distancing device along with the 'fourth wall' between the actors and the audience adding to this separation (Katyal 132). Further, the fact that the tickets to different sections of the audience space have different prices depending on its distance from the stage, gives the entire space a hierarchical identity. This was something that Sircar completely resented.

One should categorically observe how *Michhil* challenges and subverts the structure of the conventional proscenium theatre. Sircar wished to write a play where he would be able to capture the montage of scenes from Calcutta and he came upon the idea of processions, which formed an integral part of the daily life of the city—the "*all too familiar trait for which Calcutta is famous (or notorious?)—as a city of processions*" (Banerjee 111). One should turn to two of Sircar's confessions—the inception of the idea of this play, and the memory of how he came to figure out the set structure of the play. As recalled by Ella Dutta in the 'Introduction' to *Three Plays*, Sircar stated—"*It is one of the very few plays where I had the idea of the production even before I began writing it, particularly the procession idea*" (*Three Plays* viii).

Sircar remembers an evening when he was alone in the Anganmancha room in the second floor of the Academy of Fine Arts—"…*I began arranging the benches in various ways to create a winding passage, twisting and turning, as in a maze…various imaginary processions went on moving along the winding passage, passing the imaginary spectators sitting on both sides*" (*On Theatre* 115-116).

In *Michhil*, there is no demarcation of the performance area as distinct from the audience space (Katyal 144). The audience is made to seat in the peripheral regions in some parts of the room as well as in certain marked zones towards the centre of the room. The stage direction states that the "*chairs and backless benches for the audience should be arranged as to suggest a maze, with a road going in knots and rounds*" (*Three Plays* 13). The 'road' constitutes the acting area with the audience made to sit on both sides, similar to how people stand on both sides of a street to watch processions.

One can thus see how, in the very structure of the set, *Michhil* breaks down the spatial divisions of the conventional theatre arena. Since the Shatabdi actors used no makeup and didn't wear any extraordinary costumes, it is hard to separate a performer from a spectator. In fact, much like *Evam Indrajit*, it is hard to locate the exact moment when the play begins as the performers enter as parts/members of the audience. What makes it even more confusing and interesting is that, the performers enter in darkness.

In the conventional scheme of things, the audience area is kept in darkness, in an illusion of non-existence while strong lights mark the zone on stage where the play is performed. Sircar saw this as yet another distancing and dividing device and rejected it. He used strong lights and moments of darkness in his Anganmancha productions, but they were used in a way that the audience and the performers shared it equally and simultaneously. Further, the voices in the darkness coupled with disjointed dialogues; followed by the scream of Khoka dying creates an utter confusion. Thus, within the opening few minutes of the performance, it is made clear that almost everything that defines or stabilizes conventional expectations and demarcations in a theatre

space are disregarded and undone.

The figure of the officer, or *Kotal*, in my analysis, is as important as that of Khoka and the Old Man, the two central characters. Unlike the other actors, he is in costume, fully dressed in military uniform (*Three Play*s 16), wearing a cap and carrying the baton. He is a figure expected to generate awe and fear. I see the figure as a one symbolizing 'order', more specifically, 'order' of the establishment. That is the reason why for him, the real-life-like costume, the attire marking his role, is necessary. Further, his role in the play vitally adds to this point. One sees chaos and confusion of several random transitioning scenes of on stage; Khoka's scream and 'act of dying' multiple times heightens the disruptions. But the officer emerges time and again to shout in his commanding voice that everything is alright and in order, and that no one has been killed. In light of the above points, it seems fitting, that it is with the appearance of the Officer, that the stage is lit up again after the darkness.

Khoka is the young boy who mysteriously and symbolically claims throughout the play that he has been and is murdered every day. The implication of such a bizarre unrealistic complaint is not understood till the latter half of the play. The old man, on the other hand, is neither grave nor wise but is almost a clownish figure wearing a cap, quick with his words and movements. I argue that it is the old man who brings in certain elements of the metatheatrical as well as the carnivalesque in this play. The carnivalesque conventionally refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. Several episodes in the play use parody and caustic humour; they have elements of the comic, even when they discuss something of tragic nature and consequence. The man announces and comments on several incidents that happen on stage in the play. The most important is his very first utterance, as he almost announces to the audience about the sequence of processions they are to witness in the play.

"*Charaaaa raa raaa yuu huu. Come along come along, the Michhil's on*

the move. Quick, join in. Take your seats on both sides of the road, choose a convenient spot and sit yourself down. Come along, come along quickly, take your seats—it's the Michhil, Michhils for food and clothes, Michhils for salvation, Michhils for the revolution, military Michhils, Michhils of refugees, Michhils for flood relief, mourning Michhils, protest Michhils, festive Michhils, star studded Michhils". (*Three Plays* 18)

This is an invocation to the audience of the theatre to watch a performance; but it also resembles a call to parallel road-side spectators to witness the spectacle of the procession. While in asking to 'take the seats', he invites audience to view a spectacle, in bidding to 'join in', he also hints at a possibility that becomes increasingly vital with the progress of the play, the achievement of a 'united humanity' of the spectators and the performers.

Following this, one sees the performers enact various kinds of processions, one after another, as they keep on moving around the audience space in cycles and saying their dialogues in differing tones, pace, emotion and energy. There are processions of various kinds. The impact of such a performance has been ably recollected by Rustom Bharucha.

"*The actors are constantly on the move—walking, running, dancing and jogging through the room's L-shaped passages…Sircar creates a most bewildering environment with the bodies, backs, faces and profile of the spectators. When the actors begin to move between and around the environment created by the spectators, the effect is startling; one can almost see a procession winding its way around the streets of Calcutta*" (Bharucha 157).

The content of the play is similar to other plays that Sircar wrote in this period. Like several other of Sircar's Third Theatre plays, *Michhil* depicts several random scenes from contemporary life. It raises the issues regarding lack of jobs, urban infrastructural projects, black-market corruption and contemporary national and international politics. The actors use their incredible physical acting skills to create contexts and situations like the interior of a suburban railway coach, an overcrowded bus, a factory with machine, a restaurant and a tennis court. The play critiques the increasing

impact of capitalism in society, the exploiting selfish ruling class and industrial and corporate giants. They are represented through two figures—one who is called as the 'guru' or the Master and the other, who is referred to as Black-market-wala, a personification of corruption.

With the passage of the play, one understands Khoka to be the embodiment of the wasted youth, a representative of hundreds of young men who have died or been killed in contemporary society. The old man portrays a figure who had 'lost' his way in life, a once energetic and aspiring youth who has grown to be senile and useless. Their words and interactions often reveal the possibility of them being the same persona, an idea that is re-affirmed when, in the concluding sections of the play, both of them state that their name is 'Khoka' (*Three Plays* 51).

One needs to delve deeper into the purpose and aims that Sircar tries to achieve through this play. It has already been discussed and made clear that Sircar's brilliant stagecraft depicts the procession and captures its essential spirit in the most effective way possible. There is no doubt that Sircar's purpose is political and in critiquing the basic factors that lead to the suffering of both the downtrodden classes of the rural and the urban sections, he is projecting himself as an anti establishment voice. Rustom Bharucha had called Sircar's works the "*most rigorously non-commercial political theatre in India*" (Bharucha 127) of those times. In this play, Sircar devises a theatrical form, which almost embodies and manifests the dynamics of the procession, or the medium of protest. In protesting against the established order of power structures, he disregards conventions and revolutionizes the structures of his own artistic medium.

Further, besides Anganmancha, if one takes into consideration Muktamancha or the potential of performing this play in any open space, one begins to appreciate the capacity of Sircar's Third Theatre. Anjum Katyal comments that Sircar's theatre could travel freely to the people, suiting any public area or venue, thereby proving that any space can be turned into a performance space (Katyal 133). As observed by Schechner, it is the very act of 'taking' a

public space and 'liberating' it through a performance that the most vital aspect of an act of rebellion.

One finds an echo of the contrasting dimensions of the rectangular framed proscenium theatre and Sircar's maze like performing space and its revolutionary implications in a quote from Schechner's essay:

> "*Is it accidental that the official displays consist of neat rectangles, countable cohorts, marching past under the fixed gaze of the reviewing stand while unofficial mass gatherings are vortexed, whirling, full of shifting ups and downs*" ("The Street is the Stage" 111)

However, the complete implications of Sircar's work is neither that simple nor so one-dimensional. For within the play he also critiques the idea of the procession in itself. Sircar has explored the fluidity and instability of the procession as almost a paradoxical symbol. It has its own structure but it often calls for rebellious dismantling of structures, it is often purposeful in aim but it disrupts and disturbs the flow of life, seldom in a constructive manner. There is a revelation of the static middle class mentality as people mumble clichéd lines and make statements like India needs a dictatorship. Further, the fluid and extremely volatile nature of processions which may change directions and spirit any moment is highlighted when an image of the nationalistic Quit India Movement suddenly transforms into a communal procession demanding Pakistan.

Strangely though brilliantly, this motif of critiquing the 'procession' is also embodied within the performative structure of the play itself. If one carefully visualizes the performance in retrospect, one observes that the cycle of processions traversing the same circular path again and again does create a sense of cyclic monotony. The repetition numerous times makes it lose its vitality and its purpose; it ceases to remain an active form of demonstration and lapses into a soul-less ritual.

It is this procession which has claimed the lives of youth like Khoka; that is the reason why he is horrified at the prospect of

processions. He sees each procession and calls them as processions of death. One would do well to remember Sircar's comment—" *In the immediately preceding years, so many young people and adolescents were killed by the police…the image of the man who is being killed every day was very strong in my mind*" (*On Theatre* 115). Coincidentally, one of the most memorable performances of this play was in a protest convention after the death of a theatre worker Prabir Datta, who was killed in police lathi-charge (Kundu 132).

Perhaps, it is the lapsing into this soul-less repetition of ritualistic cycles that Sircar wants his audience to guard against. Manujendra Kundu wonders if the reasons for Sircar's rejection of and disbelief in democratic protest movements might have developed from his ultra-Left leanings and intimacy with some disillusioned youth (Kundu 164).

The final part of the play has several acts and symbols with regards to finding directions. In yet another moment of ingenious theatre, Khoka and the old man move throughout the room in 'search of direction' but cannot proceed too long in any direction as each time, they invariably come up against the sitting audience who block their way. They search for the east, from where the sun will rise, a symbol of the hope of a new day.

This search is ultimately highlighted and reaches a climax in the search for an almost Utopian "true procession", one that would take them to a promised home; the true home. With regards to the symbols of the play Sircar had clearly mentioned the old home that the old man refuses to return to is nothing but the present society, and the new home he is seeking is a place where there will be no hunger, no privation, no injustice. (*On Theatre* 116)

Thus, one sees that the powerful motif of the procession is used throughout the play as a symbol of a community journey, a quest. The false processions that lead nowhere are contrasted with the search for the true Michhil (Katyal 145).

Sircar believed that the lack of a true spirit of purpose may render even a powerful action ineffective. While an idea or

knowledge and information are crucial, little can be done with it unless one has the true feelings to work upon it. The integration of knowledge and feelings is what can be called consciousness, and it is consciousness that can induce and guide any meaningful action that can in turn change the world for the better" (*On Theatre* 85).

The audience, throughout this play, had been in a position to 'experience' the action simultaneously with the performers. But at the end, they are directly addressed and invited to become a part of the movement, the final true Michhil. If one remembers that in the preceding moments, the audience was 'blocking' Khoka and the old man's way to find a path, one is left to marvel at the symbolism as the path becomes clear when the audience themselves join in the procession. Rustom Bharucha emotionally recalls the final scene of the play—" *The spectators and actors intermingle and the entire space of the room becomes a swirling mass of humanity…one of those moments in the theater when one becomes acutely aware of the possibilities of life and the essential brotherhood of man*" (Bharucha 163).

Sircar's play masterfully captures the theatricality of all processions and is in itself a theatrical presentation with a purpose and aim akin to processions. He has critiqued what he saw of the contemporary processions, how they had lapsed into pointless ritual like exercises. Sumanta Banerjee observes that Sircar wanted to show how "*this once radical demonstration of genuine popular urges has degenerated today into a ritual that is used by the ruling classes to confuse and exploit the masses*" (Banerjee 112).

Sircar almost revitalizes the very purpose of processions by using certain elements from his theatre repertoire. And that is where, theatre as a medium emerges as important and powerful with potential. What Sircar achieves through this play reveals the powers and potential of theatre and is best summed up in the words of Joseph Eshcrick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom; quoted by Schechener:

> "*Central to the notion of ritual is the idea that only careful adherence to a traditionally prescribed format will ensure the efficacy of a performance. With any departure from a traditional script, a ritual ceases to be*

ritual…Theatre, by nature is more liberated from the rigid constraints of tradition, and provides autonomous space for the creativity of playwrights, directors and actors. This gives theatre a critical power never possessed by ritual" ("*The Street is the Stage*" 117).

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2

THE GENEALOGY OF *UTTAMANGA:* A FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF GIRISH KARNAD'S *HAYAVADANA*

Thulasi Das B

The skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once: how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw bone, that did the first murder! It might be the pate of politician, which this ass now o'er-reaches; one that would circumvent God, might it not?

-*The Tragic History of Hamlet*, Act I, scene I

The famous graveyard scene of Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act I, Scene I) is remembered for its contemplation on the mortality of human life. Hamlet, the procrastinated protagonist, meditates upon a human skull, which was supposedly of a court jester, namely Yorick. He also offers his pondering on some other skulls, dug up by the grave digger, and through the anecdotes of Alexander and Caesar, he brings in the notion of *Memento Mori*. It is quite a doubtful fact that the Bard may not get a chance to enlighten his readers with his verbal play on the mundane nature of the human life, if the digger unearths any other remnants of a dead guy other than the skull, say the ribs or knee bones etc. Here the skull-the head-

becomes a representative of identity, unlike any other body parts.

It is also interesting to note that a good lot of words in the English language affirm the importance attached to the head. For example, Head of the institution, Head of the Department, headmaster, head game, head of the snake, head of the steam etc. all these words assert the primal importance given to the head, as a symbol of cognitive agency, authority, power and knowledge. This is the same in the case of many ancient scriptures and mythological texts in India.

Girish Karnad, one of the most discussed experimental dramatists in India, had made use of the same problematic of the supremacy attached to head over the rest of the body in one of his supernal dramatic efforts, *Hayavadana*. Karnad's treatment of the subject matter in a stunningly deviated way from the original source of the story, *Vetala Panchavimshika* and *Katha Sarit Sagara* may have its inspiration in *The Transposed Heads* by Thomas Mann whose different rendition of the myth provided the base to Karnad's drama.

The proposed study intends to map the Foucauldian *genealogy* of the politics behind assigning an unequivocal supremacy to the head supposedly which can be traced back to the *chathurvarnya* system advocated by the Brahminic hegemonic texts like *Manusmriti* and how the very notion of *Brahmin* and the *chathurvarnya* system itself suffered a discontinuity or a rupture from the initially associated meanings of the same in the Vedic scriptures like *Purusha Sukta*. It also analyses how Foucault's notion of the *power/knowledge* composite acts to regulate the discourse on the supremacy attached to the head in the nexus of socio-political context of India.

Michel Foucault's unfathomable influence on the poststructuralist/ postmodernist thought paved the way to approach history from a new perspective. Often considered to be the precursor of the new Historicism method, Foucault's influential concepts had a tremendous impact on the poststructuralists, postmodernists, LGBT theorists, Feminists, Historians, sociologists, Space theorists and so many others like that. Those groundbreaking theories still stir a considerable amount of interests in many inter-

disciplinary fields. As Peter Sedgwick puts it, "*Foucault's works cover a wide range of topics, including the construction of concepts of mental illness, the analysis of systems of discipline and punishment, of sexuality and subjectivity, the relationship between forms of knowledge and discourses of power. Frequently, his enquiries take the form of a close analysis of the historical development of these notions*" (251).

Foucault's repeated treatment of the question regarding power and identity on the fields of the production of history gives rise to many explorations which still continues its legacy. He considered power as a productive one, which embodies both the positive and negative aspects of it, which marked a vantage point in the theoretical field of analyzing history through Marxian perspectives. His seminal tenet – 'knowledge/power'- commenced the exploration on the 'discursive formation' of knowledge. Subject formation, as a result of such discourse practices, made some drastic changes on the notions of psychoanalysis based on a transhistorical or ahistorical aspects of the field. This power/ knowledge composite is something which is quite different from the common modes of the norms of conventional meaning attached to these terms. It can be understood as:

> *The kind of knowledge to which Foucault directs us with this term, then, is one that has no clear source but that a genealogical analysis and examination of the historical condition of possibility-illuminates, describing the accidents of history that results in particular consolidations of what counts as truth or knowledge. It is not the knowledge that is decreed by some authoritative body "from on high" but is more preciously described in the passive voice: it is the kind of knowledge that is "recognized as true", "known to be the case. For Foucault, this knowledge can only exist with the support of arrangements of power, arrangements that likewise have no clear origin, no person or body who can be said to "have" it.* (Taylor 56).

Power and *Knowledge*, according to Foucault, constitute each other. There is always reciprocity, interdependency between these notions, they regulate each other in a way and eventually controls the 'subjectification' of individuals. *Knowledge*, as he makes it clear,

always occurs in the nexus of power relations.

Though he negates the idea of attaching his concepts, and to a certain extent, himself, to any particular 'isms', scholars often consider his early works as structuralist in method. He terms his early historical analysis as 'archaeology', which probes the possibilities of non-visible formations of culture which regulates practices and representations. He investigates the hidden structures beneath these structures of culture. In 'The Order of Things' he introduces the concept of episteme, a conglomeration of a set of relations that govern the discursive practice of the prevalent day. He analyses how these epistemes compose the particular history of an epoch. This idea is well reflected in his 'Madness and Civilization' in which he analyses how normality/abnormality has evolved as discourses in the Western culture. History, is not evolved as something which has a linear movement, but rather shattered and disoriented pieces of epistemic formulations.

This treatment of history as 'regimes of practices' rather than a smoothly evolved, holistic corpus is central to Foucauldian analysis. The 'History of Ideas' present material conditions, a continuous flow of movements of thought from top to bottom, which, deliberately or not, effaces those unheard voices and unrecorded annals. It always demands continuity and never entertains ruptures. On the contrary, Foucault's 'regimes of practice' never advocates injecting or 'projecting meaning into history'. *"…All we have are material effects and material acts; there is no essential meaning to things-no essential subject behind action; nor is there an essential order to history. Rather, order is the writing of history itself*" (Lechte 111). This paradigm shift from analyzing history from a structuralist perspective, through archaeology; to a more sophisticated method of viewing it as a ruptured corpus of discontinuities, is the dominant practice of Foucault in his later works, which he calls 'genealogy'. "*Genealogy is the history written in light of current concerns. Genealogy is the history written in accordance with a commitment to the issues of the present moment, and as such it intervenes in the present moment. Genealogy, in short, is 'effective history' (Nietzsche) written as a current*

intervention" (ibid 112).

Karnad's seemingly radical treatment of the story from an old myth contains many exquisite passages that affirm it as an existential/expressionistic drama. But as we probe it in the aforementioned genealogical method of Foucault, the more complicated, inconspicuous layers of history and power politics may be unfurled. To do so we have to survey certain facts, namely, the original narrative of the myth, how the adaptation of this myth is done by Karnad in *Hayavadana*, how this myth is being found in other texts, the power relations that are being attached to the head as a symbol of authority of knowledge and other institutions prevalent in the then Indian society, and how it is treated in the present day society etc.

The original story is taken from *Vetala Panchavimshika,* -a collection of some twenty-five tales within a frame story, written in Sanskrit, of anonymous authorship. "*One of its oldest recensions is found in the 12th Book of Kathasaritsagara(Ocean of the Streams of Story), a work in Sanskrit compiled in the 11th century by Somadeva, but based on yet older materials, now lost*" (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baital_Pachisi). Sir Richard Francis Burton attempted a free adaptation of the stories in 1870, in which he is of the opinion that the story is by sage Bhavabuti (Burton18). The main narrative is that a demon namely Vetala posits some cryptic riddles before the valiant warrior-king Vikramaditya; if he fails to answer the riddle, his head will be shattered into pieces. The ninth story proposes the most famous riddle: the head or the rest of the body-which one is more significant, crucial and inevitable in determining the identity of a person. He narrates the King the story of two bosom friends Gunakar and Devasharma. The latter marries Unmadini, a beautiful lady, and he offered his head to goddess Kali as votive to get this girl. As it turns out, he beheads himself, and seeing the plight of his friend Gunakara, being too loyal to his friend, also does the same. Unmadini, on the verge of killing herself, is rescued by the goddess and she gives him a blessing to restore life into the demised beloveds and in that chaotic moment of utter

bafflement she misplaces the heads into one another's body. Now Vetala asks the king which one should Unmadini take as her husband. The King answers that she should go with one who has the head of her husband. It affirms the supremacy of head in subject formation, identity, subjectivity. It affirms head as the *Uttamanga*- the most significant organ.

Karnad, basing on Mann's *Transposed Heads,* re-presents the story in a different perspective in *Hayavadana*. Here, the main plot narrates the lives of Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, and the subplot deals with a creature with horse's head and human body, namely Hayavadana. The play opens with the traditional invocation to Lord Ganesha, the god with an elephant's head and human body. As the plot gets revealed, we can see the two friends, Devadatta, who was a promising intellectual, the son of a renowned Brahmin, a great scholar of all the branches of knowledge discussing his troubled condition after watching a beautiful diva in a street, with whom he had fallen in love at the very first sight. Kapila, his loyal friend, the son of a blacksmith, a man with a gigantic physic, jumps in to help him. Devadatta vows: "…*I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I'll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I'll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra*…" (14). With Kapila's help he marries her and Padmini gradually falls in love with the 'body' of Kapila. Kapila also reciprocates her love with great caring and willing to do any adventure to please her. When they went for a tour, Devadatta could understand their attraction to each other and he decides to offer his head to Kali, as he vowed, and beheads himself. Seeing this, Kapila also commits self-beheading and soon Padmini also attempts the same. Here goddess Kali intervenes, who is seemingly bored with the human affairs, and offers a blessing so that she can make her beloved ones rejuvenated by placing their lost heads back into the body. Padmini, seemingly fully aware of what she is doing, 'misplaces' the heads. But initially they all were dancing in joy, saying that now they are really "blood related". After that, things become worse since Kapila claims over Padmini to be his wife since he possesses Devadatta's body. But Devadatta declines the claim by saying that *"…according to the Shastras, head is the sign of a man*…"(36). They argue violently

and again the *Shastras* are being quoted. *"…of all the human limbs the topmost –in position as well as in importance – is the head"* (37). Kapila never agrees with this though, Padmini discards Kapila and his new 'body'. After a few days Devadatta feels himself to be a different man, he wrestles, swims and do hard labours of such sort because he feels anew stimulation in his body. But gradually, his Brahminic head wins over his body, and he becomes the same old scholar again. Padmini who is not so happy with this, goes to meet Kapila in a forest while Devadatta is away from home. They argue with each other and Kapila describes how his head struggled to win over his Brahminic body. They spend some time together and soon Devadatta appears there and in the dual that follows, each kills one another. Padmini who was torn between 'two bodies and two heads' performs the ritual of sati and burns herself. Hayavadana is given a complete body of a horse by Kali and in the final act he also loses his human voice, as the boy begins to speak. The play ends with a prayer to the elephant headed god Ganesha.

The play can be analyzed as a specimen of existential crisis and identity politics though, the Foucaldian genealogical reading will provide us a different perspective. Here we have to deal with two problems. The first one is that; does the head stand as a mere metonymic/metaphoric symbol for authority or does it indicate a much more complex, serious socio-political system? The second one; does Karnad 's treatment of this myth actually usurp the already known politics of the supremacy of head over body.

The notion of the supremacy of head over the body is so ancient a discourse that can be traced back to the periods of the Vedic discourse. Many Sanskrit texts like *Amarakosa* – the illustrious lexicon of Sanskrit written by Amarasinha, and Ayurvedic texts like *Ashtangahridaya, Susrutha Sanhita* etc use the same terminology – Uttamanga- for head. This is as old as the *Chaturvarnya* system which prevailed in India. *Brahmin, Kashatriya*, *Vysya* and *Sudra* are the four categories of *Chaturvarnya* system, in which the first three situate at the top of the social ladder whereas the *Sudras* are

considered to be outcasts and untouchables. Ancient record of this classification can be found in the *Purusha Suktha* (*Rig Veda*, 10.90) where the universe is considered to be the body of *Purusha* – the cosmic being.*"… The Brahmin was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vysya, from his feet the Sudra was produced*" (Griffith, 8).

The Brahmin is the head of the *Purusha*. Since head is considered to be the *Uttamanga*, the noble, supreme organ, it constitutes the supremacy of Brahmins as the *Head* of the 'social body' of the time. They are considered to be of pure, noble birth, authority of knowledge, persons of high and 'divine' intellect, decision makers, Priests who are so close to the God, Poets, advisors etc. Even the *Kshatriyas*- rulers- were afraid of the power of Brahmins and revered them well. Many such instances can be seen in numerous Hindu *Puranas*, say for example, in *Ramayana* we can see the reverence given to Vasishta, the teacher/priest of Ayodhya, ruled by Dasaratha and later by his son Rama. Here Head/ Brahmin becomes a Foucauldian composite of *Power/ Knowledge*, each constitute and regulates the other. Hence the supremacy attached to the 'head' is the same given to the Brahmin as the 'head' of the *Varnasramadharma system* (class system) in India.

The same hymn describes how the cosmic elements evolved out of the body of the *Purusha*. Everything celestial, heavenly and ethereal are attached to the head. Thus, "*the moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the sun had birth; Indra and Agni from his mouth were born and Vayu from his breath…the sky was fashioned from his head*" (Griffith, 9). Whereas earth is formed from the feet- which are, as per the previously mentioned verse (no.12), the *Sudras*.

A random analysis of the systems of Indian philosophy would provide us some ample evidence of the existence of the counter discourses to this very division of class system, which were, somehow muted because of the power/knowledge regulation of the major discourse. Foucault's genealogical analysis addresses this problem. Foucauldian genealogy is:

…a historical analysis that proceeds by way of accounting for social,

political, ethical and other forms of discourse without making reference to the notion of human agency…Genealogy, for Foucault, is the historic analysis of forms of knowledge , practices, etc; that operates without making any reference to the notion of a subjectivity that would exist independently of the historical context in which such knowledge forms, practices, etc. were located (Sedgwick 256).

Thus counter statements of the superiority given to head/ Brahmin can be seen in the famous *Lokayatamata* (materialist/atheist philosophy) of the Charvaka school. It denies the existence of the soul (*atman*) over the body. It gives prominence to the body.

…As consciousness is perceived to exist the perceptible living body composed of the material elements, it must be a quality of this body itself. What people mean by a soul is nothing more than this conscious living body itself (caitanya- visista – deha eva atma). The non-material soul is never perceived. On the contrary, we have direct evidence of the identity of the self with the body in our daily experiences and judgments like, 'I am fat,' 'I am lame', 'I am blind'. If the 'I', the self, were different from the body, these would be meaningless. (Chatterjee and Datta 60)

But by the time the supremacy of Head/Brahmin was constituted by various discourses by *Manusmriti* (c.2 BCE) etc. eventually which culminated into the caste system in India. The excellence of Brahmin is asserted by *Manusmriti* as:

*The man is said to be pure above the navel. Therefore, the self-existent one has declared, the mouth is the purest part. Because he arose from the loftiest part of the body, because he is the eldest, and because he retains the Veda, the Brahmin is by Low the lord of all creation…among creatures, living beings are the best; among living beings, those who subsist by intelligence…and among human beings, Brahmins, so the tradition declar*es. (Olivelle 91)

Manu asserts that Brahmin is the noble one because he is born from the *Uttamanga* – head-of the Supreme Being, which makes him the Lord of everything (ibid 308). But the discursive formation of Brahmin as the head of the social institution had suppresses such counter discourses.

The discourse remained just as a system rather than a law in the subsequent regimes in India. During the Islamic rule, it was not practiced as a law system. The modern-day discourse of the same as the Hindu Caste system was affirmed by the British Raj in India.

> *The British colonial officials, however, mistook the Manusmriti as codes of law, failed to recognize that it was a commentary on morals and law and not a statement of positive law. The colonial officials of the early 19th century also failed to recognize that Manusmriti was one of many competing Dharmasastra texts, it was not in use for centuries during the Islamic rule period of India…Manusmriti, thus played a role in constructing the Anglo-Hindu law, as well as Western perceptions about ancient and medieval era Hindu culture from the colonial times.* (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusmriti)

Thus, it is clear that the genealogy of the discourse of cast system in India had undergone a discontinuity, a rupture. It was resurged as the basic Hindu law in the British Raj and after. The colonial power is thus responsible for the *Manusmriti* based caste division in India, where the Head/ Brahmin composite, assumes the authority of the mainstreams of the socio-political strata.

According to Foucault, genealogy is "*gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary and must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality*" (Sedgwick 256). What Karnad does in his *Hayavadana*, then, is the adoption of this discourse, rather than a mere identity/ existential crisis. The discontinuous singularity of the discourse of Head/ Brahmin is so discernible in the hidden layers of the narrative, which makes *Hayavadana*, a drama that deals with the history of the sophisticated class system of India.

Here, Devadatta, is all about his 'head', a man of intellect. He is the son of revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. *"… A Poet. A pundit. Knows Vedas backwards. Writes the grandest poetry ever. Long dark hair. Delicate fair face*" (19).On the contrary, Kapila, the blacksmith, a lower cast, is described in terms of his body, than of his 'head'. In the scene where he climbs a tree to fetch a rare flower for Padmini his strong built body is being gazed and described by Padmini as

thus: "*How he climbs- like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes', he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back-like an ocean with muscle rippling across it-and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless*" (25). Devadatta also offers a gaze over his friend's body, when he asides: *"…It is his strong body- his manly muscles… no woman could resist him*" (26).This is not the kind of ordinary glance, but conspicuously it is a 'gaze' ensued by an underlying power relation of the caste system. The body of the *Sudra*, the lower caste, is being analyzed by the elite upper-class gaze. His head is never mentioned. He is just a specimen to be looked at; the body, not the head- the 'uttamanga'.

And again, we can see the hidden layers of institutional power structures in the scene in which Devadatta, the Brahmin, cuts his head off, the playwright mentions that *"... cuts off his head. Not an easy thing to do- he struggles, groans, writhes. Ultimately succeeds in killing himself*" (28). For the Brahmin it is not easy to cut his head, because head is what constitute the authority of Brahmin. To cut his head off means to annihilate himself from the authority, the *Brahmanya*-brahminhood-, bestowed on him. Whereas while Kapila, the blacksmith, performs the same act, the head easily separates from the body, "*cuts off his head. It's an easier death this time…*" (30).The supremacy is again regulated by the assertion that "*as the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is Supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs*" (40).

Again when it comes to the case of a Brahmin, his body cannot perform any hard work. He is identified by his head- the symbol of authority, power and knowledge. See for instance when Padmini asks what Kapila had done with the body of Devadatta, Kapila replies:

> *Kapila: When this body came to me, it was like a corpse hanging by my head. It was a Brahmin's body after all- not made for the woods. I couldn't run a length without my knees howling. I had no use for it. The moment it came to me, a war started between us.*
>
> *Padmini. And who won?*

Kapila. I did.

Padmini. The head always wins, doesn't it? (55)

Karnad's *Hayavadana* makes use of the genealogy of the Head/ Brahmin discourse, which had a history of discontinuity from its origin to the present day. Seemingly he adopts the modern-day discourse regulated by the British Raj in India. It should also be noted that *Manusmriti* was translated into English by Sir William Jones in 1784 (Olivelle 308) and then it was accepted as the Hindu Social Law. It was then a surprising coincidence that, in the same Raj rule, to be precise, in 1870, Sir Richard Frances Burton translated *Vetala Panchavimshika* where we can find the original myth of the supremacy of head over the body.

Though Karnad attempts to deconstruct the supremacy of head by stating that body also has memories, it may also feel pain and pleasure. But we can see that he could not go further, it is not an easy task. He has to deal with the genealogy of Head/ Brahmin power structure. In the climax of the play we can see that all the three main characters commit suicide. It is, from our perspective, not out of the existential streak they were undergoing through, but the inability to capsize the aforementioned power structure that prompts them to do so. The 'Brahminic head' cannot survive in a 'Sudra body' (Devadatta) and vice versa. Padmini, as it is clear from Bhagavata's description about her (p.19), is the daughter of a wealthy merchant, a *Vysya* by class. She, as the third category of the Varna system, too cannot tolerate this changing of heads and bodies for long, hence her committing of suicide.

"Genealogy, it follows, embodies an open-ended form of analysis. It spurns any attempt to reduce the significance of its subject –matter to a determinate meaning that may be found outside of its specific context-for instance, in relation to a notion of subjectivity that is a-historical" (Sedgwick 256-257). In a nutshell, Karnad's *Hayavadana* deals with the genealogy of the discourse of the class system in India. It opens up manifold possibilities to approach the history by positing the central metaphor of head as the representative of Brahminhood and authority, power/ knowledge composite, and regulating the discursive

formations associated with it.

Let us sum up with Foucault's own words on genealogy:

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis of the subject with in a historical framework. And this is what I call genealogy, that is, a form of history, that can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of subjects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to a field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history (117).

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3

"THE UNCANNY" HARVEST: A FREUDIAN READING OF MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S *THE HARVEST*

Rafseena M

Literature, variably seen as the mirror of the reality has tended to be mysterious, in its approach and analysis of the system within which it is placed. Realistic/ unrealistic, natural/ strange, fact/ fiction- literature has its own way of binary in operation. Myths, anecdotes, classical allusions, real incidents, anachronistic depictions, realistic narrations, futuristic representations, dystopian and utopian recordings; a vastness of narrative space which literature has held on to encompasses its degree of not only its expanse of area of concentration but also of the different, multiple possibilities of its functionality. The established literary canons, with its expected norms of literary representation, has been invariably subjected to multiple forms of readings and analysis over the ages, paving way for a deeper level of introspection and observation.

To be real is ordinary, to be unreal is not ordinary. The not so ordinariness imposes a strangeness to its very own existence causing

a sense of detachment, which problematizes the issue of how and why the sense of dejection works in an unsettling manner in some futuristic oriented narratives in literature. A futuristic narrative, be it optimistic or pessimistic, tends to be twice removed from the reality as Plato had asserted it. "The art of reproduction in the mechanical age," as Walter Benjamin stated unoffensively, seems quite feasible and rational when such futuristic literary pieces are taken into consideration.

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *The Harvest*, nomenclatured as a futuristic play with a resemblance to science fiction which focuses on the third world commodification through organ sale with the futuristic setting with a donor positioned in India and the receiver from the West, has been perceived as a frightening vision of a cannibalistic future. Recent studies on this contemporary Indian play has however been silent on the hidden, unnerving or eery aspect of uncanniness. Freud's theoretical formulation of the uncanny which centers itself around the central idea, *"…. What is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar*" (220) hints at the revulsion which gets generated at the interjection of the real with the unreal. The present paper would like to undertake a Freudian analysis of *The Harvest* using the concept of the uncanny.

OED would put the uncanny thus: strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way. Some object or idea which drives in the feeling of being unreal or fictitious is a natural though uncommon way of the functioning of the understanding of the world. Where fact and fiction collides, as in the case of literary expressions to an extent, the distinct line which separates the real from the unreal is imaginary yet very powerful. The object of familiarity receding into the realm of unfamiliar, making the even resemble the odd is what denotes the uncanny concept. "*The uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness. More particularly it concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar*" (Royle 34).

The uncanny concept as conceptualized by Freud undertakes

a psychoanalytic path of analysis, which as Freud himself had asserted would seem problematic. It is when the real or the ordinary incident or object or idea of everyday life suddenly takes on an unusual or a fictional quality that the notion of uncanniness sets in. Literature, seen as "*the discourse of the uncanny*" (Royle35), seems to have been echoing the concepts of defamiliarization as formulated by the Russian formalists. The concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) which makes the familiar appear unfamiliar, seems to be very rational in the same way as Bertolt Brecht had expected the theatres to be the productive spaces of alienation effect. As suggested by these above concepts, no reader or audience is expected to find any similarity of identification with the characters in action. Rather, what is expected of a spectator/ reader is a sense of dissociatedness, uneasiness and alienation. While Brecht's aim was to establish that the real is something what gets constructed through human perception and beliefs, and observation and language; the real which is not definite or immutable is conditionally subject to changes. The art of defamiliarization or alienation is not only very central in transforming the whole perception of the world, it is rather intricately bound up with the uncanny.

The factor of strangeness or eeriness of a thing or idea is what determines the uncanny quotient of things. Making the real things or ideas appear uncertain promotes the uncanniness associated with it. The uncanny can make itself visible in various forms; the foremost being the experience of déjà vu and the idea of the double (*doppleganger*). To put it in other words, the strange repetition of a feeling, situation or event or a character can cause the feeling of uncanniness.

The play *The Harvest*, opening its first scene to the hustle bustle of city life in a country like India, seems to present a very realistic but alarming picture of a societywhich is gyrating towards its own chaotic existence. The ensuing conversation between the characters echoes the loss of human values and integrity. Om Prakash, the donor representative of the third world, who had been a victim of

the burgeoning octopian modernization strategies was hired by an agency for the organ sale at a crucial juncture in his life. The alarming tone of dissatisfaction which Om had with his unsuccessful attempts at attaining a vocation of maintenance gets reflected in the attitude and behavioural patterns of the other characters too.Human relationship seems cold though an artificiality is maintained to make it appear real:

JAYA (carefully): What is it? What happened?

OM (looks up): I got it. (puts the package down on the bed)

Jaya stifles a sob, spins around and back to her window.

MA (as if unable to believe him): What? Say that again?

OM: I got it. I got the job.

MA (painfully fierce intake of breath): Hhhhhh! Hhhhh! Oh! Say it again! Say the blessed words again! (rises shakily to her feet, disclaiming to the world) Never stop saying it "I – have – got – the – job!" (turns to him holding out her arms) Ah my soul, my heartbeat! Come, kiss me! Let me hold you, fondle your ears! Why am I surprised? You deserve every success. (9)

The uncanniness of the situation here lies not in the fact that the familiar is made to represent the strange; rather there is a sense of strangeness underlying in the relationship between Om and his wife Jaya. Though, neither Om nor Jaya does not overtly display the lack of genuineness in their relationship in the presence of Ginni, the potential Westerner to whom Om has committed himself, it remains a day reality to the inmates of Prakash family that Jeetu signifies more than a brother- in- law to Jaya:

JAYA: Not at all! You're the one who never counts Jeetu-

MA: Huh! That pimping rascal! That soul's disgrace!

JAYA: You like to pretend he's not there- but I'm the one who has to cook for him, worry about him- (8)

The double works here indirectly; for Jaya, itassumes a different level of perception and justification, thoughher reasoning may

appear too unreal. Jaya, who as the opening scene explicates is the wife of Om. However, Om's helplessness in offering his family a good fortune, forces him to contort and construct relationships which will not have any adverse effect upon the new professional requirement which he will have to meet at any expense. As such, Jaya assumes a new identity, the identity of being his sister with Jeetu identified as Jaya's husband. The identity of her husbands results in an emotional trajectory in Jaya; the emotional strain turns to be decisive at a later stage in Jaya's decision making. Jeetu is now the signifier of the double in operation here; the uncanniness being established hereby the factual alternations which the relation status underwent for the sake of the whole Prakash family. Jeetu, a sex worker who accepted Jaya's significance in his earlier life as his sister- in – law, however seems to accept the new identity bestowed upon him and in fact mocks it in presence of Om later.

In relation with the change in the identities of Om, Jaya and Jeetu, the uncanniness continues to reveal in strong odd coincidences. The moment Om enrolls himself for service at the Interplanta services, he not only surrendered his life, but all other lives related to him was also put at stake. The entire household as well as the lifestyle of Prakash family is transformed to meet the demands of the Westerner, the organ receiver Ginni. Made into a haven of existence, the Prakash family is not only expected to fit into the images which the First world receiver wants, but the entire household is made to come and go according to the beck and call of Ginni. The eeriness of Ginni, is however not manifested in the beginning since it's an angelic image which the contact module projects to the Prakash family:

> *The polygon flickers to life. Each face displays one view of a young woman's face, unmistakeably blonde and white- skinned. She is beautiful in a clear-eyed, unequivocal manner, exuding a youthful innocence and radiant purity.*
>
> *MA (she sees the globe head-on): Ahhh! Who is this angel?* (24)

Thus, presented with an image of an evangelic presence, the First world representative has been able to maintain a sense of

attractiveness and respect by disguising the strangeness behind the mission as well as vision.

It is just a matter of coincidences which plays a vital role in estranging the familiar aspects for Jaya. Om and Jaya, who have been informed prior to Om's commitment to Interplanta Services regarding the professional requirement which is expected from Om in the form of donating healthy '*smiling organs*' (41), however, turns to be resistant when the time turns up for the organ donation. Om, who had proclaimed his commitment to Interplanta services as a means to provide a better life to his family, presents himself as a feeble person, not able to withstand the reality when the guards of Interplanta Services announce their arrival for taking away Om, thus, "*No!! I beg of you- please! Please! Leave that cursed door alone! Seal it with cement and fire! I cannot bear to see its gape, admitting those vile, those cruel, those vicious guards! (groans) Ahhhh…"* (53).

Odd coincidence is materialized the second time when the guards announce their arrival; this time the guards warning them not to resist and take away Jeetu as '*the penalty for the resistance'*(60). A switch in roles of Om with Jeetu as the organ donor for Ginni shocks the nerves of Jaya. All the while, it was expected that it was Om who had to be the donor but the sudden shift of donor establishes the fact that though the Prakash family has no say in deciding their fate, the fate of their lives is now decided and directed by some power other than the divine power. Jeetu's forced departure as the potential donor may not seem as a matter of odd coincidence, though this sudden reversal of situation deepens the sense of eeriness related to the character of Ginni more and more.

The uncanny deepens more with animism coming into effect when the contact module springs up to life. Ginni serves to heighten this eeriness through the angelic image, which she projects initially to establish a bond of superiority with the Prakash family; an image which becomes so powerful when it starts exercising its control over the Prakash family through the strict surveillance imposed upon them. The eery feeling becomes complete when the contact module lights up again, but it is faceless. The voice which the

contact module generates creates a repulsion in Jaya and for the first time the real uncanny is in action. The initial attraction through Ginni transforms into a spiteful revulsion in the form of Virgil, the real yet disguised image behind the Receiver Ginni:

VOICE (a rich, gravelly male voice): Zhaya…

JAYA (she is badly shocked, recoils away from the CONTACT MODULE, her hand to her mouth): Ahhh! (89)

The strange and disturbing atmosphere of CONTACT MODULE extends the form of animism to that of being an instance of anthropomorphism. The contact module functions as a rhetorical figure wherein it is vested with the function of attributing human features to the images it projects into the room in the Prakash household. Beginning with the image of Ginni and ceasing with Virgil, the uncanniness is heightened to its zenith thus.

Though Padmanabhan sets up a futuristic play with a gigantic theme at its focus, the commodification aspect lends a sense of artificiality of being driven to automatism; automatism lending more to the eery feeling to the whole aura of the play. The harvest as the title suggests is reaping something beneficial from something which is sown; the harvest here being the harvest not of a crop but of healthy organs. Taking away the lively quality of organs and placing it just as another object of sale, the familiarity of human body is removed and the reader/ spectator is provided an estranged picture of human body. Not only does the human organ is re-presented as an object, but it is presented as something which can be used as per the requirements of the superior/ powerful/ first world receiver.

Almost all the characters in the play become victims of the process of automatism. Beginning with the complete transformation of the entire household with the installation of the contact module, the organ receiver Ginni leaves no space for the transformation of the inmates of the house too. Om's mother, Indumati Prakash is attracted and made a slave to the modern

gadgets making her totally glued on to the extent of neglecting the human values and its attributes. The commitment which Om owes to the Interplanta services makes him deaf and dumb to the reality of the Western attitudes and schemes. His ironical statement just adds to his innocence and inability to see through the objectives of the First world, "*How little you understand of Westerners! They are not small, petty people- like us!*" (50). Jaya, though she tries to resist the changes within and outside her life, too flows along with the current of changes to which her family has been subjected to. The only exception in the beginning to automatism was Jeetu, who was more aware of the tricks of the world. Though a futile attempt he makes to escape from the grip of the guards, he too cannot withhold himself from becoming a prey to the cunning and vile schemings of Ginni, *"…I would do anything for her- anything"* (81). Om, Om's mother and Jeetu have been made mechanical in their tastes; an exception being Jaya who bereft of her husbands feels entirely lonely and alienated. This sense of alienation inculcates a sense of fear in Jaya, which when taken into higher degrees of experience forces Jaya to respond against the silences in her life.

The uncanniness of gender identification or the uncertainty of sexual identity too strengthens the uncanny in *The Harvest*.The alluring angelic image of a young woman is so enticing and appealing that Om and Om's mother become a symbolic prey of the hegemonic concepts of the West. Om, hoping against the reality of him being the organ donor, wishes that, "*At least she could have let us enjoy the illusion for a little longer-*" (52); a sign of how far Ginni had her authority being exercised in her favour though it is in fact unjust and inhumane. The sexual identity, which Ginni forges to establish her unprecedented supremacy and power, appears very uneasy and doubtful for Jaya, who seems to be logical and rational in her approach to Ginni, as Jaya remarks, "*You look very young-*" (43). Fearing the slow death of her husband, Jaya remarks, "*If you were dead I could shave my head and break my bangles- but this? To be a widow by slow degrees? To mourn you piece by piece? (sobs) Should I shave half my head? Break my bangles one at a time?"* (23). Jeetu, too, upon given a chance to visualize the beauty of Ginni is ready to do

anything for her. While Ginni's sexual identity remains doubtful for Jaya, the later incidents in Act III, Scene II of *The Harvest*not only reveals the real uncanniness of sexuality whereas it also justifies Jaya's instinctual nature (of not believing others blindly) regarding the originality of the rich Westerner who is the organ recipient:

JAYA: They said you were a man-

VIRGIL: And I am! Always have been-

JAYA: But then you looked like a woman! You spoke like a woman-

VIRGIL: Without being one. Without ever saying I was one- (95)

Jayain her encounter with the acoustic presence Virgil reflects upon the reality of her life thus, "*Ginni might be "fine, fine"- but what has happened to my life?- She's taken Om, she's taken Jeetu! And where is she?"… "…locking Ma into a trunk- it's all madness!"* (90- 91); the way Jaya retort is just an extension of the fear which has engulfed her, a fear of being left alone in wilderness. The experience which Jaya has erupts from a sense of enclosure and confinement to which she is subjected to against her choice. This uncanny experience of Jaya gets to an extreme level of unbearableness when Virgil speaks out the truth of his identity and intentions.

JAYA: You said you wanted a healthy body-

VIRGIL: Yes, Zhaya- yours!

JAYA (stops dead): Mine! But it was Om who got the job…

VIRGIL: He's part of the job, but not the job itself. (pause) We're interested in women where I live, Zhaya. Childbearing women. (95)

The eeriness of the play heightens in the silences it breeds throughout. Silence plays a major role from the beginning of the play. Om, initiated into the service of the organ donating agency, had made Jaya a partner in his silences, the silence regarding the nature of the job and the personal details of the Prakash family. Upon being pressurized by his mother does Om reveal the professional nature which demands his presence in his home rather than his absence. Jaya, who is made a silent partner to the secrets of Om, finds it very disturbing to pretend the fact that everything

is fine between them. With the entry of Ginni, silence in Om's house attains a new dimension. Confined to their limited sphere of actions, they find silence to be the best response for many of the unaddressed questions which they have with themselves; the silence being broken only when the contact module buzzes into life/ action. Ginni, as Virgil himself accepts later as a "*computer-animated wet-dream*" (95), the rich Westerner cum organ receiver, too maintains a speculative silence regarding the identity which has been projected to the Prakash family. Ginni's silence is not explicit since her silence is disguised under the façade of a well-mannered young angelic lady who needs some help from Om to recuperate her health. Jaya's silence embarks upon the societal mores within which she is forced not to voice herself. Her emotional detachment with Om makes her even more articulate to Jeetu and his needs. Jaya's silence breaks only in one or two instances; the first instance being the attempts of the guards to take away Jeetu for the organ transplant and the second, when Virgil tries to makes her realize the truth of all the actions. While the modern gadgets have made the mother silenced and totally shut off from the rest of the world, the encroachment which Ginni has had upon Jeetu's free life makes him too inarticulate. Silence, thus has a very dispassionate yet fragmentary purpose in *The Harvest*.

Death, a familiar yet unfamiliar idea which is unimaginable or unthinkable, carries the uncanniness within itself. *The Harvest* forecasts a society ready for organ transplantation with a recipient and donor readily available in the form of the rich westerner Ginni and the poor Indian Om Prakash. It is slow death, to put in the words of Jaya, that the donor has to face. A symbolic death of the various relationship is what *The Harvest* speaks of. The organ harvest which the First world does on account of the Third world donors, results in a multitude of deaths. By becoming mechanical or automatic in their relationship and dealings, the Prakash family, it could be said, has embraced their metaphorical death. Even Jaya, who had to witness the losses of her life, becomes disheartened and disruptive towards Virgil, who promised a better life for her in return for the services she could deliver to him by providing him a

child. Jaya does not hesitate to endanger herself by challenging Virgil to travel all the way down to meet her in person. She calls Virgil "*a stranger's phantom*" (97) and is ready to risk her life at the cost of her own death. She asserts that her life has failed her so far. But now she has discovered a new way to see her success, "*I've discovered a new definition for winning. Winning by losing*" (100) … "*the only thing I have left which is still mine is my death. My death and my pride*" (101).

The Harvest penned by Manjula Padmanabhan with a cannibalistic society at its background definitely has many uncanny elements which puts this futuristic narrative to be deconstructed so as to unearth the eeriness hitherto attached with the commercialization of the societies and the world at large. To put it in the words of Nicholas Royle and Andrew Bennett in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, "*the uncanny can be described as the thoughts and the feelings which may arise on those occasions when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes unfamiliar or the unfamiliar becomes strangely familiar*" (38) and Padmanabhan's *The Harvest* has the uncanny.

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4

FROM THE SOUND OF *SONATA* TO THE DIN OF *MOURNING* AND *MAIYYAT*: A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR PLAYS OF USHA GANGULY AND MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR

Sreetanwi Chakraborty

The mirror which postmodern theatre shows to its spectators may seem in some respects, a shattered one. It consists of numerous disparate elements which, even as a whole, render no meaningful unit, can reveal no unifying image. The image reflected by postmodern theatre is one of many 'Others'. As stated by Erica Fischer-Lichte and Jo Riley in *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective.*

The colossal corpus of Indian drama in English is pregnant with this same idea of 'disparate elements' which reveal no unifying image, in terms of themes, techniques, characterization, and theatrical expertise. While drama or the 'Fifth Veda' dates back to antiquity, with the strict adherence to the principles of *Natyashastra* written by Bharatha, all major Sanskrit dramatists including Bhasa, Sudraka, Vishakhadatta and Kalidasa were instrumental in rendering

new passages and transitions to the kernel of truly Indian drama. India has always been a melting pot of regional folk cultures: dance-drama, puppet theatre, and even traditional mythological plays find some of the most appropriate expression in forms of variegated theatrical apparatus. However, there was a major change in the intensity and proliferation of Indian drama in the Post-British Indian trajectory of literature. With the introduction of English language, the dramatists did a constant experimentation, with respect to language, theme, and structure of a play. As Girish Karnad recalls in his introduction to Three Plays, in the 1930s:

> *The contemporary concerns of these playwrights gave their work an immediacy and a sharp edge lacking in the earlier theatre, and a few plays of great power were written. While trying to awaken their audience to the humiliation of political enslavement, many of these new playwrights made a coruscating analysis of the ills that had eaten into Indian society. This was essentially the playwright's theatre; the plays were presented by amateur or semiprofesisonal groups and were mostly directed by the playwrights themselves.* (Girish, 8)

The advancement of modern Indian English drama post-1960s has seen a remarkable exposure to new and brilliant theatrical techniques: with plausible uses of stage lights like beam projection, Fresnel lantern, strip lighting and half-light half-shadow stagecraft variations, the modern dramatists and theatrical experts have introduced new dramatic techniques that aspire to offer something exclusive to the audience. With ideologies that challenge and subvert gender, class, caste, and sexual stereotypes, modern Indian English dramatists like Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Shambhu Mitra and many others have created a revolution in Indian English drama. In this direction, it would not be a literary exaggeration to discuss about two more stalwarts of Indian English drama, Mahesh Elkunchwar, whose regional Marathi plays have been translated and adapted in English, and Usha Ganguly, whose Hindi and Bengali plays have contributed immensely to the development of the tentacles of modern theatre. Both in terms of Realistic theatrical devices, costumes that directly

appeal to the senses of the audience, and speculations regarding dialogues and stage performances, Usha Ganguly and Mahesh Elkunchwar have opted for administering the ideas of denaturalizing and defamiliarizing the stages of history, sexuality, patriarchal norms and stereotypes by building characters that are bold, expressive, realistic as well as enigmatic. While Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad followed the ideals of alternative representations of creating individuals from archetypes with a conscious volition, both Usha and Mahesh also follow up to recreate this same picture, with their renowned plays like *Sonata*, *Rudaali*, *Maiyyat*, *Hum Mukhtara*, *Pratibimb*, Party and Garbo. The critical dichotomy existing between the 'self' and the 'other', between the individual and the society, between fidelity and infidelity, between 'being' and 'becoming' and between the woman who is a stereotype and the woman who feels and acts emancipated, find one of the most poignant expressions in the plays of Usha Ganguly and Mahesh Elkunchwar.

In one of her essays *Subversion of Traditional Image of Women in Karnad's Plays*, S. Shylaja points out how in her eponymous work *A Literature of their Own*, Feminist critic Elaine Showalter points out that in the course of the evolution of a female character, there are many phases that counterbalance her existence in the family and in the society:

> *First there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages Feminine, Feminist and Female.* (Gopichand, 103)

If we go for a theatrical and literary circumspection, it would be an indication of a folly if we just say that the major plays by Ganguly and Elkunchwar are Feminine or Feminist. With an appropriation and inclusion of radical extremist ideas that often

verge on the idiosyncrasies of a modern cosmopolitan life, plays like *Sonata*, *Party*, Garbo and *Pratibimb* do not have a positive repercussion of certainty and a compartmentalized technicality. Elkunchwar has taken every initiative to make, break, and deconstruct his plays against the norms of class, culture, temporality, and spatiality, to give them a distinct literary and aesthetic flavour. For instance, as the play *Sonata* commences, the audience has a glimpse of three women among whom Dolon and Shubhadra belong to two different communities and cultures, implementing values and indoctrinating new codes of living life to the fullest. Elkunchwar presents Dolon Sen who works in a multinational company, Aruna Chaturvedi who has a habit of adhering to linguistics and an impeccable way of dealing with Sanskrit language as part of her academic profession, and Subhadra Parekh who is a journalist. "We are all in boxes", is perhaps the best catchword that depicts the life of the three women in the play. When Dolon says, "I sway to life with abandon", it almost presents the elixir of life in the form of the archetypal Dionysian impulse, which Aruna lacks. The Aruna-Dolon-Subhadra trio makes up the non-conventional activities as part of a megalopolis. Added to this, the play uses stark techniques of surrealistic muffled voices that interfere from the dark and amble toward the interior most recesses of the id, the ego, and the superego as part of the mental framework of the three women. In terms of both themes and techniques, *Sonata* is a radical departure from the erstwhile socialist plays or just Feminist ones. At some points, it is sprinkled with absurdities and multiple implications of an eternal waiting, where the women label themselves as awful creatures, sans ideology, aim or any type of ideal in life. For Dolon or for Subhadra or even for Aruna, it is living itself which mesmerises them; eternity stops in just indulging in gossips about masculine bodies and tropes of sexuality in advertisements. At one juncture Subhadra gives out a sardonic laugh anticipating that after all her words coated with an implicit sense of sexual innuendo will make her resemble a 'walking encyclopaedia on pornography.' Drinking and smoking as part of an urban landscape, with the sheer ineluctable vacuity that the three women

suffer in their love life and personal relationships are incorporated with the minutest details. Elkunchwar's *Sonata*, unlike Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal, which* is about moral, social and historical decadence, tries to be both non-conformist about socialist ideals but it never discards them fully. Just to eradicate the strangulating sense of vacuity in their lives, the women often engage in meaningless verbal meanderings, leading to an infinite abyss. Just like the absurd worldview projected in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, this play by Elkunchwar also presents a rhapsody, short staccato dialogues, infringement on personal sentences, comic misdemeanour and also balancing and counterbalancing existential crisis in a most jovial manner. So the introduction of silhouettes of human forms and language variations, a Bengali woman, a Maharashtrianized woman and a 'pure' *Marathi'* woman, all talk about dramatic plurality as a technique in Elkunchwar's play.

The stagecraft with the living room setting as the background is also one of the modernist techniques that we have seen in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, or in Henrik Ibsen's *The Dolls' House*. Westernization of the Indian spirit and yet retaining its virtues and rebellious spirit-that is how Elkunchwar uses the modern dramatic histrionics and theatrical techniques. It would be appropriate to refer to Girish Karnad's comments on the living room as a setting in modern Indian English drama:

> *From Ibsen to Albee, the living room has symbolized all that is valuable to the Western bourgeoisie. It is one's refuge from the battleground where values essential to one's individuality are fought out and defended. But nothing of consequence ever happens or is supposed to happen in an Indian living room! It is the no-man's land, the empty, almost defensive front that family presents to the world outside.* (Girish, 10)

That is exactly where the dramatic intensity reaches in Elkunchwar's play *Garbo*. The language of obscenity, defaming a woman, absurdity about birth, death, and regeneration, and an interminable quagmire of modern human filth, are some of the thematic issues that are projected as part of this ambitious drama. Garbo epitomizes different ideals for different men. The individual

man-woman sexual and spiritual discrepancies, which Elkunchwar discusses in *God Son*, also find a repercussion in *Garbo*. Garbo is the female protagonist, and three men, Shrimant, Intuc and Pansy have feelings for her, although of disparate nature. While for Shrimant, she is just a machine for delivering sexual satisfaction, with which he can continue his promiscuous escapades, for Intuc, Garbo resembles a living work of art and enigma, and for young and immature Pansy, she is a replica of just an older sister. This play also opens in a living room where the three men keep on relaxing and meditating about songs and concerts. Switching from the nuances of inculcating a sense of modern dramatic techniques and complete meaninglessness existence to arrive at a definite conclusion about the purpose of life- that is how the play progresses, with an affirmation that time never passes but it has to be spent. Elkunchwar presents a worldview that is static at maximum times, a worldview that is based on the mundane, the monotonous tune, jesting on the animalistic pleasures of existence. The world that Intuc, Pansy, and Shrimant inhabit is a world of indiscriminate variations, where 'clean language' becomes foul. As Shrimant acts as a moral police, he says to Intuc:

> *You are guilty of using impossibly clean language shorn of all obscenities, thus causing acute embarrassment to those who are in the habit of using abusive language...*(Elkunchwar,10, ellipsis in original)

However, it is in the character of Garbo that we find one of the most exotic and sublime combinations of both beauty and cerebral capacity. When the three men in her life opt for escapism and violation of morality, she stands erect basking in the glory of triumphant motherhood. When the three men ask her for aborting the foetus, she refuses. Her journey is not about acquiescence or the termination of her own values, but it is an all-encompassing life force and enigma emanating from her umbilical cord, that makes the three men pay obeisance to her as a 'mother' figure at last. As they say in chorus:

> *You are life. The spring of fearless-beauty, the source of all hope, the fulfilment of all promises are you. You are the beginning of belief. You*

are the everlasting. All future Suns are in your womb. Give us your light. (Elkunchwar, 42)

It is not the resurrection of the injured, but an appraisal of the re-affirmation of the blessed soul, which remains indissoluble in social and moral filth, almost engaging our attention to the incongruous, theatrically ludicrous, and entertaining elements in V.V. Srinivas Iyenger's play *The Family Cage*.

The eminent Indian dramatic critic M.K. Naik has pointed out in his critical essay on *The Achievement of Indian Drama in English* that:

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and though that medium reacts on the mind of the audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience. (Naik, 151)

It is this same sense of composite art that finds a realistic as well as expressionistic accomplishment in the plays of Elkunchwar. His plays *God Son*, or *Pratibimb* (Reflection) are a curious amalgamation of the multi-layered strands of psychoanalysis, verging on the creation and unmasking of individual identity: identity which is fluid, and identity of the microcosmic portion of human life, with respect to the macrocosmic influences of the entire society. Just like the aimless, rootless, and godless characters swaying toward the vast abyss of eternity in Beckett's *Endgame*, the man-woman character in *God Son* portrays a picture of the postmodern individualism, along with a crisis for existence, evasion of parental responsibility, the embryonic stages of inner turmoil, and even the stream of consciousness technique. With reference to the movie *Sonata*, veteran actress Shabana Azmi points out in one of her interviews,

Earlier women-oriented films were movies called Main Chup Rahungi. The female lead was used to tell us that silence is a virtue in women. (Shabana, YouTube)

In any case, the silence that exists in many of the postmodern plays of Elkunchwar is colossal with typifications and social hierarchies, where man-woman-child-woman-man all kinds of relationships appear in one of the newest manners to the audience. Apart from socio-psychological realms that are explored, the plays by Elkunchwar also highlight the rhythmical ways of silencing with sudden snubs, words that often go in a prolonged manner, or even an abrupt concession to minds and metaphors. Images, symbols, and exclamations determine the deficiencies in the characters, and also channelize a set pattern of estimating them as both stereotypes and digressions. Thus, in his plays like *Holi*, Lalu or Anand capitulate to the vagaries of misfortune and socio-political entanglements, whereas Gopal, Madhav, Thakur and Ranjit all survive. Sustenance of life through play management and stagecraft management, looking into the derisory and illusionary aspects of human life and sometimes, making man stand in stark contrast to the accepted realities of a social background are essential modernist dramatic elements that mark Elkunchwar as an adroit playwright.

It is quite interesting to note that the production, staging, and reception of the modern Indian English drama experienced a massive change since the postcolonial establishment of new drama companies and theatre groups. With the concept of the new woman, there was a post-colonial anticipation of the resisting reader and the audience of the new modern Indian English drama, with theatrical devices that were often in congruence with the new waves of social, political, religious, and economic change in the Indian society. The popularity of Elkunchwar's plays has therefore made it possible for them to be adopted as movies also. In one of his interviews in 2016, to Deepa Ganesh of *The Hindu*, Elkunchwar talked about this new wave of dramatic grammar and performative theories and how it ushered in a new era in the field of Indian English regional drama like Marathi plays. He said:

> *Dramatic grammar is different from the grammar of fiction and an informed reader keeps this in mind while studying drama; therefore, he can read (only) those texts as literature that reveal their performance*

> *worthiness to them. One basic rule in drama is that whatever appears irrelevant and unnecessary vis-a-vis the dramatic intention on stage automatically becomes redundant, unbeautiful and parasitic...Therefore, if a script is full of unnecessary and unwarranted embellishments, used only to decorate the text due to wrong notions of 'beauty in drama', the reader refuses to acknowledge such plays as literature.* (Elkunchwar, The Hindu)

This is exactly how we measure and appreciate the popularity of Usha Ganguly as one of the contemporary Indian playwrights in English. Her plays are a well-knit deviation from the extraneous dramatic elements, not in consonance with the 'redundant, unbeautiful, and parasitic' elements that Elkunchwar speaks of. According to Anjum Katyal, most of the plays of Usha Ganguly 'dehistoricizes' the class and caste-specific traditional notions about performing arts in general. Usha Ganguly has always been a renowned name in the field of new Indian English proscenium theatre, delving deeper into the realms of both rural and urban psyche. With dedicated stage directions that interrogate and disparage themes of gender and sex discrimination, Ganguly proves to be instrumental in setting up a socially-heterogeneous realm, which thwarts the transitional concepts of both parental and patriarchal hierarchy. In plays like *Rudali*, *Hum Mukhtara*, *Maiyyat* or *Himmat Mai*, the ambidextrous playwright thus reconstrues a meaningful synthesis of emotions, violence, spiritual resurrection and ambivalence in terms of the evolution of a single character or that of a community.

The play *Hum Mukhtara* commences against a black, undulated backdrop, having the impoverished land of Meerwala in India-Pakistan border. Taking its cue from the historical reference of Mukhtar Maii, who was gangraped by the Mastoi clan, for an alleged fault of her brother, the play's theme, props and style all stand as a gruesome and yet pathetic evidence of use of an inscrutable power of the woman against the blotched face of patriarchy. As the play commences, the audience has a glimpse of a group of women, all clad in black *burquas*, along with a woman who is the narrator and

the commentator, played by Usha herself. The dominance of black and red coloured costumes, ropes, and stage curtains synchronizes with the unpardonable acts of killing, community rape, and ostracism in its most spiteful form. Black and red also symbolize anonymity, as well as the omnipotent shadow of a vicious patriarchal system looming large in the life of the women. The theme of universality compounded with the clarion call of "*Hum Mukhtara, sab Mukhtara*" coincides with the ideology of those animal instincts, which do not spare a two-year-old child, or even a sixty-year-old lady. Thematically it is the fight of the privileged communities against the solemnity and chastity of Mukhtar, but symbolically, the play traverses all spatial, temporal, and regional variations, attaining a universal sublimation. The spotlight shifts on to the tattered *Shalwar* and the battered spirit of *Mukhtar*, and her white coloured headgear serves as a symbolic penetration and perpetuation of her virility, enigma as well as the impeccable spirit that cannot be tarnished by the claws of rape. In this connection, it would be appropriate to refer to the insightful excerpt from Mukhtar Maii's own memoir, *In the Name of Honour: A Memoir*:

> *I am forced to submit. Then they shove me outside, half naked, where I stumble and fall. They throw my shalwar at me. This time, the double wooden doors of the stable close on the four men. Everyone is waiting. I am alone with my shame before the eyes of the entire village. I have no words to describe what I am at that moment. I can't think: a dense fog has clouded my brain, masking the images of torture and infamous submission.* (Mukhtar, 165)

The play presents muffle voices, disjointed images, often embarking upon surrealistic visions from the past, and an ample use of folk songs and regional linguistic variations. When Mukhtar reminisces about her childhood, remembers her running after a small bird, the chorus of women in the background reflect her undying spirit, and her stamina to stand erect. The imaginary bird in the hand of *Mukhtar* can save itself from fire, and she helps it to fly. The bird stands for the indomitable spirit that does not remain incarcerated as *Mukhtar* herself. As the play meanders towards its

end, the narrator comments "*Khwab tut jaaye ya na rahe, to insaan khatam ho jata hai*", indicating the triumphant spirit of *Mukhtar* who initiates an educational program for the women in her village. The play ends on a positive note, with a streak of self-reconciliatory measures that Mukhtar adopts and goes on fighting for her case, demanding justice.

One more adaptation by Usha Ganguly deserves explanation in this connection. Her famous play *Rudali* is adapted from a novel of the same name, by writer cum activist Mahashweta Devi. *Rudali* has as its backdrop a village in Rajasthan, where under the strict regime implemented by feudal lords, professional mourners are hired to mourn the death of upper caste people. The play becomes proportionate to the tear, howling and crying of the lower caste mourners, who sacrifice their own lives at the cost of mourning for the *zamindars* and their family. Thematically, it is the progress and salvation of the soul of the departed that is hinted at, but the play also mitigates all assumptions about caste domination, women as wailers, and the ritualistic patriarchal hegemony that inculcates the sense of inferiority in the women. The sense of an overwhelming tragedy encompasses the whole gamut of the play, infusing a strong sense of resemblance to Greek plays like *Antigone*, where there was a need for a decent burial for the dead. With traditional music, *Rajsthani* costumes, dance forms, and regional flavours of dialect all knit into a rich tapestry of dramatic and performative details, Usha Ganguly recreates traditional feudal instincts that challenge and subvert the concepts of both Feminism and humanity.

Staging resistance and speaking the language of resistance, thus, is not just a postcolonial impact in the finer threads of Indian English drama. In any case, a constant connection exists among the female author playwright as the collaborator and the contributor to the theatrical performances and the overall revelation of the reality to the audience. These new genre of Indian English plays do not just indicate a release from the stereotypical forms and techniques of theatre, but they also contain more cerebral elements

as part of their enumeration. Class divisions and reconstructing social solidarity are problematized to a large extent, and the playwright can easily glide in between the translated and unobtrusive portrayal of characters and situations that are an adaptation of Brecht or Gorki and Ibsen. As Aparna Dharwadker discusses in her chapter titled *Modern Indian Theatre*, as part of the Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre, she opines:

> *[...]through an individual or collective process, a female director develops a text for performance that has antecedent sources and sometimes an earlier play as a model, but no prior existence in the form in which it is brought upon the stage. The term 'auteur' is most appropriate for this form of writing, which combines elements of acting, directing and authorship*. (Dharwadkar, 265)

In case of *Maiyyat*, for instance, Usha deals not with an earlier play, though, but with a literary verisimilitude that is found in cases of Dalit studies. The story is about Lakha, and his inclusion into the Brahmin caste, and his exclusion from his own Dalit community. Coming from a socially despicable condition in a village in Maharashtra, Lakha has a yearning that his acceptance in the Brahmin community will make his specially-abled yet deformed son recover. Gradually as the rituals take place, he falls sick and dies. He remains an untouchable, on the peripheries of the social reality- to both insiders, from his own *dom* community, and also from the Brahmins. Therefore, it is the taste and the integrity of the subaltern that questions his own domains, and fails to acknowledge his space in the so-called cultured spheres of the society. The playwright secures a montage of different forms, colours, bindings, and reasonable justifications of the act of 'representation' itself.

Somewhere, the modern Indian English plays also represent the finer strokes of Impressionist paintings, where words become terse, and expressions live manifold. Submission to injuries and celebrating a socially, economically, and morally disparaged life thus become the most dominant elements in modern Indian English drama. With stage lighting, direction, short, crisp dialogues and

often patches of glimmering silence, the modern Indian dramatists harness the most exquisite creative and literary potential of their ancestors, but with a twist, almost like that of O'Henry's English short stories. As Girish Karnad becomes optimistic in the last few lines of his Introduction to three plays:

> *Perhaps quite unrealistically, I dream of the day when a similar ripple will re-establish theatre- flesh-and-blood actors enacting a well-written text to a gathering of people who have come to witness the performance- where it belongs, at the centre of the daily life of the people.* (Girish, 18)

Therein lies the success of the themes and techniques of the modern Indian English drama.

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5

LEELA BENARE: MUFFLED VOICE OF A FEMALE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

Dr. Seema Sarkar

Leela Benare remains on the stage from the very beginning to the end of the play. She is a dedicated and competent school teacher, who is prepared to give the last drop of blood to teach her students; yet by breaking the social norms and challenging the established traditions, she has invited everybody's displeasure and condemnation. Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our religion and our traditions. Tendulkar condemns and discourages the socially destructive tendencies through Sukhatme. The final judgement given by Kashikar exhibits his social concern and duty to the coming generations: "No memento of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore, this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed." Crying 'No! No! No!-I won't let you do it...I won't let it happen' Benare gets half-fainted. By the end, she is shown sifting motionless and from somewhere unseen Benare's own voice is heard singing softly:

'The parrot to the sparrow said;

'Why, why, are your eyes so red?'

'Oh; my dear friend, what shall I say?

Someone has stolen my nest away.'

Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow...

Although marginality is taking the centre stage now in the postcolonial era, the woman empowerment has not achieved a full-fledged status yet. The voice of Leela Benare is subdued like a little sparrow at the end, it seems to be muffled, crushed by our male-dominated society.

Keywords: New Woman, Male Chauvenism, Marginality, Muffled Voice, Hypocrisy Vijay Tendulkar is a multifaceted genius among the contemporary Indian English writers. He is not only an established playwright, but also a screen and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator. The family background of Marathi theatre has made him an influential dramatist and theatre personality in Maharashtra and in the translations to the world over. Socio-political situations were expressed forcefully in his plays. He says,

As an individual or rather as a social being, I feel deeply involved in the existing state of my society....and in my way brood over it. Once in a way, I even do something to relieve myself of the tension, and anxiety and agitation produced by this brooding. I participated in a protest meeting or dharna or a fast or morcha or a Satyagraha. I align myself with some civil liberty organisation.

As a writer, I find myself persistently inquisitive, non-conformist, ruthless, cold and brutal as compared to the other committed and human....As a social being, I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end...

As a writer, I feel fascinated by the violent exploiter and exploited relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that the relationship is external fact of life however cruel, I will never end. Not that I relish this

thought while it grips me but I cannot shake it off.

He was always being inspired by real life events and his own struggles in early life—living in chawls provided a perspective which gave authenticity to Marathi theatre. 'Silence! The Court is in Session' is a satire on male domination on women. In an interview, he confessed:

> *I personally don't bother about people who haven't seen life. They close their eyes at the sight of suffering as if it doesn't exist. The fact is that life is dark and cruel it's just that you don't care for the truth. You don't want to see it, because it might make you uncomfortable. If escapism is your way of living, then you will fail to see the truth. I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within....an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can't do it, I have to speak the truth.*

When the play, 'Silence! The Court is in the Session' was first staged, was not received well, but Rangayan continued 35 performances of it and finally made an impact on the audience. Tendulkar got the Kamladevi Chattopadhyay Award in 1970 and 'Shantata' bagged 'The Play of the Year' award. 'Shantata' was translated into many languages and brought National scale recognition to Tendulkar. He established his place as a leading force in the national theatre movement with Girish karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar. With this play, he became the eye of a storm. Tendulkar had already earned the title of 'the angry young man' of Marathi Theatre' but 'Shantata (Silence)' marked him as a rebel against the established values of fundamentally orthodox society. The theatre group is a miniature cross-section of middle-class society that comes to perform at a suburban village of Mumbai. The members are representative of its different sub-strata. Their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerisms reflect their petty, marginal existences filled with disappointments and inhibited desires that find expression in their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings. The only exception is its central

character, Miss leela Benare.

Leela Benare, the protagonist of 'Silence! The Court is in Session', a symbol of emancipated modern woman, is the most important and powerful female character of Tendulkar's play. She is the pivotal character and the whole play revolves round this young, energetic and fun loving character. She is a member of an amateur dramatic troupe in Mumbai named Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association. Other characters like Kashikars, Prof. Damle, Ponkshe, Sukhatme, Balu Rokde and karnik are introduced to us through her. Bednare is a school teacher, a very talented, 24 year old young rebellious woman. She is being adored by her students for her strict discipline and dedication towards her wards that her colleagues and even the management are jealous of her. An extrovert, frank and bold lady, Benare is highly sociable.

Despite of all the merits, the school management is holding an enquiry just because one bit of slander. Benare assertively questions the management for mixing her personal life to the professional. She says:

> *Who are these people to say what can or can't do? My life is my own—I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those—no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life!*

She maintains her cool though much worried about her personal predicament and problem with the management and behaves lightly with witty remarks and jokes with Balu Rokade, Sukhatme, and Ponkshe, when they enter the hall. Actually her sweetest songs tell us of her saddest thoughts. She wants to drink life to the lees, hence breaks the social traditions and taboos that shackle her freedom. She pays heavily for being different from the stock. She is actually a victim of betrayal of love. Firstly, it was her maternal uncle, at the tender age of fourteen, unaware of such sin, deceived her and fled. She failed in her attempt to commit suicide. Secondly, her affair with Prof. Damle, a married man with children turned out a fiasco. She even got pregnant of this relationship, but this intellectual man very shrewdly threw her out of his life to safeguard

his honour.

Being an empowered new age woman, Benare wants to bring up the baby with the protection of a father, home and security. She makes every effort on Ponkshe, Balu Rokde and Samant, but all in vain. They all shirk away to bear the responsibility to father a child of other man. The traditionalists like Mr. And Mrs. Kashikar and Sukhatme consider her a danger to the institution of marriage and the sacred nature of motherhood. According to them, if a woman is given freedom, can misuse and abuse it like Benare and spell doom and cause disaster to society. Sukhatme's argument against Benare in the mock-trial of the court scene proves it clearly. She forthrightly gives a frank and fitting reply to the charges levelled against her in the court. She tells strongly to the court not to interfere in her private life.

Leela Benare is more sinned against than sinning. She is charged with unwed motherhood and infanticide and ironically enough, it lets Prof. Damle scot free, who is the root cause of this sin. She is a cruel victim of a society, where men rule the roost. It's the height of male-chauvinism when the court that accuses Benare of infanticide, pronounces the judgment that she will live but the child in her womb be destroyed. Sukhatme appeals to the court for severest punishment to the accused Miss Benare, who has shaken the citadel of morality and tarnished the institution of marriage. He says it forcibly:

> *The accused has plotted to dynamite the very roots of our tradition, our pride in ourselves, our culture and our religion. It is the sacred and imperative duty of your Lordship and every wise and thoughtful citizen amongst us to destroy the plot at once.*

Mr. Kashikar as judge pronounces his verdict in equal force:

> *Prisoner Miss Benare, pay the closest attention. The crimes you have committed are most terrible. There is no forgiveness for them. Your sin must be expiated. Irresponsibility must be chained down. Social customs are all of supreme importance. Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure. This court takes*

a serious view of your attempt to dynamite all this...The morality, which you have shown through your conduct, is the morality you were planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow... The School officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from your job. By the grace of God, it has all been stopped in time. Neither you nor anyone else should ever do anything like this. No memento of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.

Although Leela Benare argues about her private rights, liberties, where society has no right to interfere, but she cannot disown her responsibility to the society. Being a social animal, she cannot violate the rules and regulation of the society. Geeta Kumar's view is considerable here: "*It is society which asks everyone to conform to its own yardsticks of decorum and propriety. The writer makes ample use of irony, satire, and pathos and even mock element (as in 'Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe) to highlight the hollowness of middle class moralities. These moralities might be having slight variations but all times and at all ages, they remain the same. An individual is not supposed to take the "Primrose path of dalliance," as Shakespeare puts it. Conform or else—all hell can break loose. Irregular or abnormal is not to be tolerated. No reasons are good enough to justify and find alibis for a person's erratic behaviour."*

John Ruskin said, 'Shakespeare has no heroes, he has only heroines'. The same is true about Vijay Tendulkar, who is the creator of numerous remarkable women characters in his plays. Some noteworthy female figures are Princess Vijaya in 'Encounter in Umbugland', Rama in 'The Vultures', Sarita and Kamala in 'Kamala', Laxmi and Champa in 'Sakharam Binder' , and Leela Benare in 'Silence! The Court is in Session'. All these women characters represent the Indian woman, who is emerging as a new woman in modern times after a long suppression and cruel domination of man. N. S. Dharan aptly says that in 'Tendulkar's plays, generally, women are the centre. It is around women most of the action revolves. The roles Tendulkar's female protagonists play, overshadow those played by the men, figuring in them'. That is the cause of dramatic intensity in his plays.

We can trace a similarity between Ms. Benare and Ammu of 'The God of Small Things' by Arundhati Roy. Benare is quite identical to the suffering women portrayed by Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai in this male dominated society. In the words of C. Coelho:

In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egoistical man and equally self-centred society.

Tendulkar himself accepted: *This play is a caustic satire on the social as well as legal justice.*

It is an interesting fact that Tendulkar has developed the central character of Miss Benare through the contents of a beautiful poem by Mrs. Shirish Pai, which highlights the travails of human life. The theme of the poem is being summed up in the Third Act of the play by Leela Benare's definition of life. The tender children left to her care are never affected by the poison of life, consuming her slowly. Miss Benare's life proves to be a battle, where defeat is destined as the end as expressed in the poem. As per P. Obula Reddy and P. Pramila Devi:

Benare, the principal character in the play is as sprightly rebellious and assertive as the heroine of Shakespeare romantic comedies....of course Benare is a lovely spark from the thunderbolt of Tendulkar. She is a new woman pleading for freedom from the social norms...

A fierce psychological violence becomes obvious in the persecution of Miss Benare, the helpless woman. During the process of the trial, the latent sadism of the characters of Sukhatme, Karnik, Ponkshe, of Mr. And Mrs. Kashikar or even Rokde comes to the fore. Leela Benare's defence of herself against the attack of the guardians of social norms in a long soliloquy has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theatre. Benare's monologue is reminiscent of Nora's declaration of independence in 'Doll's House' of Ibsen. But the note of protest that characterizes the speech of Ibsen's heroine is missing in Leela Benare of Tendulkar. It is more of a self-justification than an attack on society's hypocrisies. It is poignant and sensitive and highlights the

susceptibility of women in our society.

The play 'Shantata!' and its structure centres round the idea of a game and include the essential ingredient of 'reversal'. Benare finds herself trapped at the close of the play, who is on the offensive in the beginning. The claustrophobic atmosphere inside becomes the kind of setting where social masks are stripped off. Benare cannot stand the judgment of the court that she shall live but the child in her womb shall die! She collapses, unable to withstand the inhuman pronouncement, which is a blow to her womanhood and motherhood. From somewhere unseen, her own (muffled) voice is heard singing softly:

The parrot to the sparrow said,

'Why, oh why, are your eyes so red?'

'Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say?

Someone has stolen my nest away.'

Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow...

'Oh, brother crow, oh, brother crow,

Were you there? Did you see it go?'

'No, I don't know. I didn't see.

What are your troubles to do with me?'

O sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow....

Benare is the forerunner of women's liberation movement. She symbolizes the plight of women in a society that is dominated by male chauvinism. Benare is like the sparrow in the song that has lost its nest and worried about it, her troupe mates are like the crow that is not bothered in the least about her troubles. N. S. Dharan rightly remarks, " It is the imposed silence on Benare that gives the title, *Silence!* its unique significance. Till the commencement of the *mock-trial* Benare remains a picture of poise and vitality. She makes comments on the behaviour of her fellow characters, and sits singing and humming. Nevertheless silence descends on her when the *mock-trial* begins with Kashikar's sudden interrogative

statement whether she feels herself guilty or not (of the crime of infanticide). Benare is dumb founded." In addition to its imposing a paralyzing silence on Benare, the play also imposes a shocked silence on the audience who become mute witnesses to the cruelty perpetrated on Leela Benare by her immediate colleagues in the name of a game and just a game.

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6

A STUDY ON THE CHILDREN'S PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

Shruti Roy Chakraborti

Drama is perhaps the most potential and powerful literary genre, since it shows more than it tells. Although, plays are often written for the purpose of reading only, but, drama, or theatre, by far and large focuses on the visual impact it creates on the audience. And this impact fulfills several purposes simultaneously, like, it aims at entertaining and educating the audience, it informs and enlightens, it also protests and subverts. Theatre provides a huge scope to the literary minds to express their views on contemporary socio-political-economic and religious issues. This paper aims to examine few plays written for the children by the phenomenal Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar.

Vijay Tendulkar was born in Kolhapur, Mumbai, in the year 1928. Initially known as a controversial literary figure, his works gradually got recognized as milestones of Marathi theatre, and over the years, Tendulkar has emerged as an iconic figure of Indian theatre as well. He was a multifaceted personality involved in multiple literary activities; he was a leading playwright, a movie

and television script-writer, an essayist, a political journalist, and most important of all, a stark social commentator. His commentary on different socio-political-religious issues is something that stands out whenever we aim to discuss anything about his literary works. And it is needless to mention that his viewpoints, which found expressions through his works, have created huge and formidable impact on the mind of the spectators and readers since the 1950s.

Looking back at his early life, we know that, Tendulkar had spent some time of his life in tenements, which are popularly known as "chawls" in Mumbai, and he had started his career with writing for newspapers. These made him come in close contact with the life of the urban lower middle class section of the society, and the experience he gathered eventually has found reflection in many of his plays. Some of the plays he is best known for are- *Gidhare* (The Vultures, 1961), *Shantata! Court ChaluAhe* (Silence! The Court is in Session, 1968), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *GhasiramKotwal* (1973), and *Kanyadaan*(1983), all of which have close bearing with the deep concern he had for the society that he lived in. And each of these thought provoking plays compel the spectators to think and re-think on the issues that he has raised in these plays. Keeping all these in mind, the fact seems quite unusual that Tendulkar has also written few plays for children as well. In this paper, I would examine five of the plays which Tendulkar has written for children, translated by Dr. Ajay Joshi.

Dr. Joshi, in the introduction of the book, *Five Plays for Children*, writes about the background of these plays. Tendulkar had written the plays at the request of Smt. Sulabha Deshpande, noted theatre and television personality. Smt. Deshpande was teaching in the Chhabildas School in Dadar, Mumbai. She wanted her students to take part in a theatre competition which was being held as a part of the experimental theatre movement in Maharashtra. In this context she had urged Tendulkar to write few plays for children which her students would enact in the competition. Tendulkar had written six plays, out of which five have been translated by Dr. Joshi, and the present paper aims at a critical appreciation of the

themes and techniques of those.

The overwhelmingly popular adult writings of Tendulkar have overshadowed the effort he had made for the little children. But a close look at these plays will make it evident that the theatre maestro of India has been no less creative while writing for the little ones either. The plays are fast paced, amusing, and are interspersed with wit and humour. But the most important characteristic, which is discernable in all the plays is that, however grace and ease the plays have been penned with, one can never miss the social concern and commentary that underlies each play. Along with a child, an adult is bound to learn some lesson from each of these plays, although, we cannot accuse Tendulkar of being sermonizing or preachy.

The five plays that Dr. Joshi has translated are- *Missing: A Father, Bobby's Story, The Play of the Nosey Parker, The King and Queen Want Sweat*, and *The Wedding of the Village Headman's Daughter*. The plays present characters from different cross sections of the society, and ranges acrossthe rural as well as urban backdrop. All the plays provide ample scope for stage enactment; the characterization is done keeping in mind the children's enjoyment and delight, and so has been the stage arrangement designed. In course of an interview given to Dr. Joshi in 2006, Sulabha Deshpande had remarked about Tendulkar, "*In his play Shantata Court ChaluAhe (Silence, The Court is in Session) there is a line 'There is a child hidden deep within me'. I think this statement is true of Tendulkar*". (Joshi, ix) And the plays in discussion reflect the deep hidden child who existed within the deep, thoughtful mind.

Missing: A Father (Baba Haravale Ahet)

Until one reaches the concluding part of the play, the title of it seems to be quite irrelevant. The play is about a small girl, kidnapped by a man from a 'chawl' in Mumbai. A troubling theme in the context of children's entertainment, but Tendulkar makes it thoroughly amusing for the kids and the adults alike. The most striking feature of the play is that, except for the characters of the little girl and her kidnappers, all the other characters of are non-

humans. We find another human character, a dancer, but she is actually a picture on a poster of a film. The non-living objects are- an electric pole, and a letterbox; there is also a presence of a crow and a tree which adds a slight tone of a fable to the play. This particular play stands out among the others. Tendulkar imparts life to the electric pole and the letterbox and gives them their voice. He does the same for the crow, the tree, and the woman in dancing pose in the poster too. And all of these characters function as the protectors and rescuers of the small girl. The play is set in late night, a setting apt for the unreal happenings to take place when an electric pole, a letterbox, a crow, a tree, and a poster woman are seen talking among themselves. They behave like human beings, rather, they are more humane than human beings, since the other human character is the one of the kidnapper, the 'bad man'. Tendulkar deliberately and skillfully merges the human world with the non-human one. The manifold dimensions of the play lie in this amalgamation of the two worlds. On one hand he tries to establish the fact that human existence is not possible without other non-human entities. On the other, he captures the existential crisis that permeates across the universe. Furthermore, the fact of human beings lacking humanity has been made more prominent through the depiction of the kind and generous non-human beings. Another aspect which we cannot afford to miss in the play is the fellow feeling that these non-humans share among themselves. The play begins with a conversation between the tree and the electric pole. They are seen sharing their part of woe and care, and how their existence has become more tolerable because of their presence in each other's life. The tree says to the pole:

> *Tree: … Only this ocean was there. I used to feel really lonely. When they brought you and put you here, I thought, oh good, at least now I'll have company. But at first you wouldn't talk. ….*
>
> *Pole: Then one day, during a storm, I just tilted onto you.*
>
> *Tree: Oh my god! What a storm it was!...*
>
> *Pole: It was because you stood your ground that I got some support, hunh. Thank goodness you held me and kept me up. But you got badly injured.*

I gave up my pride then, and we became friends.(Ibid, 4)

This excerpt from the play makes Tendulkar's intention quite clear. A message is passed on to the children, and adults too, that self-pride might be a barrier in the path of fraternity, and fraternity is essential for an emotionally healthy living. Later in the play we find the same fellow feeling exits among all of them. The letterbox is called Aunty Red, and she emerges to be kind of a guardian figure to all of them. Tendulkar exploits her character as his mouthpiece to comment on certain malpractices in the society, like, the practice of guardian call in schools. Aunty Red seems to be highly against this practice of school authorities calling parents to complain on their child. She sounds highly sympathetic towards the father who slogs hard to provide his child education. The presence of the dancing woman in the poster is also quite significant. She is seen to be enjoying life among these non-human beings. May be the society denies her the recognition of a respectful human being which she finds among them. All of these characters makes an effort to save the small girl from the kidnapper. The child with all her innocence mingles with them. We cannot miss the innocence of Blake's ideology here. A child trusts the human existence of the non-humans, and eventually becomes unaware of the fact that they are unreal or unnatural. The play ends at the break of dawn, with a writing on the poster which is held by the woman, that a small girl had been found and they were in search of her father. A positive ending, definitely, with a hope that the child would return to her parents.

Bobby's Story (Bobbychi Goshta)

Indeed the play narrates an intriguing and highly contemporary story. It is a first person narrative that captures a child's thoughts and feelings in this contemporary world. Except for the apparent setting and characterization, the play in no way can be called a children's play. It explores different socio- political issues, like, gender roles and stereotypes, the present education system, corruption at different levels of public sectors, challenges that working women face, and of course the plight of isolation and

identity crisis that every modern man suffers from. Like the formerly discussed one, this play too has an extensive characterization, ranging from an urban middle class family to the historical characters of Birbal, Akbar, Shivaji; it includes the immensely popular Walt Disney character Mickey Mouse, and assimilates the spatial entities of the moon and stars with imaginative characters of demons; a horse, and a circus artiste are also present among the above mentioned ones. To assume that this heterogeneous, huge crowd would create utter confusion, would certainly be a misconception. Tendulkar carefully assigns each character its share of role, and all the characters together render the play its magnificence. The plot is about a little girl Bobby, who narrates her own story. She suffers from loneliness as both her parents work and she has to stay at home alone for quite some time. She has no siblings, no companion and eventually ends up imagining the presence of the historical, fictitious, and spatial characters in her life with whom she interacts. The beginning of the play also captures the severe identity crisis she suffers from:

> *Bobby: I am Bobby. Actually I'm Baby, but my parents wanted a baba, so I became Bobby. Now everyone calls me Bobby. I have boy's clothes and boy's games. My Papa says that even my haircut should be short——in a boy-cut. Ma says no. She says I look nice with long hair. I have no brothers or sisters, so Ma and Papa get me everything that I want. But what's the use! Ma and Papa are so busy, I hardly ever see them. I dress up in boys' clothes, so the girls say, go play with the boys, but boys don't let me play with them. When I come home from school, Papa's not there, and even Ma's not there. I get the keys from the neighbours, open the door and play on my own.* (Ibid, 25)

These lines that the play opens with at once set the mood for the entire play, and leave the spectators alert, anticipating what might occur eventually. What occurs eventually is that, the different characters appear on stage, in their traditional attire, interacting with Bobby. They amuse, educate and entertain. Bobby role-plays a teacher teaching Birbal, Akbar, and Shivaji, through which Tendulkar critiques the hollowness of the education system. As

they disappear, Mickey Mouse appears on the stage. He interacts with Bobby and in course of the conversation emerges the playwright's comment on corruption that hugely impacts common man's life. Mickey is found commenting on the ration system:

> *Mickey: Nowadays the rice you get through the ration is so lousy that however much I eat, it just doesn't do my health any good…….. The ration is of such poor quality that we get really unhealthy mice these days.* (Ibid, 30)

The pseudo-hilarious statement is bound to draw our attention towards the corrupted socio-economic scenario of our country, and that is precisely what Tendulkar aimed at achieving in the play. As the play makes progress, the character of the moon appears, along with others in Bobby's dream, and they talk of equality, pointing at the massive discrimination regarding the accumulation of wealth. The moon says:

> *Moon: …Gather all the money and give it to me. Every night, when everyone is asleep, I'll distribute the money equally, just as I distribute my light.* (Ibid, 36)

The young spectators might just be amused with the archetypical presence of the moon as 'Chandamama', since the depth of this message is beyond their perception. But we cannot fail to notice the interweaving of social criticism and fantasy that Tendulkar adroitly carries through the play. In spite of the presence of such amusing characters, Bobby is left wretched craving for her mother, and the audience/ readers are supposed to be left helpless in not being able to decide whether a mother should work, or a child should suffer miserably. But Tendulkar doesn't disappoint the target audience. *Bobby* ends with a hopeful situation when her parents return home and there is a promise of her being immensely pampered by them.

The Play of the Nosey Parker (Chambhar Chaukashiche Natak)

The idea central to this play is a popularly explored one. It is about the invention of shoes, and many regional cultures across the country must have had the story doing rounds since ages. In

Bangla, Rabindranath Tagore has written a poem named "*Juta Abishkar*", in which the Poet Laureate has explored the similar theme of a stupid king and his band of stupid subjects who did not know how to protect their feet from the heat and dust, until, a shoemaker suggested that a piece of leather can cover the King's feet without creating any hassle anywhere in the kingdom. Thus shoe was invented. Tendulkar, in this play exploits the same theme, adding to it his own socio-political perspectives. The King and Queen are present along with The Prime Minister, Prince, Doctor, and Army Chief and with few other characters in the kingdom which is known as "Andhernagari". No one can miss the significance of the metaphor that the name suggests, "Andhernagari" clearly refers to the dark lanes of power and glory. Tendulkar draws a picture of a kingdom which is in utter anarchy. The King is a despotic, dictator blind with power and pride, so far so that he not only aims at curbing basic human rights, but also attempts to tame nature. We find him referring to the sun saying:

> *King: But this new moon—no, sun— ever since it has come, our Andhernagari has become very bright! I mean our land of darkness has become land of brightness….. There's light everywhere!... Nothing unscrupulous is possible at all…* (Ibid, 47)

The King is nonchalant and at the same time shameless in his approach towards the kingdom. A further reading of the play shows that absolute anarchy prevails in the kingdom, and the common man is reduced to the status of a non-entity. They do not exist anywhere in the consciousness of the King. He has to do whatever he feels like doing, and orchestrates the state machinery to follow his whims and wishes without even raising a question for once. The one man who stands out is Shidba, the cobbler. He visits "Andhernagari" from a different place and calls the King a dumb, who wants to cover the sun to save himself from heat. Further lawlessness is depicted through Shidba's encounter with the soldiers. They catch him suspecting to be a spy, and announce him his execution:

> *First Soldier: In this Andhernagari of ours, the rule is that if a spy is*

caught, then with no enquiry or hearing, he is to be blasted by a canon. That's the Army Chief's order.

Second Soldier: So let's do that to this spy…….

Shidba: But what have I done?

Second Soldier: …..Such questions are not asked in our kingdom. Here it's first punishment then enquiry. (Ibid, 57)

These lines are certainly not in keeping with a children's play, and this makes it even clearer that Tendulkar did not write the plays for mere juvenile entertainment. Rather he wanted the minds of the children and adults alike to be stirred and shaken at the thought of such terrorizing anarchy that might let loose on a state and its people, and its eventual ramification. But as it happens with all the plays, he keeps the play in bearing with the genre. The play concludes with the invention of shoes, and poetic justice is attained through Shidba being announced the Prime Minister. And the delight becomes abundant with Shidba's instruction to the Army Chief:

Shidba: Army Chief, from today anyone who pokes his nose into other people's affairs will be given the title of 'Nosey Parker' and everyone will bow to him. I was made Prime Minister because I poked my nose and asked pointless questions. (Ibid, 63)

The conclusion promises freedom of speech and right to information, the basic human rights that the citizens of a state are often denied.

The King and Queen Want Sweat (Raja Ranila Gham Hava)

The title of the play is quite weird, since it says that the King and the Queen, of all things, want sweat. In this play, Tendulkar exploits sarcasm at its best. Dr. Joshi states in the translator's note of the book that, *The King and Queen Want Sweat* is believed to have been the predecessor of the Tendulkar classic *Ghasiram Kotwal.* The play engages certain traits of folk theatre, it is written in a specific rhythm, most off the dialogues are composed in verse, and the characters of Royal Attendants perform the role of the

Chorus. The play opens with a Ring Leader narrating a tale which introduces the King and the Queen. The skillfully penned dialogues are loaded with duality of meaning, which again is a deliberate exercise on the part of the playwright. The Ring Leader introduces the King and the Queen:

Ring Leader: He is the king and she is the queen.

The king and queen of this kingdom

They've sacksful of money in their home

They have milk and honey every day

They sing and dance their days away

For them, every day's a holiday! (Ibid, 68)

The picture of the life of the King and Queen painted depicts wealth, fortune and happiness in galore. But human beings are never content with what they have. The King and Queen, in spite of being immersed in unending luxury, yearn for sweat, which comes only from toil. Thus, the socially conscious and concerned Tendulkar establishes the fact that, at the end of the day, fortune cannot buy happiness. The common man's life too is worth living. The Ring Leader further comments:

Ring Leader: In this kingdom no one toils, no, no, no one toils.

Fields are drying, animals dying.

The houses are bare the doors are blocked

Industries, shops, buildings are locked.

Nothing works, no, nothing works. (Ibid, 84)

Stark poverty, unemployment, lack of enterprise, lack of good governance, and most important of all, lack of basic human necessities, the above mentioned lines sum up to hint at all of these. Farmers are in distress, workers agitated. Tendulkar brings in the issue of trade union through the characterization of the worker:

Worker: Strike… Strike… We don't live, we strike. We are Murdabad! Zindabad! Strikers! On our blood and sweat the rich build

their homes. (Ibid, 81)

The greatest irony lies in the fact that, it is this 'sweat' that the King and Queen crave for. And the King finally realizes that, to work is the key that opens the door to happiness. We discover a transformed King at the end of the play, who admits his worthlessness, and subsequently decides to hang himself. It is the farmer who saves the King by saying that he can bring glory to the kingdom by working and toiling, and not by hanging himself, which would be a sheer act of escapism. A highly democratic atmosphere concludes the play with the emergence of the King as a true leader.

The Wedding of the Village Headman's Daughter (PatlachyaPorichaLageen)

This is the last translated play of the book. Dhondu, a drummer is the protagonist of the play. The play opens with Dhondu preparing himself for playing his drum at the village headman's daughter's wedding. But he is soon disappointed, as Sambhya, the headman's servant informs him that his kettle-drum is quite outdated, and a band from the city has been commissioned to play at the wedding procession. The glaring show of the band overshadows Dhondu's age old kettle-drum. This play too has multiple dimensions. It hints at the scenario of new technological advancements taking over the traditional cultural entities. It also portrays the love and care musician nurtures for his musical instrument. Dhondu is utterly disappointed when Sambhya comments:

> *Sambhya: Your drum against the band is like a flute against the trumpets! Or like a firefly against the sun. Play it, don't play it, it's all the same."* (Ibid, 101)

When Dhondu almost accepts his defeat, and gives up, the character of cripple Bajya encourages him:

> *Bajya: Dh- dh- dhonodoba P-pant…. D-d-drummer ….You g-g-g-go. For the p-procession. P-p-p-play it———— your d-drum. It's your right, d-d-d-don't give it…uh…up!* (Ibid, 105)

Bajya is a cripple, he stammers, still he has the clarity of thought, the sympathizing mind to cheer Dhondu up. Tendulkar's

characterization of Bajya makes him so loving to us! He plays the vital role of scaring the band away. As it is, the performers of the band were not comfortable with the atmosphere of the village, on top of that Bajya had scared them, finally clearing the path for Dhondu to play the kettle-drum. Nahrya, the jester establishes the fact towards the conclusion of the play, that:

Nahrya: Truly!

Don't want trumpets

Don't want flutes

Our own kettledrum is the best in theland. (Ibid, 119)

The play ends with the drum's sound being heard loud and clear, and the smiling face of Bajya which is bound to be immensely assuring to the audience, that ultimately humanity wins.

The five plays examined above unfolds a much shadowed chapter of Vijay Tendulkar's literary career. We find him equally at ease in writing for children, but at the same time, we cannot fail to notice his loyalty towards his creative impulse. He does not shift from his agenda to comment on different social, political, economic, and even emotional aspects that our life is attached to. In the guise of children's plays, he attains his purpose of creating awareness among the mass, and compels us to keep thinking on the issues he raises in his plays.

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7

TAPPING THE ANXIETY OF THE WORLD OF HIV POSITIVES AS A SUBSUMED TERRITORY: A FEMINIST STUDY OF MAHESH DATTANI'S *EK ALAG MAUSAM*

Dr. Shachi Sood

The present chapter**,** "Tapping the Anxiety of the World of HIV Positives as a Subsumed Territory: A Feminist Study of Mahesh Dattani's "*Ek Alag Mausam*" attempts to highlight Dattani's concern for female body which has always been "more body than soul, more soul than mind" and is the "*Sexual Object sought by all men" and her "value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others*" (Greer 63-67). The playwright's revelation of the exploration for an enlightened self other than the one imposed upon women by the society and culture initiates when women start defying the societal stereotypes.

In the play discussed in this chapter, Dattani as a staunch votary of liberated female self portrays the dilemma of female body which is subjugated at various stages and due to diverse reasons. The female protagonist Aparna in *Ek Alag Mausam* questions the

accepted norms and acquires a defiant attitude towards them; we see the development of a feminine sensibility, as against the feminine consciousness that has prevailed earlier. The portrayal of Aparna in *Ek Alag Mausam* exhibits the double marginalization of women in the distressing world of the HIV positives of the Indian society which too is men's world. Rita represents the darker side of HIV positive prostitutes who are used, abused and reduced. Through the character of Rita, Dattani highlights the unlicensed sex business that is managed by men, in which women are reduced to functional thing and an object of appetite for men.

The play under analysis took the Indian English drama to new heights as it deals with the agony and suffering of HIV positives in Indian society. The play revolves around the love story of two HIV positives Aparna and George, and depicts the personal and social tussle in the life of Aparna. The play covers the rendering narrative of two women who received the HIV virus from their male partner and lived a life of misery and isolation. Dattani accentuates the plight of women like Aparna who responds meekly under the shadow of various customs, myths, conventions and superstitions of the society. Beena Aggarwal has aptly commented in this context:

> *Ek Alag Mausam is a play with a message, it is not a question of the love of the two people but it is a question of love with life. Dattani takes the place that the misfortune of being marginalized as being HIV positive, cannot crush the urge of life.* (Mahesh Dattani 140)

Dattani limned the incidents from the past and present lives of Aparna and George, and relates them with the basic urge of human beings to live, cherish and feel a sense of belongingness. At the beginning of the play, Aparna expresses her wish to send Paro to the Panchgini boarding school because Paro's mother died of HIV infection. Paro enjoyed the company of Aparna and was very fond of her but Paro's heart sinked when she heard Aparna's decision to send her away. Paro inquires, "Why? Why are you sending me away?" (CP II 473). This remark of Paro moved Arpana's heart and she dwells back into the past from the flux of

her conscience. She recalls the phone call of hospital nurse, Rosalynd Cooper and then the fear of past appears one after the other before her eyes.

Aparna is expecting a baby and she requests her husband, Suresh to accompany her to hospital as she is scared. She asks him, *"It's something about our baby. I am scared Suresh. I want you with me*" (CP II 476). She is greatly hurt as her husband shows no interest to accompany her and she alone went to the hospital. Cooper suggests her to abandon her baby at the hospital, to this Aparna agitatedly retorts, "*Why? What's wrong with my baby?*" (CP II 478). Aparna wishes her child to survive and expressed her apprehension, "*Am I going to lose my baby?*" (CP II 478). She was shattered to hear the dark reality of her life that she is HIV positive and she exclaims "*It's not possible, how I could be HIV positive?*" (CP II 478).

When the doctor informed Aparna that she received infection from her husband, she was shocked to know about the shallowness of her marital life. Here, Dattani throws light on the gloomy side of the institution of marriage where men control the life of women inside and outside the marriage. Simone de Beauvoir's words, "*The woman's body is an object to be purchased; for her it represents capital she has the right to exploit*" (456) further establishes the fact.

Aparna's husband cheated on her and she entered the world of repugnance and sorrow knowing about the loss of her unborn child. She wanted to share this pain with her mother, she called her but the misery engulfs her and she could not speak even a single word. It reflects the mental torture, suffering and helplessness of the HIV victim. Dattani has presented the subordinated position of wife through the words of Aparna when she investigated him how he has got the disease:

Aparna: All those business trips! Those late nights. How many women have you infected so far?

Suresh: I don't know!

Aparna: You are too drunk to know.

Suresh: What are you going to do now? (CP *II* 482)

Aparna's life has been ruined by her husband, she miserably blamed him and she needs his help. Legalization of power relations between the sexes is the meaning of marriage and it ensures husband the power over his wife. Greer in *The Female Eunuch* while commenting on the acquiescent position of women in marriage writes:

> *The housewife is an unpaid worker in her husband's house in return for the security of being a permanent employee hers is the reduction ad absurdum of the case of the employee: who accepts a lower wage in return for permanence of his employment.* (272)

In spite of offering her company, Suresh further puts her in dilemma by his interrogatory words, "*What are you going to do now?*" (CP II 482). Aparna waned to save her baby and implores for the help of Suresh but her sense of illusionary companionship was shaken when Suresh confessed, "*How can I help you? I am dying too*" (CP II 482). Suresh decided to quit the city and Aparna made vague attempts to stop him, "*Suresh, stay for a while!*"(CP II 482).

Aparna feels a sense of isolation in her miserable condition, She feels insecure towards her gloomy fate. Suresh deserts her, Aparna loses her child and the social stigma attached to the disease made her life miserable and unbearable. Aparna takes shelter at Jeevan Jyoti Hospital and feels affection towards her new home. Beena Aggarwal observed:

> *It was a new dawn in her life with message of the shadows of death, can't be overpowered, can at least be lingered with the positive thrust of life. If HIV is the preface to death and social shame, Jeevan Jyoti is certainly the light of life.* (Mahesh Dattani 143-144)

Aparna observes the group therapy session at hospital where Dr. Machado addresses the inmates and inspires them to live joyfuly.

> *Dr. Machado. (moving around) Aren't we all dying? Isn't everyone in this world dying? (Pausing for effect) I am not HIV positive. But I am also dying. But do I think about my death all the bloody time...* (CP II 486)

Dr. Machado tries his best to rejuvenate their spirit of life and

to eliminate their fear of losing life. His energetic lessons greatly inspire the life of victims. Aparna is touched by Dr. Machado's slogan "*Keep fighting. Seize the moment*" (CP II 487). He tries to spread positivity into the mental space of the HIV infected persons because the social stigma, seclusion and shunning are more traumatic than the horror of death.

On one side Dattani highlights the many myths associated with the disease and on the other hand, he represents the enthusiasm of woman to fight for liberation of self. There is an episode in the play which throws light on the marginalized treatment of HIV infected person even by a medical professional. A dentist refuses to examine the HIV patient named Manoj. However, Aparna struggles on two levels, one as a HIV positive and other as a woman. Aparna is a strong woman and serves selflessly to the patients at the hospital.

The play *Ek Alag Mausam* is different in many aspects as it focuses on the true essence of life i.e joy and love. When Aparna expressed her annoyance that she should have been apprised about Suraj's expired parents. George utters in a graceful manner, "*Death is not news over here. Life is*" (CP II 504). It is the heartened respect for life that Ramnath played cards on his death bed. Dattani under the spell of myths and blind judgments, people are forced to spend a life of seclusion and this results in marginalization of the powerless section of the society.

Dattani outlined through the lake washing scene, how female sexuality is viewed with disrespect. Aparna suppressed her feelings on watching the wet body of George. In patriarchal discourse, the female sexuality is a locus of anxiety and it is culturally endorsed that male should control the female body. Male sexuality is celebrated and female sexuality is encompassed as subordinate meant for reproduction only. N. P. Kumar in his book, *Writing the Female* has aptly commented about the patriarchal endorsement of man's sexual urges, "*Though woman is defined by her sexuality, she is restrained from enjoying her sexuality*" (41).

In the episode of "wooden soldier", Aparna and George

hugged each other and George expressed his desire to look beyond the common belief. George expresses her love to Aparna but she rejects his proposal on the grounds that she is HIV positive and George is aware about the fact. George counters her question and asks her, "*Because you are HIV positive?*" (CP II 519). Aparna feels a sense of shock when she came to know that George is also HIV positive. She rushes towards the car and moves away leaving behind George shouting, "*What is wrong in it? Tell me what's so wrong?*" (CP II 520). George believes that one should not flee from the actuality of life.

In this play, Dattani traces the difference between the condition of a HIV positive wife and a HIV positive prostitute. A character named Rita is representative of gloomy fate of HIV positive prostitutes who are used, abused and refused. Kate Millet in *The Prostitution Papers* calls prostitutes 'political prisoners' of a patriarchal society. In short, the core of prostitution is sexual politics (119). Through the character named Rita, Dattani peeps into the unlicensed sex business which turns women to the status of an object and this business is exercised by men for their sexual appetite. Rita got the virus of HIV through this illegal business as she works as a sex worker at a bordello. She was forced to leave the cathouse along with her daughter as she was losing clients due to HIV infection.

Dattani shows his concern towards the misery and agony of the marginalized section of the society and he tries to portray their sufferings in his plays. George promised Rita that she would live under care and affection at Jeevan Jyoti hospital without paying anything in return. Rita moves inside the hospital along with her daughter, she is so relaxed that she feels joyful to have a virus and pathetically speaks, "*Oh! Thank God I have Aids*" (CP II 528). Rita is a sex worker but as a mother she is concerned about her little daughter. One day, she requests Aparna to allow her daughter to stay with her just for one night, "*Let her stay with me just for one night please*" (CP II 529). Although, Rita and Aparna belong to different social background but they share a common bond of motherhood.

Beena Aggarwal observed:

> *Aparna and Rita are from two distinctive social status, but both of them possess equal quest for motherhood. It signifies that human sentiments, human sympathy and human sensibility is associated with the universal human experiences, irrespective of externally imposed restrictions*. (Mahesh Dattani 147)

Dattani wished to work for the upliftment of the marginalized and deprived and this mission is visible in his play under analyses *Ek Alag Mausam*. Dattani wanted to work for the cause of the deprived who have been disowned from the love and justice. He artistically draws attention towards the ignorance faced by HIV infected persons and our lack of understanding about this dreadful disease called AIDS. Aparna's love towards Paro, George's affection for the kids and his love for Aparna, and Dr. Machado's determination and affection are the means to fill the empty spaces in their lives. The occurrence of AIDS ended all their relationships for good. Aparna lives away from her husband and she has to let go the unborn child.

Dattani is aware about the subordinate position assigned to women which tends to make them silenced under the male supremacist society. Defying the discouraging attitude of the society, the women in the play emerged as the victors and acted independently under the shadow of patriarchy. These characters verify that women can encounter any difficulty and can also diminish the effect of patriarchy by inculcating the attributes like self-discovery and self-formation. A. Dworkin in his book *Pornography* comments on the male's control of women's body as a means of dividing and controlling women:

> *Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women's lives and all struggle is for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's body*. (205)

Women characters defined by Dattani have realized that the way to emancipation lies in making your own choices; whether intellectual or sexual. Women should write their own scripts and

resist the subsumed position assigned to them by so called pillars of patriarchy.

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8

THE USE OF MYTHS FOR THE DEPICTION OF HUMAN DILEMMA; LIFE BETWEEN REALITY AND ILLUSIONS, IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *NAGA MANDALA*

Dr. Irum Alvi

Humans are trapped between reality and illusions, the plays give a glimpse of the man's reality. They show man, who dwells in the subjective world of ideas and concepts, but physically exists in the world of objective reality that he cannot directly experienced or fully understood. The plays also reveal the use of reason and logic to portray truth, but they rely on language that is insufficient for describing reality and often leads to paradoxes. Girish Karnad, a renowned Indian English playwright, reveals the human mind as it struggles between reality illusion and reality, wherein practical terms the mind only generates a range of concepts that bear evidence to its limitations. The paper focuses on the human dilemma as it analyses reality and illusions in the Girish Karnad's play, since identifying the boundaries regarding applicability is essential. His plays hold a mirror to human life, the subject matter resonating between illusion and present day reality. In an interview with Mid-

Day, Karnad says: "*Contemporary plays don't necessarily require a contemporary subject.*" Girish Karnad's *Naga Mandala (play with a Cobra)* incorporates a mythical structure to reveal the human dilemma, disconnect between reality and the illusions.

The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought mentions one of the meanings of the word "myth" is "*a 'sacred' narrative, from which legends and fairy tales are not always clearly distinguishable*" (407).*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines a myth as "*a narrative or a group of narratives which recount the activities of a culture's gods and heroes. These narratives are the product of communal and (often) sacred impulses to sanction and reflect the cultural order existing at the time of their creation*" (806).The Greek regarded myths as "*allegorical and symbolic means of conveying truths about nature and the world, as well as human ethics*" (807). Goethe and Herder maintain myth is "*a self-sustaining structure of the human spirit which is a necessary and essential mode of belief and of conceiving reality*" (807).however, the paper asserts Karnad uses myth for all these and also for depicting the human dilemma, life between reality and illusion.

The play is based on two stories which Karnad heard from A.K. Ramanujan in his childhood (Karnad 1997). It employs the device of a story within a story. Karnad's focus seems a detached depiction of myths as essential part to the play, as well as illustrating the protagonist, a woman, in the quest for reality. The play highlights the dichotomy in reality and illusion making use of fragments of myths. Tuta Aswar Rao in "*Mythical Elements in Indian Plays: A Study of Naga Mandala of Girish Karnad*" states:

"*Karnad does not take the myths in their entirety, he takes only fragments that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination to make his plots interesting. His interest was not in recreating old myths and legends but in representing them to suit his artistic purpose.*"

Girish Karnad pointed out in an interview, "*while I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back I am amazed how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at the moment…*" (1997-3). He further adds that the myth "*enabled me to articulate to myself as a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at*

rationality..." (1997-3).In an interview with Indian Express, Karnad states: "*Writing a play is like having a child. You want them to be obedient, but that does not always happen. Instead there are many surprises.*" Karnad in this play portrays many surprises, but most significant as the paper asserts is the reality and illusions of a married woman, Rani.

The play starts with a paradox that indicates the difficulty in discerning reality from illusion. The opening lines of the prologue tell "*the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified*". The temple is ruined and there is an implied suggestion that reality and illusions exist. The urge is to familiarize, redesign or regenerate something new from the ruins. The temple seems the 'Mandala' wherein the play is to take place. The opening lines of Act One reveal the protagonist of the play: "*A young girl. Her name…it does not matter. But she was an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani". Karnad's aim seems to be the depiction of reality and truth, as he states: "I can't concoct plots. And I'm not interested. To be trite, truth is stranger than fiction. History, myth and legend interest and excite me, and I like to share that excitement with others.*"

Rani's goes to her husband, Appanna's house, after marriage. Appanna, literally meaning 'any man' treats, her as a servant. Their marriage is not consummated because he is involved with a "concubine", in whose company he spends his nights, a "bazar woman" as a substitutefor his wife. He says, *"…I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go*".He visits home to gratify his elementary needs like bathing and eating. Rani sacrifices her life and serves himloyally like a "good" wife. Every night he deserts Rani, making her feel isolated and lost. Appanna locks her up every night; illusionsprovide her solace from the stark reality of her life.

Manchi Sarat Babu maintains "*This solitary confinement of Rani by Appanna in the house symbolizes the chastity belt of the Middle Ages, the reduction of women's talents to housework and the exclusion of women from enlightenment and enjoyment.*" (Babu 239)

Apanna locks her up in the house and brings home a watchdog and a mongoose. She feels frightened; Appanna threatens her, "*What*

is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you…" (7). She dreams of an Eagle and asks him: "*Where are you taking me?"* Eagle replies: "*Beyond the seven seas and seven isles. On the seventh island is a magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you*". Rani wants reassurance: "*Do they? Then please, please take me to them—immediately. Here I come*". So the Eagle carries her clear across the seven seas… "*Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you*" (7). Her dreams and illusions are indicative of her longings for freedom and flight from the tyranny of her married life and mundane reality. Rani seeks refuge in illusions of her parents' embrace her and cries. They kiss her and caress her. At night she slept between them, "*Oh, Mother*". (7)

In the morning, the stag with the golden antlers comes to the door. He calls out to Rani. She refuses to go.' *I am not a stag*,' he explains, '*I am a prince'* slowly the lines between reality and illusion seem to diminish, the illusions serve as an escape mechanism for Rani. But these illusions soon disappear as she is forced to confront the harsh realities, the moment she wakes up and finds herself locked in Apanna's house.

The play progresses further with Kurudavva and her son Kappana's appearances. Rani needs to share her agony. Rani tells Kurudavva, *"… you are the first person I have seen since coming here. I'm bored to death. There is no one to talk to!"* (11).

The blind Kurudavva silently observes and she informs Rani about her beauty. "*Ayyo! How beautiful you are. Ears like hibiscus. Skin like young mango leaves. Lips like rolls of silk. How can that Appanna gallivant around leaving such loveliness wasting away at home.*" (11)

She unveils the affair of her husband with a whore and she provides her with a magical root to cast a magic charm on her husband that would open his eyes and that he won't go sniffing after that bitch. He would make her a wife instantly. The enchanting root is an illusion Rani wants to believe may become a reality. Later on, while cooking the root she observes it "boils over, red as

blood". She hesitates to serve her husband the curry she has cooked instead she "puts it in that ant-hill".

A cobra, which happened to live in that ant-hill, gobbles the curry. Subsequently, the incredible root that was meant for Appanna, casts a magic charm on the cobra. Then, Naga takes on Appanna's form and approaches Rani at night. He compliments her, calls her a 'tender bud', and tries to come closer. He praises her long hair and talks a lot about her parents, besides listening to her attentively. Naga gradually breaks her frigidity and hesitancy, and dispels feelings of fear and insecurity with the help of "*honeyed words*" (25). Rani also falls in love with Naga, another illusion in the guise of Appanna. One is reminded how historically snakes represent fertility or a creative life force. As snakes shed their skin through sloughing, they are symbols of rebirth, transformation, immortality, and healing.

Rani is confused and she constantly questions herself about the whether it's an illusion or reality. She fails to understand how her ruthless husband who comes to her only midday for lunch transforms into a lover at night. The meeting continues though she remains unresolved and believes it is a dream/ illusion, but "*they make love*" and she persuades herself into believing it is reality and she is "not fantasizing" about these nighttime meetings.

J. L. Shastri in Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology states that "*Myth, at all events, is a raw material, which can be the stuff for literature"* (229).As seen, Karnad also uses not only Indian myths but also the Abrahamic traditions, in which a snake represents sexual desire.

Rani observes, "*you talk so nicely at night. But during the day I have to open my mouth and you hiss like a snake…. stupid snake*". (22) One is reminded how the snakes are supposed to be both good and evil.

The playwright gives a lucid depiction of the difference between illusions and reality as she says: "*Yes, I shall. Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you. Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you. No, I won't ask questions. I shall do what you tell me. Scowls in the day.Embraces at night. The face in*

the morning unrelated to the touch at night. But day or night, one motto does not change: Don't ask questions. Do as I tell you." (32)

When Rani announces, "*I am pregnant" her husband, Appanna becomes angry: "Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off*" (33). He adds "*I swear to you I am not my father's son, if I don't abort that bastard! Smash it into dust!"* (33). He labels her as a "*harlot*", and a "*slut*". He doubts her chastity due to '*the bloated tummy*'.

At night, Naga apprises Rani of the Elders' judgment to her utter horror. Rani is confused: Why are you humiliating me like this? Why are you striping me naked in front of the whole village? [...] Look at the way you talk — as if you were referring to someone else [...] After you complained to the Elders about me. Now you can go and withdraw the complaint. Say my wife isn't a whore.

Naga can't give her any respite but only informs her that '*it can't be done'*. He advises her to '*undertake the snake ordeal'*. She shivers and shudders, scared. She says: "*won't the Cobra bite the moment I touched it? I will die like your dog and your mongoose.*" Naga reassures her that the cobra will not bite her unless she tells a lie. (34) When Rani refuses to do as Naga asks, he gets angry and says: "*I can't help it, Rani. That's how it has always been. That's how it will always be*".

The next day, a huge mob assembles in front of Rani's house. The Elders are of the opinion that Rani should take an oath by holding red-hot iron in her hand to affirm her chastity. The Elders symbolize old customs and traditions in the play. The play narrates a woman's dilemma, caught between reality and illusion using myth to depict the reality of contemporary life, Rani, becomes analogous to Sita in the Ramayana, who has to undergo a trial by fire (*Agni Pariksha*). Sita enters a burning pyre declaring that if she has been faithful to Rama let the fire not harm her; she comes out unharmed with Agni as proof of her purity. Rama accepts her and makes her his queen. In the play, Rani has to prove her purity; as such the playwright makes use of an ancient myth, however "*it is her very infidelity that comes to her aid in proving that she is a faithful wife.*"

(Dharwadker 444)

Appanna proposes to the Elders to throw Rani and her illegitimate child into boiling oil. Rani remembers Naga's advice and decides to undergo the snake test to save her honor and reputation. Rani displays supernatural power, invincible courage and firm resolution, turning down the suggestion of the Elders; instead she goes to the ant-hill, puts her hand in it and takes the Cobra out into the open. The Elders advise her to 'be quick' and take her oath. She swears: "*Since coming to this village. I have held by this hand, only two….My husband….And this Cobra*" (38). The Cobra does not bite her and it "*slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like on umbrella over her head". It turn acquiescent and "moves over her shoulder like a garland*".

The Elders believe it is something supernatural. One of the Elders calls it"*A Miracle! A Miracle! She is not a woman! She is a Divine Being!*" (39). Rani becomes a Devi "to hold the universe in her womb: she lights thee lamp of wisdom". The play reveals man's inability to uncover the unknowable, and the need to cope with the forces of nature and human mortality, combined with the wish for the discovery of cause and effect relationships in the world, a compelling case for the concept of divinity, as one of the Elders tells her husband: "*Appanna your wife is not an ordinary human. She is goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged wrongly and treated her badly. That is how goddesses reveal themselves to the world*" (40).

Appanna repents and apologizes to his wife and pleads for pardon from her "*Forgive me. I am a sinner. I was blind…*" (40). She pardons him and "*takes him in her arms*." Appanna's whore watches the spectacle; she "*feels ashamed of her sinful life and volunteered to do menial work in Rani's house*". Later, Rani gives birth to a fine-looking baby boy.

Rani's mindset is revealed at various levels. She finds conjugal bliss, she maintains control of her wishes and desires, and she embraces motherhood. She also becomes an unearthly being in the eyes of others.

One day Naga remembers Rani and desires to see his "*queen*". He visits her in the unchanged old style, but he sees her sleeping with her husband and son, he feels pangs of jealousy. He resolves to kill her but finds "*love has stitched up 'his lip*"", instead he chooses to live in her hair and "*becomes their size now. Enter her tresses! Make love to them*". Rani feels heaviness in her hair and tells her husband to comb them. Suddenly, a Cobra falls down, frightening them out of their lives. Appanna recognizes Rani's goddess-like merits and says: "*Your long hair saved us*" (44) from the deadly Cobra.

Rani utters a strange desire that the cobra has to be ceremonially cremated, the fire lit by their son, every year on this day, their son perform an annual "*pinda-daan*" in the memory of dead snake. Appanna approves: "*Any wish of your will be carried out*" (44). In the alternate end to the play, Naga, who finds Rani merrily sleeping in the arms of her husband, strangles himself in her hair. One of the flames demands a happier ending.

As Prasad states: "In the play, all the songs are sung by the flames. The flames are the metaphors of the women of the village who have gathered at the time of the night to tell tales and sing songs."

In the alternate ending, Naga does not commit suicide. When a snake falls out of Rani's hair and lies writhing on the floor, Apanna wants to kill it but Rani hides it in her dark and dense tresses: "*The hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, forever.*" (45) Rani accepts Naga as her lover and invites him to stay into her hair. She says, "*Get in (to my hair). Are you safely in there? Good. Now stay there. And lie still. You don't know how heavy you are. Let me get used to you, will you?*"(45).

The play repeatedly portrays the reality and illusions around freedom and free will. The question is whether one is free to make choices independent of external factors or whether one's choices and actions are causally determined by preceding events and conditions. It deals with free will, whether it is an illusion or a reality, which implies whether one is not responsible or not for one's actions. The play emphasizes the inability to identify the limits

and boundaries of freedom and free and the illusory perceptions are boundless.

The word Naga, a Sanskrit word for a deity/entity/ being/ taking also needs to be focused on. The Naga primarily represents rebirth, death and mortality, and symbolically means "rebirth", and is also associated with other gods, with Shiva and with Vishnu, representing freedom in Hindu mythology because it cannot be tamed. As such, Karnad makes use of fragments from various other myths to depict human dilemma, life between reality and illusion.

The title of the play Naga Mandala is exceedingly noteworthy in the sense that it replicates the importance of the character around which the play is intertwined with, the cobra, one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbols, which have been associated with some of the oldest rituals known to humankind and represent dual expression of good and evil, being worshiped as guardian of mysteries of birth and regeneration, according to Roderick and Davidson.

The dramatist thus throws a lurid light on life between reality and illusion. He tries to portray the impact they have on an individual. The ambiguous endings of the play lend it a post-modernist touch. One frame shows a feeling of loss as the snake sacrifices his life for Rani's bliss and the second frame shows a feeling of gain as the snake unites with Rani's tresses, suggesting a union. There is seen to be no definitive answer to the question of what reality is. In broadest terms, one perceives reality as all that exists, irrespective of whether or not it can be observed or understood. The play depicts apparent reality and ultimate reality, as well as physical reality and mental reality. Physical reality may extend in space, having physical properties, and exist independently of the observer, but as the play reveals mental reality has no expansion in space and exists only in the mind, with its existence depending on the observer. Ultimately, the Man, the cursed storyteller completes his story in the postulated time and gathered applause from the audience. Maya rightly observes:

Karnad links the past with the present, the archetype with the real. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy, reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an integral part of the cultural consciousness of the land, with their associative layers of meaning, their timelessness and relevance to contemporary issues. (Maya 68).

The playwright reveals what happens when boundaries and limits between reality and illusion are not properly defined. As concepts can't wholly construct the ultimate reality fit after the inaccessibility after entire the factors regarding emergent reality, or due in imitation of the inherent un-know-ability over all as stays after being observed rather than being understood, the playwright makes use of myths to reveal the human dilemma. In the play one easily recognizes the mysterious nature of reality, as the protagonists struggle to distinguish between illusions and reality. But it is not always clear whether they arrive at a deeper understanding of reality or just move from one illusion to another. Knowingly or unknowingly, the human tendency to distort reality to make it more endurable is clearly discernible. The play ends as the protagonists are steered towards illusions that are adaptable to their needs and desires. It is hard to tell where reality ends and illusions commence, as the change between them is unclear and incoherent.

The paper concludes that the fundamental problem seems the man's awareness and the resulting reluctance to see things as they are and to be seen without illusions. Disconnect from reality, is inevitable as man is caught between illusion and reality, which forms an important theme in the play *Naga Mandala*.

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9

A STUDY OF GENDER DYNAMICS IN SELECT PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

Dr. Prachi Priyanka

Mahesh Dattani is one of the most important playwrights who have helped in changing the face of the contemporary Indian theatre. Born on 7 August, 1958 in Bangalore where his parents had moved from Gujarat; he was the first Indian playwright writing in English to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, for his play *Final Solutions*. He wrote his first full length play in 1986 and since 1995, he has been working full time in theatre. He has to his credit about ten plays and four screen plays. Besides being a director and a playwright, he is also an actor, producer and the founder of a theatre group called Playpen. When Dattani was asked as what he thought made him a successful playwright, he answered: "*I have been successful for various reasons: I have my own theatre company (Playpen), and I have a theatre background. I'm not writing because I'm a writer (of literature), I'm writing because I have a theatre background.*" Dattani realized the importance of form in bringing to surface the social issues that he wanted to convey through his writings. "*I started doing theatre, not because I had something political to say and I used*

theatre as the platform – just the reverse. Since I've realized the potential of theatre as an agent, if not for social change, at least for reflection." (Mee, 19)

Dattani's plays probe deep into human heart and create characters true to life-situations. As an active theatre practitioner his aim is not at changing the society but to present us the grey realities of the urban families, the conflicts and dilemmas they face every day, contemporary social issues like gender discrimination, sexuality and communalism. According to R.N. Rai, "*He has the unique capacity to read the rumblings of contemporary urban Indian society and smell the perennial clash between tradition and modernity.*" (Rai, 20, 21)

According to Robert J Stoller, "*Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'Male' and 'Female', the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex.*" (Stoller, 9)

The gender role, which an individual plays, is governed by social and cultural constructs of the patriarchal society, where a man is expected to be active, dominating, adventurous, rational and creative and a woman is considered to be passive, timid, emotional and conventional. The Feminists challenge these culturally constructed roles and stereotyping and insist on developing a more unbiased power relationship between groups.

The status of women in India has been an ambivalent one. Indian customs and myths have been built on chunks of myths drawn from ancient books and oral narratives – they portray women as vulnerable and weak and at the same time dangerous and inferior. The Atharva Veda mentions that Mother Earth has many virtuous qualities and on her bosom rests the ocean and rivers and she is invoked to grant men prosperity. Goddess Saraswati is an all-pervading power in the Puranas. As Gayatri, she is invoked daily and becomes the mother of four Vedas. Uma, the wife of Shiva, is depicted in the Hindu myths as the ideal wife. However, mythology does not restrict itself to portraying women as being tender-hearted and passive; but also shows her in the roles where she becomes aggressive and takes on the aspect of evil to destroy the evil itself.

Goddess Kali, with a garland of skulls around her neck, becomes frightening, and Goddess Durga vanquished the buffalo demon, Mahisha. Som Benegal comments:

> *"Indian epics have always had the most profound effect on the lives, attitudes, ethos, morals and aspirations of the Indian people, because they were conceived as the repository for faith, instruction and inspiration. They are totally woven into the lives of the Indians."* (Benegal, 7)

The stories of women in the epics and sacred books are filled with the virtues of womanly chastity, sacrifice, love, devotion and sacrifice to God and man. She is forced at times to assume the role of perpetually giving and forgiving, willing to suffer for benefit of others. In Manu's code, the woman's right entirely depends on her husband and she is not considered equal to a man in her own right. As Simon De Beauvoir explains, woman has been mythicised to the subject of male dreams and idealization. She writes "*A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence*". (Beauvoir, 98) Thus the woman becomes associated with life, fragility, purity, beauty and goodness on one hand, and a temptress, corruption and sexual object of male's desire on the other. The preoccupation with 'fringe' issues form an integral element of Dattani's works – issues that need to be addressed, those that are hushed under the rug, those that are quietly pushed to the periphery or hushed under the rug. Dattani tries to sensitize his audience to such 'invisible' issues and make the mainstream society recognize the existence of such problems.

Another important characteristic of Dattani's plays is the way he portrays family ties. Extra-marital relationships form an important theme in many of his plays. Family is the epicenter in Dattani's plays. It is through the dynamics between family members that Dattani chooses to explore the gender dynamics in Indian society. The focus on family can be for two reasons: firstly, the family, being a nuclear part, integrates with other parts so as to constitute a whole, i.e. the society. Secondly, though not undermining the significance of joint family culture in encouraging stronger kinship, Dattani, nevertheless, calls attention to its bleaker

sides by exposing the patriarchal underpinnings within society and how it curbs the freedom of an individual to make decisions and live a life of his own choice.

In his first play *Where There's a Will*, Dattani has chronicled the follies and prejudices of the Indian society as reflected within the microcosm of the family unit, the most tangible and dynamic reality in middle class Indian live where traditional family values clash with unexpected twists in the tale that completely subvert the existing stereotypes. *Where There's a Will* examines familial relationships, focusing on exorcising patriarchy that continues to wreck bliss in family life. At the bottom of it all, it is psychological depravity that leads Hasmukh to exercise his supreme authority – belittling his son, wife and daughter-in-law. Finding no positive qualities in any of his relations, he searches for fulfillment and psychological bliss in extra-marital relationship. Finally he is crushed by his own machinations. Dattani's ideas consolidate to expose social evils that continue to fester in our social net-working. Ajit finally has been able to expose his father's follies by his timely revolt to escape from scars of the past.

Dattani deftly draws attention to issues seldom discussed, with humour and irony, calling for social introspection. Written in the backdrop of a Gujarati family, *Where There's a Will* is applicable to joint-family system prevalent in several parts of India. The patriarchal control is examined in two parts: in life and in death. In life Hasmukh haunted his family daily with his autocratic control. The bickering in the household escalates with the death of Hasmukh, when the ghost of the dead man, keeps his sway over with the execution of the will. In the final analysis, when all stand united, the sins of the forebears are rooted out when Hasmukh's ghost is driven out with the cutting of the tamarind tree. Kiran's assessment of extreme patriarchal control in Hasmukh as a substitute for his inadequacy as a man finally resolves the conflict among the characters and brings them together to derive benefit from the Hasmukh will.

According to Allan G. Johnson patriarchal social structures

are: *1) Male dominated–which doesn't mean that all men are powerful or all women are powerless–only that the most powerful roles in most sectors of society are held predominantly by men, and the least powerful roles are held predominantly by women 2) Organized around an obsession with control, with men elevated in the social structure because of their presumed ability to exert control whether rationally or through violence or the threat of violence. 3) Male identified: aspects of society and personal attributes that are highly valued are associated with men, while devalued attributes and social activities are associated with women. There is a sense of threat to the social structure of patriarchies when these gendered associations are destabilized–and the response in patriarchy is to increase the level of control, often by exerting control over women. 4) Male centered: It is taken for granted that the centre of attention is the natural place for men and boys, and that women should occupy the margins. Public attention is focused on men.* (Johnson, Allen).

Another play where Dattani uses the family home as the setting, is his play *Dance Like a Man*. In this play also, Dattani shows intricate family relationships in which the dancing couple Ratna and Jairaj learn and practice dance in their household despite Jairaj's father's protests. Amritlal is not able to come to terms with his son's interest in dance and compares it with prostitution. He says: The craft of prostitution is to show off her wares – what business a man has in learning such a craft? No use – similar with dance. (406)

Gender, like a text, is a performance, the playing out of roles that has to be repeated and validated within specific social and cultural contexts, but which is also open to contest and negotiations. Critics like Butler do not believe that there is (or can be) an essential woman or man because these are meanings that emerge in performances relative to each other. Hence, texts such as *Dance Like a Man* question the desperately strict adherence to gender roles in the conventional social framework which gives birth to a caustic relation between a father and a son and ruins an artist of his innocent passion for his art. The play opens with Jairaj and Ratna in their sixties, looking back to their days of struggle in retrospect, and in the 1950s when there was a social stigma attached to the Bharatnatyam; that is a dance form of the Devdasis. Amritlal,

father of Jairaj, is caught in the complex structures of fixed gender roles and is unable to appreciate the kind of freedom an artist seeks to follow his passion. He stigmatizes dance as a prostitutes' art, which to his son, is an art of divine dimensions. In an argument between the father and son,

Amritraj: Encourage open prostitution?

Jairaj: Send them back to their temples! Give them awards for preserving their art.

Amritlal: My son, you are the ignorant one. Most of them have given up their 'art' as you call it and have taken to selling their bodies. (416)

It is interesting to note how deeply embedded are the gender dynamics within the society, that though Amritlal is opposed to Jairaj's choice of dancing, he is in the favor of making a cricket pitch in his lawn. This is because '*most boys are interested in cricket*' - a pronouncement of his belief in fixed gender roles and that playing cricket rather than dancing would be an expression of masculinity. Through the play, Dattani thus, takes up issues regarding strict categorization of gender roles. Amritlal emerges as the father whose authority funds expression only in conditioning the son's desire with his own at the pretext of caring for him. The father here emerges not just as a single individual, but a symbolic father figure possessing the 'phallus', representing authority and the sole progenitor of meaning. Jairaj is the symbolic son who lives in the fear of castration, not for the desire of his mother but his art. He appears as a site on which the meaning is imposed upon, so as to continue bearing the already constructed. (Das, 17)

To make his son conform to the 'gender-defined boundaries', Amritlal tries to manipulate Ratna in doubting Jairaj's manliness.

Amritlal: Do you know where a man's happiness lies?

Ratna: No

Amritlal:In being a man (425-26)

Amritlal and Ratna destroy the passion and personality of Jairaj in different ways. Ratna destroys the 'man' in him, and Amritlal,

kills his art. Hence, far from growing into a man, Jairaj loses his self-esteem and wastes himself – "*I want you to give me back my self esteem!*" (443)

The play brings out the characters of Jairaj and Ratna as foil to each other. While Ratna has succeeded in the manly world, deftly managing both the appreciators and the critics, and has created a favorable atmosphere for their daughter Lata to shine in her career; Jairaj has failed miserably both as a man and in his career. He is now bitter and looks for opportunities to hit back at Ratna. He therefore, recedes back to existentialism of gender roles and points out Ratna's failure in emerging as a caring mother; for he feels that it is because of her negligence that their son Shankar died. This is in conformity of the gender defined roles where a mother is responsible in nurturing of the children. Angelie Multani reads Ratna and Lata as transgressive women – Ratna has married outside her community and Lata is preparing to do so. Neither of them has necessary female virtues of demureness, quietness, and obedience, both are ambitious and outspoken. The play therefore also seems to reveal on the reversal of gender roles under the garb of a fine domestic conflict.

Gender based discrimination brings disaster to humanity. This is also evident in Dattani's play *Tara* which is a study on the issue of marginalization of women. The play was first performed as Twinkle Tara at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru, on October 23, 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group. The play exposes how patriarchy is pervasive, multi-layered and deeply rooted in our social structure. Preference for a boy child can be due to various factors – economic, social or religious concerns. However, in the play, Dattani places Tara Patel in a family that is economically and politically sound. Despite that, the family shows preference for Chandan during surgery, which shows the complex nature of patriarchy in social system. The play opens with a scene set in London, where Chandan recalls the memories of his childhood with his sister, Tara. On the theme of Tara, theatre director Erin Mee points out:

Tara centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favor the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a feisty girl who isn't given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister's death by living without a personal history. (319).

Through the play, Dattani deconstructs the binaries of gender and challenges the notion of man being superior to woman. Dattani believes that masculinity and femininity are parts of identity of an individual. Tara and Chandan, the conjoined twins, represent two sides of a self – feminine and masculine. Tara aptly remarks about her relationship with Chandan:

> *Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we are forced out. … And separated.* (Collected Plays, 325)

Stereotyped gender roles play an important role in the social construction of gender. On the superiority of the roles assigned to a male, he is considered to be more important in the gender dynamics. In Tara, Dattani brushes on this issue when Patel asks Chandan to support him in business and expects Tara to restrict herself in domestic spehere. This sex based division of labour is one of the important root causes of gender discrimination. Tara says: "*The men in the house were deciding on whether they are going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave*" (Collected Plays, 328).

In the patriarchal system of defined set rules, exchange of responsibilities between the two genders often becomes a cause of embarrassment. In this play too, Dattani explores the possibilities of blurring of roles between Chandan and Tara. Chandan is interested in so called feminine roles while Tara is inclined towards a career like her father's. Patel gets upset with his wife for this reflects on wrong upbringing and accuses her of '*turning him into a sissy-teaching him to knit*" (Collected Plays, 350).

It is not just because of the dominance of men that the gender

discrimination persists in the society. Women too play a significant role in the biased approach towards men. Bharti's preference for male child during surgery points at the female psyche where women too are trapped in the vicious cycle of patriarchal structure. Patel reveals secret about decision regarding surgery:

> *A scar slowed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were better that the leg would surivive … on the girl. Your grandfather and mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come. That same evening your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except – I couldn't believe what she told me – that they would risk giving both legs to the boy. May be I had protested more strongly!* (Collected Plays, 378)

After the failure of surgery, Bharti covers up the guilt by giving excessive love to her daughter, but the burden of truth made her restless and drove her towards insanity. Later, when Tara learns about the reality of her mother's love, she gets shocked and emotionally broken. Dattani deconstructs the myth that Nature and God have made male superior to female. Through the story of Chandan and Tara, he wants to assert that the male and female are equal in the eyes of God and like Dan, he too considers injustice against Tara, an unnatural sin:

> Dan: "*She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. May be God never wanted us to be separated.destiny desires strange things ….but even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life. A duel to the death between God and nature on one side and on the other – the amazing Dr. Thakkar.* (Collected Plays, 330)

Being physically challenged makes Tara and Chandan both a marginalized segment of society. However, Tara is doubly marginalized for being a girl. The discrimination against women actually starts from mother's womb. The play brings forth this point through Roopa's remarks: "*Since you insist I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy*

with getting girl babies – you know dowry and things like that – so they used to drown them in milk." (Collected Plays, 349)

To relocate the position of women in the patriarchal order has been a persistent effort of writers and artists of postcolonial India. Dattani challenges the universal questions of traditional and stereotyped gender scales. The title of his play *Bravely Fought the Queen* draws our attention with its reference to a valorous queen and is a literal translation of the first line from Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poem which reads '*Khoob ladi mardani wo toh Jhansi wali rani thi*'. The title, as a reminiscent of the poem, significantly drops the epithet 'manly'. The reason for this conscious change is to interrogate the implications of manliness itself. The play brings forth the compromised private lives of two sisters in stark contrast to the callous profligacy of two brothers who are also their husbands.

Violence operates as a powerful subtext for the play. Bonsai, a significant symbolic trope, represents the outcome of violent subversion. The grotesque looking tree is deliberately acclimatized to its environment, turns into a dwarf and yet survives against its natural growth. The conversation between Alka and Lalitha points at the unnatural way of suppression and its deeper impact.

> *Alka: You said you make bonsai?*
>
> *Lalitha: Yes, I have got a whole collection.*
>
> *Alka: How do you make them?*
>
> *Lalitha: You stunt their growth. You keep trimming the roots and bind their branches with wire and .. stunt them.* (*Bravely Fought the Queen,* 16)

On another instance, Dolly and Lalitha discuss bonsai.

> *Dolly: Does it need to be … cut or bound anymore?*
>
> *Lalitha: Oh no. It's completely resigned to its new shape. I suppose something happens inside it and … it decides to change its size. All it needs now is a little nourishment occasionally.* (*Bravely Fought the Queen*, 33)

Bravely Fought the Queen exposes the male chauvinism and woman as the colonized subordinate section of a male dominant society. The play also depicts the issue of homosexuality in a bold manner. Alka's anguish and agony is aggravated when she comes to know that Nitin, her husband, has homosexual relationship with her own brother, Praful. And it was for his own convenience that he marries off his sister with Nitin. Though the women in the play differ in their mood and musing, they are unhappy and disappointed with their lives. The depression leads them to seek solace in different things. Alka gets addicted to wine and Dolly develops romantic notion for Kanhaiya. Lalitha's over-involvement in growing bonsai plant results from her frustrated mental state. The play highlights how Alka, like a queen, bravely fought the conventional mindset and the patriarchal social construction to free herself from the burden of subalternity.

In the gender dynamics as portrayed in Dattani's plays, the women characters are essentially human beings who are endowed with basic urges and impulses. They certainly possess the qualities of love and compassion along with the potential to fight back and defend their own identities. Though marginalized in society, these women possess a will of their won to resist the forces hazardous to their survival. Regarding his own perception of gender identity in society, Dattani admits: *"…he seems to be fighting for my feminine self. And since I have the male self, which is equipped to fight as well, it is a proportionate battle. The feminine self is not a victim in my play. It's subsumed, yes! It is marginalized, but it fights back.*" (Katayal, 255)

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10

POWER POLITICS IN *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL* AND *TUGHLAQ:* A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Gunjan Gupta

With the longest and richest tradition in theatre, India has witnessed many developments in the elements of theatrical expression. Dating back almost 5000 years, Indian theatre has used mime, singing, dancing along with acting. This accumulated heritage began as a celebration of seasonal festivities or like any other tradition of performing arts it has its origins in dedications to Gods and Deities. The unbroken tradition of theatre in India has changed from Kalidasa to the modern Indian times. Unlike the traditional forms of theatre, modern Indian theatre did not celebrate gods or a season's arrival rather the issues related to common man were explored. The change happened because of the colonial rule under the British where the socio-political, cultural and economical consciousness was heightened. Along with the Indian society under the British rule the theatre also changed, the issues changed, the objective of the performance changed and so did the elements used in the plays. Theatre performances which earlier were done

with a purpose to entertain British soldiers or to amuse the elite class were now endowed with a much serious purpose. Soon, the writings in the regional language matured and saw an upsurge. Most of the Indian plays in English were basically translation works from various regional languages.

Playwrights like Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad weaved their plots and created their characters based on everyman across the country. Thanks to the emergence of middle class, their life and concerns became central to these writers. It was due to the interaction with the west and influence of their literature that modernity seeped into Indian Theatre as well. Theatre now became a viable medium for putting forth a strong social and cultural critique. Vijay Tendulkar, vanguard of Marathi Literature and Girish Karnad, who majorly writes in Kannad are among the stalwarts of Modern Indian Theatre who deal with issues related to the society and its people which is free from any limitations of time and space. Reckoned among the best playwrights, their plays written in late 1900s are still applicable to the situations in 21st century. Their protagonists can be seen walking in today's society dealing with the similar emotions and situations as portrayed by them decades ago. The characters have a strong potential to directly communicate with the modern audiences and take them through similar experiences. The purpose again is to render an authentic voice and to put a thinking cap on the audience's mind. *Ghashiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar and *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad are two such plays that bring out the desired effect through the use of themes, symbols and motifs in these plays. The two plays which are set up in different time periods with different characters and written for different regional audiences share similar thematic concerns of the day. Themes of Violence, sex, human relationships, revisiting history and myths, alienation of modern man dominate the two plays. However, what unites all these themes and the two plays in question is the idea of power and the essential human nature that is explored through its protagonists. The characters, despite their powerful status, are essentially human and the free play of their emotions makes them vulnerable to the social

and psychological limitation.

India is a reservoir of numerous myths, legends and folktales; stories which have a potential to directly communicate with us even in the present time. History may separate myths from us but the themes that these stories explore and the human tendencies that they depict make them immemorial. To start with, both the plays are based on historical figures. Vijay Tendulkar depicts the 18th century Poona (Maharashtra) under the Peshwa rule. Nana Phadnavis, portrayed as a womaniser in the play is evidenced to have 9 wives and 2 mistresses in history. Ghashiram, the protagonist is based on the North Indian Brahmin of the same name who not only came to Poona and rose to the position of Policeman in 18th century but his tyrannical regime was also inspired from his historical namesake. The decadent society as depicted in the play reflects the corruption of the historical city of Poona in 18th century. Girish Karnad's Tughlaq is also based on the 14th century ruler Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, who ruled the Indian subcontinent for almost 26 years. However, creative liberties have been taken by both the playwrights as these plays are not essentially historical but the familiar legends "*are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place.*" (Bandyopadhyay, Samik: 2015: VIII) These diversions from historical facts also provide dramatic coherence to the plays. For instance Karnad's Tughlaq rules for 5 years in the play instead of 26 years and the story is based on how he creates a sense of distrust among his people both Hindus and Muslims. Similar to the historical king, Karnad's Tughlaq is a visionary and an idealist but with a different degree of cruelty in nature. So the aim of these writers was not necessarily to moralise anyone by using these characters from the past but only to highlight the frailty and impermanence of human situation.

Power and the politics involved to attain that power is the dominant theme in both the plays. Most of the characters that appear have a hidden agenda to climb the ladder and attain an important position in the society. Interestingly however, this thirst for power does not come from doing good but either to seek revenge

on certain people/ class or to assert a personal idea of an ideal society. Ghashiram, an ordinary Kannauj Brahmin puts everything at stake to become the kotwal of Poona only to further tyrannise the local population. His desire to avenge the ill-treatment he received as an outsider by the fellow Poona Brahmins made him sacrifice everything for nothing to remain at the end. Stoned to death, he meets rather a horrific end at the hands of the people of Poona. As Tendulkar in an interview said, "*There is a constant switching of roles- the victims of one situation become the oppressors in another...eternal seesaw of action*." (Frontline) Tughlaq on the other hand, is a king and has a vision for his people and his kingdom. He shifts his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, introduces copper currency over silver claiming all the while that it is for the good of his people. He too swings into madness when he realises his failure towards the end. In the play, we witness that not only the people from across religions are unhappy but all these changes are a part of administrative strategies. All the other themes in one way or the other add to the assertion of this power. Various actions, symbols, motifs and themes are in relation to consolidate the authority of these characters. Tughlaq is seen engrossed in playing chess to "*solve(d) the most famous problem in chess*" (Karnad, Girish: 2010: 09) which shows his manipulative skills and an obsession with power. The chess game symbolizes how he treats everyone around him as a pawn to beat his opponents/rivals. For instance, the ruthless way he uses Sheikh Imam-ud-din to defeat Ain-ul-Mulk or the opportunist Aziz who practically exploits everyone around him to earn money. Aziz emerges to be a true Machiavellian figure in the play who seeks future in politics. He explains to Aazam that politics is "*a beautiful world-wealth, success, position, power- and yet it's full of brainless people, people with not an idea in their head*…." (Ibid 50) Like Aziz, Nana in *Ghashiram Kotwal* is one with Machiavellian traits, the one who not only abuses power for his carnal lust but uses Ghashiram till the end. All this scheming creates an unbreakable chain of fallacies and malice.

Religion is an integral part of the active power politics in the two plays. The corrupt society depicts the fallible idea of God and

religion which essentially is a human construct and hence is conveniently twisted by both the authority figures and the common man. Religion is reduced to a mockery of a belief system which seems to have no meaning in these decadent societies. The play begins with humanising the gods when Ganpati, Saraswati etc come on stage and dance. Later on when Nana Phadnavis, the influential statesman who can get any woman he desires, tries to seduce Lalita Gauri, Ghashiram's daughter, dances in front of Ganpati mocking it as a mere "*idol of holiness*" (Tendulkar, 23). Similarly in *Tughlaq*, religion manifested in the play becomes a farce and is continuously mocked. The act of praying itself becomes a charade. The king first makes it mandatory for all the Muslims to pray five times in a day and later on bans praying creating contradictory situations for his subjects. It also shows that how the rules or practices of religion can be altered according to the whims and fancies of the king. The monarch therefore seems to possess a much important position than religion. The play depicts the existence of both Hindus and Muslims where the king constantly tries to bring the two together by trying to treat all people equal irrespective of their religion. The freedom from the Jizya tax or the ability to speak their mind in a Muslim dominated society with a Muslim king fails to win the hearts of Hindus. Moreover, the cynicism of Hindus rises and they are not able to put their faith in Tughlaq. They are forever sceptical of what might be the hidden agenda of the king. Here also Aziz does not fail to manipulate king's soft corner towards Hindus. He disguises as a Brahmin and sues the king's court of illegal confiscation of his property. The politically charged move of shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad (a place with Hindu majority) does not settle well with both Hindus and Muslims. Amirs think that it is to outnumber them while Hindus feel there might be more to what the king is planning.

Religion becomes an alibi or a tool to hide wrongdoings of the characters. When Ghashiram confronts and accuses Nana of his daughter's death, Nana retorts, "*He- the Omnipresent- He makes everything happen... We are merely instruments*." (Ibid 51). The misdeeds of the people of Poona are attributed to the will of God. On the

other hand, Tughlaq kills his father and brother during the act of praying; Sheikh Imam-ud-din, the priest is used for king's dirty politics; and Amirs are killed by the king's men in the same room while he prays. All these instances demystify Tughlaq's vision of creating an ideal society. Religion hence is continuously used for personal and political motive; and the act of prayer, religious ceremony or even the idea of god is ridiculed. Themes of sex and violence are extensively used to highlight the depravity of religion in these plays. This exploitation is also based on the depiction of gender in the plays. Women are suppressed, marginalised and sexually exploited by men. There is no mention of wives of either Ghashiram or Nana Phadnavis; Lalita Gauri and Gulabi are sexual objects in this patriarchal world where their only role is to gratify men's sexual needs and both of them become the victims of power politics played by Ghashiram and Nana. In Karnad's play, the stepmother is rendered nameless, without any identity of her own or even a voice against the killing of her husband and son. Tughlaq on the other hand, remains a bachelor and does not have any woman counterpart. The stepmother is shown to be genuinely worried about his well being despite brutal murders of her husband and son only to be rewarded death and public humiliation. However, her concern has long been debated whether it was due to her love for Tughlaq or a desire to have a power over him. All the attempts to create a harmony between the two sexes collapse with the rampant immorality and the pitiful treatment of women in these plays.

Complete social and political chaos in both the plays is reflected in the jarring relationships between the characters. The plays do not really give audience a task to understand the complex nature of human relationships but the impact of disorder, both mental and physical, onto the working of these relations cannot be missed. There is no flourishing relationship or a happy family set up portrayed in the two plays. *Ghashiram Kotwal* depicts discordant father-daughter relationship where the father exchanges his daughter for power; relation of fellow Brahmins with an outsider Brahmin where they ill-treat him in the beginning and murder him in the end; and the relationship between Nana and Ghashiram

which was necessarily based on convenience and usefulness, the moment Nana had no use of Ghashiram he let him die a dog's death; and finally family and marriage system collapse with Lalita Gauri's death during childbirth. *Tughlaq* too portrays the falling apart of familial relationships where the son (Tughlaq) commits fratricide and patricide to achieve power, orders killing of stepmother and goes on a killing spree to remove any obstacle in attainment of ultimate power over everyone. The ensued violence and bloodshed within these plays leave a lasting impact on the sensibilities of the audiences.

Both the plays also contain elements of Theatre of Cruelty propounded by Antonin Artaud. Theatre of Cruelty was an avant garde experimental theatre whose function Artaud believed was to get rid of all the repressed animalistic desires in human beings and how theatre can purge them of this desire to inflict pain and cruelty by way of witnessing it on the stage. It involved and engaged the audiences by removing all the barriers between the audience and the actors on stage. Elements of mime, pantomime, props, music, dance and human wall used in *Ghashiram Kotwal* link it to the effects created in Theatre of Cruelty. It not only refers to the torture and violence inflicted on stage but off the stage as well which is realised through screams, shouts and shrieks of the characters heard off stage. Artaud wanted "*to reveal the physical and effective side of language by having words explode and expand into space as screams, controlled sounds and intonations in order to form vibrant incantations.*" (Kumar, Geeta: 2015: 143) Such outcry fills up the killing scenes in Karnad's *Tughlaq*. The basic cause of violence in both these plays remains the lust for power, the injustice prevalent in the society, the stark discrimination on the basis of caste, class and gender. The play, *Tughlaq* is a collection of scheming characters, deceiving relationships, horrific murders and terrible unthinkable traps. The characters plotting against other characters are totally unaware of the intrigues against them. Ghashiram seeks revenge and inflicts carnage on the Brahmins of Poona once he becomes the kotwal. The same people stone him to death. He does everything for Nana even selling her daughter to him but Nana does not flinch from

betraying him and inciting the people against Ghashiram. Aziz in *Tughlaq* is an opportunist who uses all the announcements made by the king for his own benefit in turn rendering the whole idea of the king's society as a futile attempt. All of these characters acting out for their benefit leave a scarring impact on the lives of common man. Be it the king's ideas and rules to make life easier for his subjects or Ghashiram's revenge seeking ordeals, it is the common man who pays heavily. The order becomes the disorder of the day. "*The Kotwal for the slightest reason beats and kills in every season. The mouths of Poona people were dry with fear... no one knew where to complain.*" (Tendulkar, 54) Thus, the two plays share the depiction of the plight of every innocent ordinary man in these societies who has no idea about the real intention of the people in position.

Though Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar have found historical characters and situations which they have depicted with such brilliance but their interest had always been in the manner these figures communicate the themes depicted by them. The universal themes of treachery, deception, debauchery prevalent in the decadent society of 18th century Poona Brahmins and 14th century of Tughlaq reign make these plays very suitable for any time they are read/ performed in. The historical characters and their situations become a reference point of not only the time when these plays were written but also of the present time when they are still read with the same vigour. The two plays do not have any embellishments to portray the society but rather the ugly naked picture is presented to the readers. Written in 1964, Tughlaq reiterates "*the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country.*" (Murthy,U. R. Anantha: 2010: VIII) The society in both the cases landed up in a sort of ideological flux after realising the failure of the ideals created by both Nehru and Tughlaq. Both were visionary and idealist but failed to forecast the practical aspect of their decisions. The ambiguity in the character of Tughlaq, his dreams and the reality can be equated with the Nehruvian time. A similar dilemma can be seen in Ghashiram who is also a dreamer like Tughlaq, who wished to succeed in a strange land, and also a failure in reality. Karnad said that Tughlaq "*was the*

most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne of Delhi... and one of the greatest failures also." (Murthy,U. R. Anantha: 2010: VIII) This remark holds true for Ghashiram as well, as he was indeed a clever man to become the kotwal of a strange land and inflict tyranny on its people but ultimately was a great tragic failure. This striking gap between their political aspirations and reality makes them a Modern man and a tragic hero of all times. The tragic flaw of both the characters can be seen as their "*impatience, (their) cruelty, (their) feeling that (they) had the only correct answer*." (Murthy,U. R. Anantha: 2010: VIII)

Both the plays transcend the idea of time and space and hence become relevant to everyone situated centuries and continents apart. They can be read/ performed and understood in any time because the play is not about the characters but the human dilemma that these characters go through. The action that we witness in the scenes of these plays is basically enactment of the characters' inner trouble. Both Ghashiram and Tughlaq wanted to bring into motion their idea of society, in the process sacrifices everything that they had- Ghashiram's daughter is dead and the Poona Brahmins are his arch enemies; Tughlaq has no surviving family member and no living friend or advisor. Both are mistrusted by their people, soon alienated and estranged. The spirit of both of them is crushed and they are shrunk into insanity by the end of the plays, both "*crumble from the inside*." (Karnad, Girish: 2010: 51) The absence of compassion, love, kindness, forgiveness makes the two the tragic heroes. The feelings, conflicts and dilemma are unique to their personality yet a representation of every modern man. The perfect amalgamation of history and modern symbolism makes these two plays rise above any strict demarcation of any time period that they may represent. Hence, Tughlaq and Ghashiram and their personalities become a perfect way to study the nature of man, bestiality of power game and maddening after-effects of power dynamics and the uncontrollable consequences that follows.

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11

A THEMATIC STUDY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PLAYS

Ragini Kapoor

One of India's most cherished renaissance figures; Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) put India on the literary map of the world when he was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1913 for *Gitanjali*. Tagore is a maker of not only modern Indian literature but also the modern Indian mind. Myriad minded, he was a poet, short-story writer, novelist, dramatist, essayist, painter and composer of songs. His world wide acclaim as a social, political, religious, and aesthetic thinker, innovator in education and a champion of the "One World" idea makes him a living presence. Rabindranath Tagore wrote over forty works of drama, hence regarded as one of the major dramatists of the twentieth century. The abundance and variety of his plays includes nearly all the known categories viz. five act plays on the Elizabethan model and one-act plays, poignant tragedies and rollicking comedies, charades, farces and satires, dramatic dialogues in verse and lyrical dramas, symbolical plays, plays with a predominantly metaphysical content

and plays that grapple with contemporary problems, both social and political. Tagore is equally facile in prose and verse.

Early in his career as a writer the dramatic form interested Rabindranath Tagore. He composed the opera, *Valmiki-Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki), in his early twenties. In the opera, the drama is dominated by the music as in his more nature compositions in a similar genre, such as *Mayar Khela* (The Play of Illusion) or the dance-drama of his old age. Drama being an audio-visual medium of expression has been a very effective and powerful genre in world literature. The birth and development of drama in Greece, Rome, England, and India emphasizes upon the fact that it has always been an integral part of culture, highlighting and evaluating moral commitments, religious convictions, and political changes in various countries. As Martin Esslin in *The Field of Drama* observes:

> *Drama is a mimetic representation of life combining in itself the real and the fictional art and reality and presenting the events and characters within a dimension of space and time. It combines the qualities of narrative poetry with those of visual arts. It is a narrative made visible.* (Esslin, Martin: 1987:45)

An attempt has been made to focus on the development of Indian Drama in English in pre-and post independence India. A survey of Indian Drama in English reveals that there has been a consistent attempt to produce drama right from the beginning. However, a few of them could make a mark. The literary career of Rabindranath Tagore is sublime. He had written about seven thousand lines of verse even before he was eighteen. *Banphul* is his first Bengali poem. *Rudra Chanda* is a full-fledged drama. He wrote an another drama, *Nalini*, at the age of twenty-three. During this time he had produced his another opera, *Kalmrigaya* (The Fatal Hunt). *Valmiki-Pratibha* and *Kalmrigaya* are still popular stage-attractions owing to the appeal of their songs. These verse plays contain in embryo ideas that appear frequently in his mature plays.

Rabindranath Tagore is a universally known writer for his versatile genius. K.R.S. Iyengar appreciated him as:

He was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, a musician and a painter; he was an educationalist; a practical idealist who turned his dramas into reality at Shantiniketan; he was a reformer, philosopher, prophet; he was a novelist and short-story writer, and critic of life and literature, he even made occasional excursion into nationalist politics, although he was essentially an international. (Iyengar, K.R.S: 1985: 99)

Tagore has successfully moulded the elements of the folk drama of Bengal known as "Jatra" with classical Sanskrit drama. He was familiar with the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck, and was influenced by the works of Kalidasa. He evolved idiom, a dramatic technique. Tagore cannot be considered either a classicist or a modernist. His concept of the theatre was essentially a poet's concept: he wanted the theatre to be a place where poetry ruled supreme, revealing "the inner reality of things". Tagore in his own words says:

Drama has the responsibility of drawing apart the curtain of naturalism and reveals the inner reality of things. If there is too much emphasis on imitative naturalism, the inner view becomes clouded. (Tagore, Rabindranath: 1961: 32)

It is significant that, right from the beginning of his dramatic activities, Tagore was greatly influenced by the "Jatra" of Bengal. What he particularly liked in the "Jatra" was "the easy bond of mutual trust and dependence" between the actors and spectators, so that the poetry which, after all, is the main thing, falls like a spreading fountain through the medium of acting on the gladdened heart of the spectators. Tagore went back to the folk tradition of starting a theatre not for the masses, but for those who want to taste the deliberate pleasures of a fine art. He was in full sympathy with the ideals of the Little Theatres in the Western countries, whose aim was to provide a meeting place for the discerning and the cultivated.

Raja was the first problem play in Bengali literature. It was the first of his plays in the allegorical-symbolical genre which was a complete novelty in Bengali. *Dakghar* (The Post Office) which followed within two years of *Raja* is in the same genre. However,

it proved to be less of a problem play owing to its gripping human interest. Both *Raja* and *Dakghar* are exceptional among Rabindranath's plays which can be described as religious, as distinct from spiritual, dealing with the relation between God and man. While the theme of *Raja*, in which the image of man is imposed on the Absolute, is implicit in Vaishnava philosophy or, more specifically, the philosophy of the medieval Vaishnava lyricists of Bengal and at least in one early poem of Rabindranath, though the way it is treated in *Raja* gives it an altogether new dimension, the entire conception of *Dakghar* is Rabindranath's own. (Ibid 237) The shadow of death darkens the play almost till the end; but when the end arrives, death comes in a blaze of glory, transmuting tragedy into triumph. This happens in all his important later plays, *Muktadhara*, *Raktakarabi*, *Tapati*. Unlike *Dakghar*, there is no trace of religion in them; they all move on the purely human plane – Rabindranth stressed in his preface to *Raktakarabi* that it was not an allegory. The poet's intended meaning is simply that the allegory in it does not represent any "inner conflict of the soul" or an issue between God and man, as in *Raja*, but deals entirely with an issue between man and man.

Rabindranath was deeply acquainted with Sanskrit Classics, Bengali Literature, English Literature, and Continental European Literature. Out of his father's spiritual legacy and moral earnestness and his grandfather's spirit of enterprise, he created his own artistic sensibility. He enriched every genre of literature as a restless experimenter and innovator in the field of poetry, novels, plays, short stories, essays, literature criticism, polemical writing, travelogues, memoirs etc.; (Raghavacharyulu, D.V.K: 1961: 48) he created his own genre of dance drama. His plays are basically expressions of the soul's quest for beauty and truth. There are certain traditional national attitudes; some unshakable obscure racial memories and quite a few recurrent archetypal human patterns and these are the stuff out of which he creates his dramatic world. Tagore has projected his ideas through his dramatic works. Edward Thomson aptly says:

"His dramatic work is the vehicle of ideas rather than the expression of action." (Thompson, Edward: 1948: 47)

Tagore's works are the creations of his age and the harbingers of a new era. During the period of sixty years that he wrote, there witnessed a rapid widespread advancement of Western type of education both amongst the middle classes, man and woman and growth of new professional classes and the virtual decay of the feudal structure of society. The barriers between castes, classes, and regions came to be destroyed due to rapid industrialisation and the development of transport and quick and ready means of communication. Advancement was seen stage-by-stage, though it was from a colonial dependency to the threshold freedom. Amongst these social, cultural, economic, and political influences, which were ushering in changing of a far-reaching significance, was the influence exercised by Rabindranath himself. It was Tagore who in reality moulded the thoughts and aspirations of three generations of educated middle class who derived their intellectual sustenance and spiritual inspiration mostly from his works and his influence penetrated every corner of India. In him the fulfilment of Raja Ram Mohan Roy can be seen in many aspects. What Roy advocated as an abstract (Iyengar, K.R.S. : 1985: 122-23) proposition with regard to women, came to be fully illustrated in great many ways by Rabindranath in his poems, short-stories, novels, and dramas. None in India championed the cause of women so stoutly and persistently as Tagore.

In *Achalayatan* (Immovable Mansion), which was published only a few months after *Dakghar*, the movement back to the mundane seems almost complete with the notable exception of the songs. The play is a devastating attack on the bigotry of established religion with its paralysing hold on the mind of man, made, as Edward Thompson says, with the most potent of weapons, sarcasm. But the songs, which seem almost like irrelevant interludes but which are packed with an infinity of meaning, almost steal the show making the play appear like a mere framework for them. (Tagore, Rabindranath: 1961: 237)

The Water Fall (*Muktadhara*) has been interpreted as a symbolic play that indicates Tagore's admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and his rejection of the machine in favour of the spirit of life. As Krishna Kripalini says, '*The character of Dhananjoy Vairagi has been seen as a representation of the nonviolent spirit of Gandhi and the play had been read as Tagore's nationalist critique of colonial exploitation*.' (Kripalani, Krishna: 1971: 175) Tagore wrote it immediately after his return from America where he had severely criticized the idea of the nation and the spirit of nationalism. He viewed nationalism as a diabolic force, or '*the one goblin-dread with which the whole world has been trembling*' (Tagore, Rabindranath: 1966: 429) and considered it to be a highly intoxicating and addictive sentiment that breeds radicalism and passionate excitement in people. The play *Muktadhara* in Tagore's own words '*is a representation of a concrete psychology*.' (Ibid 411) When *Raktakarabi* was first published in 1926, it excited considerable interest which, however, was confined to speculation about its meaning rather than its merits as a play. Its story is about a community, every member of which is forced to slave in the gold mines, under the vigilance of the ruthless bosses (a whole hierarchy of them), associated with whom in sinister partnership is the Priest. People here, are treated as parts of a machine, having no names, only numbers. Rabindranath succeeds in *Raktakarabi* in representing the actual world, in this case a world of greed and unscrupulousness, in such a way as to give an immensely heightened sense of it. The symbols he creates are even more real than reality itself. The reality in Tagore's plays is the realism of the mind, not so much of exterior physical action as of emotional or spiritual. It depicts the fluctuations in mood and feeling. It does not emphasise the development of a plot but develops a pattern of symbols which reflects these fluctuations in great deal.

Tagore's power as a dramatist lies in his amazing vitality of imagination and his remarkable ability to create an atmosphere which grows upon the mind, not by the repetition of any central idea but by magic. He weaves his words into a delicate pattern of poetic prose. He does not follow any of the rules and conventions of the modern stage. His plays bear a continuous action on the

stage and are set against a background which is extremely simple and unostentatious. He concentrates the attention of his audience on the atmosphere that he is creating. Edward Thompson says, '*We don't need any scenery, the only background we need is the background of the mind.*' (Thompson, Edward: 1948: 42) Tagore spiritualises all dramatic action. His characters do not exist in a convincing manner because of their extremely rhetorical and sometimes paradoxical way of speaking. He uses much wit but little humour, much mockery but little irony, much keenness of intellect, but little precision and straight forwardness. His plays are merely plays of ideas, the reality of which remains hidden behind a persistent and determined illusion. Even a most startlingly realistic plot becomes a cover for symbolism and everyone in his plays is a puppet. His characters are as poetic as himself. They seem to be actors staging an idea, symbols not human beings. His dramas are capable of poetic heights, because their author is intensely subjective and sensitive, but it is prone to love its simple and straight beauty in the endless labyrinth of a useless repetition of words and phrases. The truth which the playwright seeks to describe is not an objective or material thing but an abstract truth, a spiritual idea. The drama or the theatre is just a device and excuse for him for self-expression.

Tagore can be called a Romantic poet. He revolts against the materialist tradition and insists on the freedom of the soul, his transcendental love of beauty and nature, his conception of the super-sensuous and super-conscious being pervading the entire created universe and his thirst for the infinite, and in order to express all this he discovered an expression which is at once mystical and symbolical. He shows a romantic nostalgia, a never ending quest after the ever-fleeting objects of desire. His art becomes a projection of his own self. He always sacrifices the probable for the picturesque. He breaks-up the smooth and tiresome surface of ordinary life by the pursuit of strangeness and surprise. His dialogues are witty and they contain in them a shrewd knowledge of men and women and a joy in all life and a warm spirit of youth bubbling forth out of the heart of all his characters young or old into songs. Tagore's unfailing faith in man and divinity, his concern

for women and solicitation for children, his sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden, his philosophical speculations and practical wisdom, his perception for the zeitgeist and the evolution of taste– all find expression in the all-encompassing sweep of his writings in a magnificent synthesis of philosophical profundity and aesthetic luxuriance.

To conclude, Tagore's plays cannot be judged on the primary criteria of theme, characterization, social purpose, and conflict. His dramatic pursuit is an extension of his poetic expression, and lyrical urge. They carry his basic philosophical attitudes and concepts; lyric emotional and imaginative, brought together with aesthetic harmony. He modified his plays after Shakespeare, Ibsen, Masterlinck, and Kalidasa. Rabindranath Tagore holds an unrivalled place as a playwright among the noted dramatists in Indian Writing in English. He is too great to be surpassed. The innovations, which were hauled by him in the stagecraft and dramatic writing, would certainly continue to guide the dramatists of future generation. It can be concluded that if his plays are read in the right perspective, they would prove to be "the artifice of eternity".

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12

PROBING THE ELEMENT OF GREED AND THE ROLE OF DIVINE DISPENSATION IN MANOJ MITRA'S *BANCHHARAM'S ORCHARD*

Tanveer Qureshi & Ashraf Karim

A leading Bengali dramatist, director and actor, Manoj Mitra's fame rests upon his unique power of combining history and myths, facts and fantasy characterised by a rare touch of humour and pathos which work together to expose the foibles of the society and the cruelty of powerful classes. *Banchharam's Orchard (1977)* translated from original Bengali *Sajano Bagan,* underscores the role of divine dispensation and corrupting power of greed in a satirical manner with some supernatural elements in the portrayal of an old villager Banchharam. The old man's beautiful lush garden which is envied in whole village is coveted by the rich landowner Nakori Dutta . The plot seeks to expose that how far a human being's greed and lust for wealth can take him if it is not regulated by a feeling of compassion and a sense of morality. Disguised villainy and rampant corruption in dealings; exploitation of lower class and embezzlement of unlawful land brings to the fore the moral

decadence and spiritual barrenness in the elite class. However,at the end of the day, the old fragile man by rising against all odds, proves that there is One Powerful above all and when he supports you, none can overcome you.

Banchharam, the main protagonist of the play; a senile man of ninety, has devoted all his life in tending and looking after his only asset, the garden for which he harbours deep love like his own offspring. Chakori, the late zameendar of the villiage, notorious in his lifetime for embezzling the land of weak and oppressed class, died in the anticipation of grabbing the garden from the old man. As his last wish was not fulfilled in his life, he turned into a ghost after his death. Chakori represents the incessant material greed and lust in human beings which is not quenched even with the end of mortal life.

We have another character in the rat race for the orchard; Gupi, Banchharam's grandson, a selfish and spoiled young man who wants to open a booze shop by selling the garden. Nakori, the son of late Chakori, on the lines of his evil father, too, wants to own the garden by hook or crook. Nakori, on the pretext of the illness and senility of Banchharam, snaps a deal with the latter to pay him a monthly amount of 200 bucks till he dies but after his death, the garden will be in Nakori's posession. However, the divine decree presides and all the nefarious plots are gone in vain as the old man against all expectations, grows healthier and eventually gets more prolonged life than his opponent. At the end of the day, we see the truth triumphs over evil and in place of Banchha, Nakori dies of despair and disillusionment.

Greed marked with intense jealousy and lust has been a major theme of a plethora of literary works. There is a famous saying that 'Avarice is the root of all evils'. This holds true in context of the present play. Envy or greed as a subject was dealt with in many medieval and Christian plays. MH Abrams notes:

> *In medieval and later Christian theology, these sins were identified as Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger and Sloth. They were collectively termed as 'seven deadly sins' because they were considered to*

put the soul of anyone manifesting them in peril of eternal perdition, such sins could be expiated only by absolute pertinence. (MH Abrams 364).

The unbridled greed to fulfil one's desire is evidently showcased in the very beginning of the play when ghost of the late Chakori falls from the tamarind tree and muses on his past life when he was young and had the verve to do anything he considered right . He, in a monologue, narrates his past life when as a miscreant, he spared nothing that came his way. He recklessly led his life in revelry and merry-making at the cost of the lives and wealth of others. He hoarded a large sum of wealth and land embezzling other's properties.

Zamindar Chakori Dutta, a Royal Bengal Tiger in his lifetime, spared nothing that came his way....I devoured everything ...Everything. Spared nothing but this orchard. (Shaking his head) A blunder. An unforgivable blunder. My own fault! (BO page 5*)*

The term 'divine dispensation' designates the role of God in shaping and orientating the mundane affairs of the human beings. Sometimes, such events/occurrences take place in the lives of the people which are beyond the level of intelligibility of human beings. The prime example of divine dispensation may, although, be traced back to the Greek dramatists such a Sophocles, Homer etc. but Shakespeare's King Lear exhibits the real amalgam of it in many places where the pious characters, though oppressed for a time, ultimately emerge as victorious.

In the present play, the old Banchha faced severe trials in the form of mental exploitation and suppression by a variety of characters, in the first instance, by his own grandson Gupi who tried to gain ownership of the land from Banchha to open a booze shop; a vocation much despised by the old man and later by Nakori's family. The more Nakori Dutta pestered him, the more old man emerged resistant to it. A stage then comes in life of the old man when he is too infirm and senile to walk or to even drive the stray cows away from his orchard. Chakori Dutta made a deal of providing Banchha 200 bucks a month, a warm glass of milk and

spoonfuls of ghee with rice every day and a Kashmiri shawl. The hypocrisy and collusion of Nakori Dutta with Moktar, a clerk of subdivisional court against Banchha to gull him and extort his garden in return for a trifling price has been exposed by Mitra most pathetically:

Nakori: Look here, Banchharam, on the first of every month, I'll give a couple of large notes. A monthly pension- two hundred bucks every month- as long as you live!

Moktar: Good, good ! Bravo!

Nakori: Just on the condition that after your death,this land alongwith all its trees will be, hey, hey..mine (BO page-10)

Though Nakori's materialistic behaviour which is ripped of warmth or any concern for humanity is a nuisance to the readers, still the author doesn't fail to amuse the readers by flavouring the play with humorous and sarcastic exchange of words between the characters. Even the topic of Banchha's death which is the biggest concern of the opponents is dealt in a humorous and light- hearted tone. For instance, when the old man asked Nakori why he was looking so sick, the latter retorted sarcastically that he had a stroke and further says that it would be biggest loss if he died before him. Banchha answered submissively that in order to get pension, he (Banchha) will have to die before Nakori.

Despite Nakori's day and night endeavour to hasten the death of Banchha, he survives as opposed to their expectation. The disparaging irony is reflected in the statement of Nakori Dutta when he responds to Moktar by saying:

How long do the goats themselves live?... (Turns to Banchha) Bhai Banchha, could you give me a word as to when you are going to die?

Old age, infirmity, sickness, death, fate etc. are the major themes of Manoj Mitra's plays. In the present play, he blends farcical humour with satire to show that old age leads to infirmity and every person has to undergo old age in his life. Thereafter, he has to face the horrifying pangs of death . Thus no one should have overriding pride in his life. His wishes should be tempered by lawful

limits and his urges should be duly governed by morality and love for his fellow human beings. Thus, the gist of the present play of the author is that even amidst perils and dangers, a human being should laugh and belive in never giving up. Simplicity leads to satisfaction and satisfaction leads to happiness. He says in the preface to the play:

> *As A boy I had seen people in my villiage in the erstwhile East Bengal who never failed to laugh even at their own anguish, despair or misery-not because they tried to appear smart but because they were really very simple. Their humour sprang from their simplicity. Banchharam or Lambordar Bhatta are like that. They laugh at themselves without pretention*. (Preface to BO, Manoj Mitra 1999)

Apart from the gnawing greed, burning jealousy and dynamics of power relations, there is the theme of preservation and nurturing of nature, trees and life. This theme serves two fold purposes, that is, if a human being fosters and preserves nature, the Divine Providence will protect him against all odds. Banchharam, the old man in his nineties, looks after the Orchard, waters the plants, drives out the cattle and stray dogs out of it, is in return guarded against the nefarious designs of Nakori and his children. Nakori, treading the same path on which late Chakori had run, that is, the path of corruption, evil design, pride and exploitation, emerges as a blood- sucking vampire. The haughty zameendaar not only exceeds in the greed of amassing excess money or property(as in the case of taking a leasehold of fishery) but also proves himself to be a living example of lechery or 'looge chracter'. Further his lust or promiscuity is reflected when both father and son (Kotka) make undue advances towards Gopi's wife Padma.The flirtatious nature is accurately shown by Mitra when father demands the girl from the son and vice versa. Both the sons of Nakori puffed up with pride, reflect snobbery obscured by egoism.

This particular aspect of Nakori is also previously reflected in the play during a conversation between Nakori and his wife Ginni in Act 1 Scene 5 when Ginni recounts her dream before her husband that the old man was dead. Nakori tells that his money is spent on

the old man but Gopi and his wife Padma enjoy the money. Nakori further declares that Padma glows with health that is fading in Ginni. Ginni retortS quickly saying that she had caught his husband's eye and the son was after 'Khunti' (an actress) and the father after Intimati (Padma). But there is strange hypocrisy that in place of blaming his husband, she makes Padma the scapegoat she angrily abuses her with words such as 'black face whore', 'glutton', 'witch' etc.

Nakori: "My money is going down the drain and she..glowing with health...Hey, hey health that melth in your mouth !"

Ginni: "Oh! So she has caught your eye then! The son is after Khunti and the father after Intimati!...

.....

Stop it!(cursing Padma) May death trap you, witch! (BO, page 30)

Nakori's unbridled yearning for pelf and power is further underpinned by Mitra when the doctor Gobindo hurries to save the life of Banchha, the latter being in a crucial situation choked with bronchial spasm. Nakori catches hold of the doctor on the way and does not let him go to the patient; he wishes to hasten the death of Banchha in order to claim the ownership of the alluring orchard. Detaining the doctor, he pretends to be suffering from indigestion. Ginni offers the doctor to pay him double fees if he lets the old man die. They also cite the examples of the doctors who willingly kill their patients in city hospitals. But thanks to the fate of old man, he still survives the brunt of the spasm and recovers soon. The old man emerges more refined and healthy. Following the advice of late Chakori's ghost, some more attempts are made to bring life of Banchha to an end through black magic and Voodooism; but the moment Nakori wants to kill him, Padma appears there proving the attempts of the murderers again futile. Money- minded and hypocritical priest too suggests some ways to finish Banchha in exchange of some lavish offerings but these, too, are rendered in vain as the divine decree has restored something else in its fold.

Nakori eventually gives him phial of Follidol to drink. Poor Banchha agrees to this proposal to end his his life by drinking the poison. He says-

> *(Touching the feet of the diety) Ma! I swear by you that I'll end my life this night.* (BO page53)

Banchha gives a list of consecrated things to be observed after his death such as he enjoins Nakori to lay him on a proper bed instead of a bamboo frame; keertan funeral smearing ghee on his body and an ox to be set free. Nakori compels him to drink the poison of the phial at midnight so that nobody could get to know the real reason of the old man's death. But the moment Banccha uncorks the bottle and opens his mouth to gulp it, Padma growning in labour pain throws herself on his lap and a son is born to her. Banchha brings some incense sticks to repel the mosquitoes. He says to Nakori:

> *I cannot die. I have become too attached to my great grandson ...I can't die now. I know how you feel'.* (BO page 57)

Disillusioned Nakori ends up his life in severe despair lying down on the khatia. He could not bear the brunt of the glad tidings of the old man having a close shave. He turns so much frustrated and disillusionment that under the stroke of heart attack he succumbs to death for good. The play shows the harm of greed and rancour inflicted not only on the society but also on the psychology of human being. Death is irrevocable and a universal truth. Nobody can escape the ferocious paws of death. It is violent greed that leads Nakori to a miserable end. And above all, it presents a strong case for the Divine Providence which protects poor Banchha against all odds and keeps him alive to look after his beloved orchard.

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13

MAHESH DATTANI: A 'DRAMATIST'S' TECHNIQUES

Dr. Archi Madhani-Patel

I hate it when people say 'playwright' Mahesh Dattani. I would rather say 'dramatist'. I prefer that word. (*Seagull Theatre Quarterly* 24)

These words, quoted in an interview, absolutely justify the creative genius of Mahesh Dattani. He is of the opinion that a play is written not only to be read but also to be enacted. He wants playwrights to understand that one should write for space and not just for page. The playwright must keep in mind that on stage certain incidents can be viewed and do not require to be spoken of, as the playwright explains: *"… you're writing for space, you're not writing for page. A lot of playwrights write for page, whereas you have to think of space.… No amount of theorizing helps there"* (*Seagull Theatre Quarterly* 22). In his workshops, the playwrights and actors work parallel, trying to find out the exact pre-requisites in each other's contributions. According to Dattani even action, be it physical or psychological, is equally important. He believes that brevity (by using pauses in between) in phrase or speech or writing in day-to-day, naturalistic conversation is also a necessity in a play. He feels

that good melodrama is a better way of understanding the craft of the trade. His plays are full of humour and suspense – humour which is wild and ironically wicked, exhibiting hypocrisy; suspense which gives away little surprises and heightens the tension to create multiple climaxes. The well-made structure of the play also gives him an opportunity to experiment with time and space, using the technique of flashback and oscillation between past and present. Hence, the various techniques used by Dattani give a very striking and dramatic effect to his plays. These techniques seem to reflect the contemporary theatre scenario. As Dattani wrote his plays for performance and not for closet drama, stage effects such as sound, lighting etc. also have an important role in almost all his plays. These various techniques are equally significant in developing the themes, characters and plot of the plays. They are mostly based on the audio-visual effect and lend a new technicality to the performance of these plays.

In *the play Where There's A Will* the father, Hasmukhlal Mehta, lingers on after death not only as an absent symbol of autocracy, but also as a ghost. It is a unique technique of keeping the character 'alive' in the play. This ghost speaks freely, like an aside, but is neither heard nor seen by other characters. The technique of ghost reminds us of the ghosts in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. But Dattani uses the ghost for comic effect:

> *Sonal lies down on the bed beside 'him'. Don't go to sleep, you silly woman. Do I have to wait for Diwali before you find out I'm gone?* (WTW 477).

Mehta does not just remain present through his will, but also as a ghost who is a witness to the changes in his family. When Mehta realises the truth at the end, he wishes that he had lived more to be the person that his family wants him to be. All through the play, Mehta talks directly to the audience, striking a chord of oneness with them. He acts as a narrator telling the audience whatever has happened, reminding us of the *Bhagavata* in Girish Karnad's plays:

> *(to the audience) Have you ever swung on a tamarind tree? Upside*

down?… You can see the world the way it really is (WTW 496).

The tamarind tree too, is the symbol of Mehta's existence in some ways. At the end, his family agrees to get the tamarind tree chopped off, denoting the end of Mehta's rule.

The play *Dance Like A Man* uses a new way to experiment with the flashback technique. The young actors playing the role of Lata and Vishwas (of the present) become the young Ratna and Jairaj (of the past) when the flashback scenes are depicted. The old Jairaj in the present becomes Amritlal (his father) in the past; to show this change of role, Jairaj (of the present) wraps a shawl around himself:

> *Jairaj wears the shawl. He is immediately fixed in a spotlight.… The living room changes into a lovely rose garden.… The characters have all changed. Jairaj becomes the father, Amritlal Parekh. Vishwas becomes Jairaj. Lata is now Ratna. Their ages remain the same as those of the previous characters they played. It is now the 1940s.* (DLM 413)

This kind of information is sufficient for the audience/readers to understand that the 'shawl' represents Amritlal. The use of the same actors for different characters demands less number of total actors in the play, which is quite convenient from the point of view of performance. It is also a symbol of the cycle of Nature, which proves that even though generations change, certain attitudes do not change, and yet there remains a difference in the thought-process of every generation. These contrasting factors work parallel. This technique enables the playwright to narrate the past in an easier way through directions or through other characters. The past and the present intermingle with each other as required and complete the plot of the play.

The last stroke of revolt comes when Jairaj sells off Amritlal's old house and moves to a flat. The play, at this point, loses the unity of time, and the technique of past intermingling with the present is no more found. The younger Ratna and Jairaj dance in the background and the older Jairaj comments on their unison in dance, and both these actions take place simultaneously. Both, past

and present become one and merge within each other, for time is never stagnant. Ratna is dead and Jairaj lives on, waiting for death. Towards the end, Jairaj's only wish is to live happily with Ratna and dance with her in harmony even after death:

> *… And we embrace. We smile. And we dance.… We dance perfectly. In unison. Not missing a step or a beat. We talk and laugh at all the mistakes we made in our previous dances.… We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God.* (DLM 447)

Dattani's concept of genius is not one-dimensional. He believes that every human being has a feminine and a masculine side to him/her, and when one fights against the other, it is a fight against the self. Each one is incomplete without the other. His philosophy brings to mind the theory of *Ardhanarishwar*, propounded as the union of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Ashok Vohra's observation of this theory is the same as Dattani's philosophy, which also explains the equality of man and woman:

> *Shiva is pervaded by the power of Parvati, and she is pervaded by the power of Shiva. So, Ardhanarishwar incorporates a synthesis of opposites and on the other integrates the opposites to show that they complement each other.… Ardhanarishwar give us the mistaken impression that it represents a being which is half female and half male. In reality, there is no such being. The symbolic representation of Ardhanarishwar is a metaphor, which represents a being the whole of which is Shiva and the whole of which is Shakti at the same time.* (10)

Tara also talks about the equality of man and woman at all levels. It is a play using flashback technique on three levels. The first is of the present, in London, where the older Chandan/Dan is working on the story of Tara. While working on it, he remembers the past – his childhood with Tara – the second level, which completes the plot. The third level is that of Dr. Thakkar narrating the reports of Tara and Chandan. Dr. Thakkar's reports fill in the gaps of the story in the play. The reports read more like medical journals, complementing and contradicting the details put forward by Patel or Chandan. The doctor's reports and the incidents of the

past take place at a parallel level, and they seem to blend with each other:

Tara: Will you come with me or do I have to go alone?

Pause.

Chandan: We'll both go.

A very low light on Dr. Thakkar, which remains till the end.

Dr. Thakkar: Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it. (TR 376)

In Act I, Chandan and Tara come on stage with a limp in their leg. It symbolizes their harmony, each one as a part of the other. At the end also they seem to be enveloped in this harmony:

A spot on the stage level. Chandan and Tara walk into it. They both have a limp, but on different legs" (TR 324)

"*Tara walks into the spot without limping. Dan also appears without the limp* (TR 380).

Erin Mee, a theatre director, quotes the observation made by one of his students:

… Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. (320)

When in Act II, Dan briefly talks to Patel about Bharati's death the audience/readers come to know of her death. The events of the present are related to those of the past and vice versa. Generally, a performance-based play could readily experiment, and in this sense Dattani has successfully utilized this technique.

The play *Bravely Fought the Queen* also works at three levels, i.e. the three Acts titled as 'The Women', 'The Men' and 'Free for All' respectively. Here, Dattani has employed a technique wherein conversations from Act I are picked up in Act II by the character on the other side of the telephone:

[Act I]

Dolly (on the phone): Hahn Jiten? Why aren't we going?… No, I swear you didn't tell me!... Well I might have been around when you spoke to them on the phone…. Let's just go out somewhere.… Don't worry. Baa has eaten…What…When did he come?… Is he coming to see us? Oh. Why not?… (Emotionally) It's too far! All of a sudden we've become 'too far' for him!… We are all here. Where would we go? (BFQ 249- 250)

[Act II]

Jiten (barking into the phone): Ya!… I told you!… Don't lie you were there when I called them… I called it off… You are staying at home tonight!… How is Baa?… Oh, by the way, Praful called… No. He said he won't come home… He said its too far…! What do you want me to do?… Yes, stay at home. Do that. (BFQ 283-285)

By the end of Act II, all the conversations of Act I and II become clear. They also hint at the events of the past. This technique reminds us of Mahesh Elkunchwar's play *Atmakatha*, where the characters pick up conversations (on telephone) from one Act and the other side of the conversation is known in the second Act. Baa's room is at an upper level. She is known only through her shadow and babbling. She narrates the events of the past whose relevance is to the present. Baa's dialogues, which are interspersed with those of the other characters, create a good deal of suspense about the past and the present.

In addition to the flashback technique, the playwright uses lighting very effectively. They are used in appropriate scenes to highlight an event or character. For instance, in *Bravely Fought the Queen* when it is Baa's turn to talk, the area at the upper level is lit, and simultaneously at the lower level, other actions take place:

Baa's area is suddenly lit. She presses a switch, but the bell cannot be heard. (BFQ 271)

On the higher level, Lalitha enters Baa's room very hesitantly. (BFQ 271)

Simultaneously, the spotlight in Baa's area goes off. Jiten enters from the

toilet, wiping his face with his handkerchief. (Q 272)

There are other lightings in the play such as the kitchen-light and the back door, which represent the hidden, deep-rooted (sexual) desires. Whenever Dolly moves to the kitchen and towards the back door, that area is lit up, referring to her illusory relationship with the young cook:

Alka exits. The kitchen light comes on. The bell rings. The general lights start fading out slowly.…

Lalitha moves to her. Dolly looks at her for a moment, and then slowly walks towards the kitchen. (BFQ 263)

These minor details of direction have to be understood, as they become symbols of the desires of the characters. At the performance level, these techniques can make a play very effective.

On A Muggy Night in Mumbai is entirely about juxtaposing the past, the present and the thoughts of an individual like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Again, the play makes use of three levels – one side of the stage depicts the living room of Kamlesh, the other side of the stage is Kamlesh's bedroom that explores the relationship of Kamlesh and Ed; the most important area that connects these two sides is the central portion, which is a raised platform. This platform is used by characters to express their inner thoughts and feelings. Hence, the events seen from the viewpoint of the character who is speaking his/her thoughts on this raised level, is seen in the present context. Then, the whole play makes complete sense. In Act II, this technique is elaborately used, where Kamlesh, Ed and Kiran interact with each other in different times and situations:

Kamlesh and Kiran move to another level of the empty area. Ed continues to address them as before.… Ed mimes dancing with Kiran.… Kamlesh moves to the third level. (OMN 90)

Kiran dances, while Ed moves to Kamlesh's level.

Ed (to Kamlesh): Look, I don't know how to tell you this. But it just isn't working out.

Kamlesh moves to the level where Kiran was earlier.

Kamlesh: Kiran, I want you to be happy.…

Kiran: Oh! I feel a little dizzy. (Mimes dancing with her head resting on Ed's shoulder)…

Ed: Let's not get too emotional. Think for yourself. There is no real future.

Kiran (mimes accepting a glass of water): Oh, thank you!…

Kamlesh: Well, yes there is someone special I am seeing. (OMN 91-92)

This technique of two or three people talking at the same time may seem to create confusion. But the conversations are to be seen in the context of their situations and the audience/readers have to relate the dialogues to the characters and situations, and understand the emotions behind the dialogues. These conversations also provide a background to the events of the present. When each line is taken separately and put in the relevant situation, the plot becomes easily comprehensible. This kind of juxtaposition of events also helps to heighten the suspense about the past and the present. This technique can be called a new kind of flashback technique on stage.

In *Final Solutions* the Mob/Chorus is not only a character but also a technique, which works at multiple levels. This technique exposes the attitudes of Hindus and Muslims towards each other. It acts as a narrator of the general public's psyche. Instead of using narratives or stage directions in parenthesis, Dattani has used this technique. The Mob/Chorus stamps the sticks to show aggression, shouts or chants to narrate a particular kind of situation:

Chorus 4 and 5 continue to question, 'Why should they?', 'Why would they?', 'It could have been an accident', while Chorus 1 mutters, 'no accident, no accident…', and Chorus 2 and 3 continue, 'The stone that hit our God was no accident, the knife that slit the poojari's stomach was no accident.' Soon they overlap and say it together. Chorus 1, 2 and 3 build their parts to a crescendo. They all finish together on the word 'accident'. (FS 168)

They wear the masks of Hindus or Muslims to represent the

concerned community. They wear both the masks turn by turn, which makes us realize that the Mob/Chorus has no particular religion. It is only a crowd of frenzied people: "…*The Mob/Chorus picks up the Hindu masks on a slow drumbeat*" (FS 178). "*Two of the Chorus now have Muslim masks*" (FS 179). The use of masks has been in the folk theatre of India and the primitive theatre of the Greeks for ages. Masks help to hide the real identities (also seen in Karnad's *Hayavadana*). Indian dances like Kathakali also use various types of masks as symbols. Dattani has used masks in this play in a modern context, as a satire on politics, religion and people. He points out that these masks, which distinguish one community from another, can be dangerous if used negatively. But if they get mixed up, they can create harmony.

Another technique in this play is the juxtaposing of the past and the present. Daksha and Hardika merge into each other's time spans, and seem to be experiencing the same emotions at that particular moment. When dialogues of Daksha and Hardika (young and the old) are put together, they make complete sense. The past haunts the present:

Hardika: They hurt me so much.

Daksha : Oh God! Why do I have to suffer?

Hardika: My own family. Because of them.

Daksha : I just wanted them to be my friends.

Hardika: I would have been so happy if I hadn't met them. (FS 223)

The technique of 'flashback', merging of the past and the present and heightening of the suspense is found in most of the plays of Dattani. These techniques seem to be included in the plays from the performance point of view. But as discussed earlier, Dattani writes plays, firstly, to be performed. Hence, these innovative techniques lend a new perspective to the performances of modern plays. It can be a 'new awakening' in the scenario of contemporary theatre. In the context of the above discussion, it can be concluded that Dattani occupies an important place in Indian drama in English. Combining literary and theatre expertise, the dramatist reveals the

courage to experiment with both theme and technique.

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14

THE 'IDEA' OF VIOLENCE: VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *VULTURES*

Dr. Archi Madhani-Patel

Violence cannot be a spectacle. If it is a recurring factor, it is so because violence is around us, it is within us, our times happen to be violent times. It is bound to reflect in our creative work in some form or the other, even if it is ugly and unpleasant. (Interview with *Ank*)

Vijay Tendulkar has been awarded the Nehru Fellowship for the study of emerging patterns of violence. He believes that violence cannot be totally eliminated from any society; a human being is born with aggressive and sexual instincts. He never consciously wrote to shock the readers as he says in Free Press Journal:

I never wrote anything shocking. It may have shocked the middle-class mentality, but that is because of their ignorance. They are not aware of what is happening around them or do not see anything wrong in themselves. If I have portrayed animal instincts in man, then most of the people are like that and they do not want to accept this harsh reality.(Free Press Journal)

This stark reality recurs in the form of characters, families, situations, relationships etc. In his plays the themes of Tendulkar's plays are social and political. Social themes include exploring of issues such as human behaviour, psychology, physical violence etc. His themes basically deal with real-life situations. He has been accused of using sex and violence very liberally in his plays. He believes that violence is a part of one's life. As Ashis Nandy points out:

> *His consistent, prolonged engagement with human aggression has made him one of the most distinguished social theorists of violence in the country.… Even when violence is not ostensibly his theme, it casts its shadow on his characters… By bringing their world close to ours through his creative powers he has shaped the way we look at ourselves.* (ix)

The themes of Tendulkar's plays, firstly, are made obvious through his characters. He considers his characters to be in the forefront in the structure of the plays, and their development leads on to the working of the themes, plot, dialogues or style. The social, political or socio-political themes are developed in his plays through his characters; hence to discuss his themes, one needs to discuss the characters first. As Tendulkar tells Gokhale: "*I was never able to begin writing my play with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to have my characters first with me… living persons leading me into the thick of their lives where they would give me the theme*" (80) Tendulkar's plays reveal the social differences among men and women, gender bias being prominent in the male-dominated society. But the plays do not limit themselves to this issue; they also go on to reveal the situation of an individual in an authoritative society and family.

Tendulkar also talks about human relationships within and outside the family. He talks of the relationship between man and woman, and between individual and society. The characters of Tendulkar's plays are real human beings drawn from real life incidents. He never romanticizes his characters or situations. He attacks middle-class pseudo-morality, craving for material gains and comforts, not being able to shed off the original completely, nor being able to take on the new identity. For his characters,

existence is full of duality, artificiality, hypocrisy and a split self. Tendulkar's women characters are victims of male/family/society dominance. They have to struggle to survive and create their own identity. Tendulkar sees women as exploited and marginalized in a patriarchal set-up, and as one who must marry and inherit 'family values'. Another concern is that of the family; the family is the pillar of society and nation. The family in Tendulkar's plays is shown as a political unit, which gives different subject positions to men and women. His 'family' is patriarchal where all men are superior to women. Maya Pandit observes that: "… *The family in Tendulkar's plays is essentially nuclear. In this family, women are equated with the 'inner' or the 'private' domain, whereas the 'public' domain is reserved for men*" (8). Hence, all his characters emerge as symbols of rebellion against the social norms in some way or the other.

The latent theme of violence – though not overtly, yet covertly – is of utmost significance in all of Tendulkar's plays. Violence is the way of life, as the playwright believes, and all his plays, have violence hidden in them. Tendulkar writes in a humanistic mode. Human being is the centre of all activities. Hence, his plays can be categorized as humanistic and naturalistic, depicting the stark realities of life. Tendulkar accepts this category and tells Bhave: "*I write about the life around me. If it is accepted that I depict human life from my point of view, then I am ready even to accept that I have borrowed when actually I have not*" (CIT 145). One cannot help but believe that the works of this playwright have been his interpretations of life as he has observed it.

Vultures (1971) (originally titled as *Gidhade*) was actually written fourteen years earlier. It is of an entirely different nature and proves the genius of Vijay Tendulkar. Girish Karnad has compared this play to "*a bomb being blasted in a crowded place*." The play had to face many controversies and problems due to free use of sex and violence in it. Tendulkar has said that this play was born out of a personal problem in his life. The seeds of this play were sown during his youth when he felt absolutely secure about his life; he feels that at such a time one is not aware of what violence or sex is.

During this period, Tendulkar had come to Mumbai and tried to get a job and a house. The real inspiration to write this play came to him when he closely observed the world of drunkards around him. Furthermore, while working with a daily in his early years, he was shrewdly and cleverly dismissed from the job. The person, who helped in his dismissal, was one of his colleagues, whom he also considered a good friend. Tendulkar was shocked to know that a person, whom one trusts could betray in such a manner. Yet, he pitied the condition of that friend – of being helpless, of doing an ordinary job in spite of a brilliant career. Though this was an ordinary event, it was quite significant for the playwright because it inspired him to write this play. During the same time he was writing a play for Rangayan, but due to such disturbances could not concentrate on the subject he had chosen. Then all of a sudden, he got the idea for the play *Vultures*. First, he wrote the soliloquy for the illegitimate brother, Rajninath, and gradually the rest of the picture started becoming clear. He could create the other characters then. The character of Ramakant was also based on a real-life person whom Tendulkar knew; this person suffered from insecurity. In spite of Tendulkar's earlier dissatisfaction and nervousness, the play was completed; it was almost a 'cathartic process'. *Vultures* does not have humour of any kind; it is very morbid in the portrayal of action and characters. Each character has a social role and language of his/ her own. Tendulkar says that he used to hear these characters in their own language, and he too, talked to them. And suddenly, all the characters took shape in his mind. The title of the play is metaphorical for the characters whose only intentions are to feed upon the flesh of others. The playwright exposes the degeneration of a family in a middle class milieu, where brothers beat their father and sister, and even abort her child. He portrays the sister's gross sensuality and the free use of liquor as an indication of decaying human values.

But Tendulkar has also shown some goodness and sensitivity in the play through the characters of Rama and Rajninath. Theirs is the only genuine and humane relationship that is in contrast to the rest of the play. Rajninath is a poet and his poems reveal the

situation that the rest of the family is going through. He is like a narrator of the play. N. S. Dharan sums up the central idea of this play in a few lines:

> *'Gidhade'… stands apart from the other plays of Vijay Tendulkar in that it is a play which displays… the unmitigated violence arising from drunkenness, greed, and immorality. Furthermore it is a play built on contrasting situations. On the one hand there is a gruesome portrayal of man's greed and on the other, there is a portrayal of tender love. When the agents of these opposing qualities meet, a conflict of great dramatic significance results.* (73)

This play has multiple scene structures and many of the scenes are replete with poems. Today, the play is judged with objectivity and is considered one of the best works of Tendulkar.

His plays poignantly bring out the suffering of women, especially in middle class society. These plays become a medium to show the authority of society, especially over women; a society in which individuals are not allowed to speak for themselves. The women characters of his plays seem to have lost their individual identity and realize it only when the men overpower them. Tendulkar has portrayed his women characters in pairs, giving each one different traits of behaviour. Yet, underneath these differences, there lies a similarity about the interpretation of life, a common truth that the lives of both are commanded by men for mere pleasure. The weaker women realise their worth when the stronger women push them towards the harsh reality – of self-existence. Thus, the latter becomes the other side, kind of an alter ego of the former.

The same kind of treatment of women is seen in the play *Gidhade*, literally meaning Vultures. The men are like vultures, the birds of prey, hunting the impoverished and meek women. This play is full of violence not only at an emotional level, but also at the physical and mental levels. It depicts the issue of the cut-throat lust for power, and even women are not spared from it. The playwright uses the imagery of the scavenging bird and the meek little sparrow. Rama and Manik form the pair of women in this

play who are somewhat apparent in their internal contrast. Rama is the 'sparrow', caught between the vultures Pappa Pitale, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik. She is the only compassionate character, along with Rajninath, the illegitimate son, in the whole play. Theirs is the only humane relationship that asserts hope in life. Rama is married to Ramakant for twenty-two years, yet is childless. She desperately wants to be a mother, but she cannot bear the 'seed' because of Ramakant's drunkenness, thus forcing her to be barren. Her yearning for motherhood is described by Rajninath in his poem: *"… After that living impotence / Of twenty-two endless years /… But she only knew / One longing, /… The need to swell with fruit /… Each womb-bearing woman's right by birth…"* (VS 202-205). Rajninath compares Rama's innocence to a doe, especially an untouched one. She looks after the house and the family; she bears all the evil acts of her in-laws, but never utters a word. When she comes to know that the gardener has not got his pay, she feels pity for him, but cannot help him as she is suppressed. Rama represents women who are totally dominated by the family and have to remain silent.

Ramakant takes Rama to all kinds of doctors and saints with the hope that a miracle would help Rama to become pregnant. Rama is tired of such trips because she knows that there is no biological problem in her, yet she suffers silently. In this play, Tendulkar portrays the victimization of a woman in a family devoid of love and hope. Later on, Rama speaks out her condition of helplessness in front of Rajninath, the only ray of hope in her life. She tells him that for many years she has endured everything without a tear and without uttering a word of protest. She has suffered pain that is not a result of her own deeds. But she can no longer do so. She tells him that her womb is absolutely fertile: *"… This womb's healthy and sound… I was born to become a mother. This soil's rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root. If the seed's soaked in poison… then why blame the soil?"* (VS 241) Rama tells Rajninath that in the olden days women who used to commit Sati, died only once. But she burnt every moment, died everyday of her life. She speaks of her wish to run away from the house and be free. Then suddenly she controls herself and says that she is very happy and should not

talk such nonsense. Rajninath comprehends her sorrow and embraces her. Though Rama tries to free herself, it is a very meek attempt; she likes being in his embrace and feels secure and loved. Needless to say, she becomes pregnant without Ramakant's knowledge that the child is not his. Rama is very happy with the pregnancy and tells Ramakant that they should leave the house, for she knows the atmosphere of the house is full of despair and hatred. She is even ready to be a slave, starve or do anything to be out of that house: *"… Let's get out of this overpowering house.… Will you listen to me?… for once? I won't ever tell you to do anything again.… I'll stay just as I have till this day. Mouth shut, head bent"* (VS 251). But her husband silences her, saying that no one in his family would want to listen to a woman's advice. Rama is not allowed to have a voice because she is a woman. It is immaterial whether she can live happily or not. When Umakant tells Ramakant that the child that Rama is carrying is not his, initially, he does not believe it. When the truth comes out, he is so angry that he wants to kick the child out. Meanwhile Manik, his sister, aborts Rama's child to avenge Ramakant for aborting her child. The last flicker of hope in Rama's life is also lost and she becomes lifeless like a stone: *"… A statue of emotions chilled to stone. /… Left her a stark insanity of stone / Frozen from her tears. / Empty of pain / And empty of desires…"* (VS 201-206). Rama has been yearning to be a mother; it is the only source of joy for her. But the power games of her family kill her unborn child, and in some way kill her too. When the house is mortgaged, she silently goes away with her husband. Her pain is expressed in Rajninath's poem: *"… Alive, she followed after / That living death, her master, With the dogged loyalty / Of a barren beast…"* (VS 201-202). Rama, like a 'true wife' follows her husband even after enduring so much, and Rajninath feels both sad and surprised at this. Sarat Babu notes that: *"… Rajninath fructifies the womb of Rama while Ramakant aborts it. Thus, in the play, they symbolize love and lovelessness respectively*" (142)

Manik, on the other hand, is a contrast to Rama, yet is not free from the tortures of male-dominated society. Manik has lived in a family where vices are considered more important than virtues,

where liquor flows like a river and abuses are uttered in everyday language. Manik is in her mid-thirties, drinks and smokes right from the morning, is not married and sleeps around with different men. Her relationship with men is only out of her lust and her greed for money. She feels that her desire to buy a new necklace is more important than the gardener's pay. She does not trust anybody in her family – neither her father, nor her two brothers – as she knows that they are also equally greedy and can go to any extent to extort money out of somebody. She does not even trust Rama and tells her: "*So I should leave it (door) open, should I? So you can come and strangle me, all of you? It's because I take care that I've survived in this house! Think it's human beings that live here?*" (VS 207). Tendulkar has endowed her with cleverness, but she uses it only for wrong purposes. She is smart enough to realise that there is some more money left with Pappa. She helps her brothers willingly to extract this money from their father, and then drive him out of the house. But she, being a woman, cannot escape the tortures of patriarchal society. When there is no money left, her brothers decide to blackmail the Raja of Hondur, Manik's latest love, to extract money from him. Manik is against this, but they do not want her to meet him, so they break and fracture her leg as a gesture of helping her: *"… our little Manik's a blockhead… We must help her. Must give her a hand, what?*" (VS 236). They break Manik's leg as if they are breaking some object. Soon they receive the news that the Raja of Hondur has died of a heart attack, and all their plans fail. In their anger and thirst for revenge, they decide to abort Manik's baby, which is the Raja's: *"… Let's abort him! Let's knock him bloody out!… Let little Manik scream till she bloody bursts!*" (VS 247). Thus, the two men gang up and plan to torture a woman who is helpless. They do not think even once that Manik is their own sister; they make her abortion a game, as when Umakant says that Ramakant should kick Manik's belly because he himself did not have football practice, the latter replies: *"… I'll give such a kick, he'll fly up to the bloody skies…*" (VS 248). They manage to abort Manik's child and drive her out of the house. This scene is one of the goriest in the play, where Manik runs with a fractured leg and a bloodstained sari. Even though she

is evil, one cannot help feeling pity for this woman who has to endure such physical tortures at the hands of her brothers. There is no doubt that when she aborts Rama's child, she is avenging Ramakant and not Rama. Gokhale rightly observes: "*The contrast between Manik and Rama is black and white. Yet, with all Manik's crudeness, she is only a female vulture, and for that she will ultimately move us to some compassion"* (85). Tendulkar shows that a woman, of any stature, of any kind, has to endure the norms of man-made society; in some way or the other she is snubbed and overpowered by men who want to gnaw at her physically, mentally and emotionally.

Rajninath, too, suffers; and he suffers the most because he is an outcaste not only from his family, but also from society. He is an illegitimate son and is allowed no rights over anything. He is a loner, despising the environment he sees in his father's family. Hence, when his father offers to give him money so as to win him over to his side, Rajninath scowls at him and asks him to go away. He is a failure which is not his fault, and in a heart-rending speech he tells Rama: *"… Why did you tell all this to someone whose own life's a burden to him? Someone as barren as yourself?… I am a failure myself"* (VS 243). Tendulkar points out the failure of Rajninath in a very subtle manner, and he too becomes a minority in his own way. *Vultures* depicts the picture of a family, which is completely violent and murderous. It is a rat-race for the family members – to cut each other's throats for money and break the family apart. This play portrays the disintegration of a family, where the outward façade has also decayed.

And so, the theme of violence in *Vultures* can also be related to contemporary times. It may sometimes seem a little difficult to find an exact relevance of it in modern times because conditions have altered. Yet, they have not been eradicated totally. Issues have merely changed colour, but even today solutions need to be found. There are some changes in the roles of women or of any individual in society of present days; society, today, has become more tolerant in many ways. But the problems do not cease to exist. Tendulkar's belief that whatever is the condition, violence will still exist at

some or the other level, proves itself evermore.

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15

RETRACING LEFTOVERS OF LEFTIST THEATRE IN RETROSPECT THROUGH HABIB TANVIR

Armeen Kaur Ahuja

Culture which created the methodological text of *Natyashastra,* is an old man with experiences to share for its changed face. India had tête-à-tête with its dramaturgical past in late nineteenth century amidst the foreign governments' crafty popularization of English theatre. Awakened consciousness of oppressed public was articulated in their plays celebrating ancient glory and plays protesting against contemporary conditions[1]. Post 1857 period witnessed productions like *Neel Darpan, Samudra Darpan* and *Chakar Darpan*, plays crying out the exploitation suffered by Indigo planters, seamen on British owned ships and tea plantation workers of Assam[2]. This first voice against British Capitalism, the first unconscious comradeship between Indian people, recognition of working class and resultant unification went long way to create Leftist theatre ethos in milieu of Indian Dramaturgy, completely transforming the procedural Proscenium teachings of *Natyashastra.*

Habib Tanvir was product of high tide of this cultural Left

movement which was germinated in late nineteenth century and was nurtured through emerging Marxist ideas in 1940s. Disappointed with failure of Gandhi's second Civil Disobedience phase, educated middle class youth began exploring Marxist ideas which lead to coming together of anti-imperialist writers and formation of Progressive Writers Association (PWA, 1936) and later Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA, 1943). Tanvir was part of IPTA, at time when Bombay was interspersed with Royal Indian Navy mutiny and militant working class actions. IPTA performed plays on ant-imperialist themes, on class struggle, on the need of communal amity[3] with idea of creating equitable society and carrying "people's revolution" to the streets, fields, factories and to wider mass consciousness[4]. Tanvir remained in close contact with CPI but did not become member of the party. This was Tanvir's first radicalization born in the locale of floating leftist ideas of middle class actors and party members of IPTA and CPI. IPTA was created to reach beyond "middle class intellectuals and few literate sections of lower middle, poor peasant and working classes."[5] however, in initial years IPTA productions remained excluded of rural poor and local languages, with limited target audience which gradually started growing more inclusive. But Leftist consciousness was in full swing as a pan-India ideology, with folk and local theatre restructuring the methodology of conventional theatre, and gaining political velocity in form of *Jatra* in Bengal, *Tamasha* in Maharashtra and *Burra Katha* in Andhra Pradesh. Along native theatre, translations of Brecht became popular choice for raising social consciousness, introducing Epic Theatre to Indian Theatre.[6]

As destiny would map the cultural history, India's Leftist cultural movement was aborted short, when it was just ripening, with independence and coming of Congress in power. Tanvir had consciously taken decision to be part of IPTA in 1943, he had concluded "…that even an actor has a social responsibility, which you can bring in with your characters. But cinema did not provide that sort of freedom."[7] The exhilaration of independence wore off in 1950s, when the nation had encountered food crisis,

unemployment and was beginning to expose bare threaded weak political structure. The loss of political theatre, which voiced the people's grievances was lamented by Tanvir, he declared "Uday Shankar, Ravi Shankar, Narendra Sharma…were all part of the IPTA movement. They considered themselves soldiers of the Party, weather they were members or not. But when there was a divide in the party, they did not understand what to do, because IPTA was cultural squad of the party. It did not have an independent policy. People were lost. With no one to show the way, one by one they abandoned the path. The 1948 Allahabad Conference was death of IPTA; the funeral was conducted in 1956.[8]" The party was an all inclusive unit, chiefly originated from the educated Bourgeois of PWA, now came to a turning point where the members were rethinking the dominant ideology of the nation, the members could not take a collective position in relation the character of Government and its noticeable representation of "national Bourgeoisie" ideation. Qamar Azad Hashmi notes that"…several of the left wing groups who had participated in the Freedom struggle and who had spent time in British jails-after India became free they accepted copper plaques and became the right hand of ruling establishment.[9]" The disillusioned, hazy state of Leftist theatre is the creative core of Habib Tanvir, what happened in the cultural history that Marxist ideas which once were rapidly translated into Telugu to be read, and the Brechtian Epic Theatre which was culturally tampered and served to the audience, came to a frozen state? And remained untouched, in the transient milieu of Indian dramaturgy?

Tanvir was one of the lost men he mentioned in his lamentation after the collapse of IPTA. An incident of 1948 captures the volatile power of leftist theatre to destabilize the right wing center:

> *Immediately on our return, there was to be some kind of protest and a procession in which the PWA and IPTA both had to march to all the working-class areas. We were given the mandate to continue with slogans and marching and if the police stopped or attacked us, not to fight or surrender, but to save ourselves and continue as far as possible… I went*

and started living with Vijay Kishore Dubey…There was a great search on, 'Where's Habib?' One day Surender Ahuja, who was in the IPTA and a great friend of mine, came and said, 'So here you are; but where were you?'

I said, 'Here'

'Why?'

'I'm underground.'

'Who asked you to go underground?'

'We were asked to protect ourselves and it appeared to me only logical to save myself from the police by going underground.'

'And what's this bandage?'

'I got hit with a lathi.'

'Why not show it to a doctor?'

'For the same reason, I'll get caught.'

He said, 'What delusion. Nobody is looking for you. They had a list of all the prominent leaders and they've caught them. IPTA is defunct, you've got to work. The Party, from inside the jail, has said to catch hold of Habib and keep the organization going.'[10]

Tanvir directed IPTA from 1948-50, but the independent India was not as independent, the right wing new government was troubled with IPTA's possible power which had propagated "people's revolution" in British Raj. Lost with the collapsed IPTA, he was looking for a motive. It wouldn't be incorrect to say that he was never a staunch Leftist in his ideas. Immediate time space in independent India was a period of violent clash of the Right and Left, Congress party was trying to wrest the claim of self-rule and nationalism out of the hands of British and traditional rulers, the communist party was busy staging secular and radical processions.[11] Tanvir was fully aware of political repercussions of Leftist theatre produced by IPTA, he knew the power of voicing the people, his idea of "social responsibility of an actor" did not mean performing for the disadvantaged. He had hung onto IPTA for its creative

space and freedom, now he moved to Delhi, abandoning Bombay, leftist street theatre and tempting opportunity of joining Film industry like his colleagues. His arrival in Delhi was driven by Urdu, thinking Delhi to be an appropriate platform for execution of the language. A play with Okhla villagers was made; *Agra Bazar* was a success with Nazir Akbarabadi's poetry. The play is devoid of clear leftist social issues; unlike IPTA productions it has no forefront of developing the disadvantaged public, but has humanist echoes of Nazir's poetry. The play nonetheless altered conventional proscenium procedure and moulded Brecht's Epic theatre. A market place was created on stage and in the auditorium, where the audience was encouraged to have free movement mingling the stage and seating arena. This polity, however, came unintentionally, Tanvir shares that "This (Agra Bazar) play was first done with students and teachers and the neighbouring Okhla villagers used to come and sit and watch rehearsals on the open air stage. So one day I told them that instead of watching from there, they could go on the stage and sit and watch, because *bhalu naach ho raha hai kabhi, kahhi Bandar ka tamasha ho raha hai* (because at times there was a performing bear, or a monkey dance). So they did that, that's how they became part of the play."[12] Tanvir was now a known theatre practitioner and had managed to take a decision and go to RADA,(Britain) for studying theatre. But how dense can be a man's decision who had briefly thought to devote himself to Children's theatre, a least politically radical form of dramaturgy, just prior to the success of *Agra Bazar?* Tanvir nonetheless left India, creating a vacuum in Indian Dramatics. He was the man with IPTA legacy and was still lost, the new political space of India promoted negligence for social issues[13]. Indian theatre was years away from foundation of *Jana Natya Manch* (1973), other activists from IPTA had scattered, with some succumbing to right wing in power, some joining film industry, others trying to make ends meet. In this infertile political space was born National Bourgeoisie theatre, which later became giant called Modern Indian Theatre.

Urban theatre was sprouting in the 1950s, it began peeping through the confused class figure of the nation. Unlike slave India,

where the dichotomy was simple, new India was giving birth to the upcoming Bourgeoisie. Mid 50s saw the rise of "*Box wallah culture* (English language theatre)[14]" and early 60s saw a tide of Bourgeoisie theatre advocates in Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, writing in native languages. They were the new educated young of free India, struggling not with exploitation with capitalist rulers, but more troubled with faux bourgeoisie morals, and consequent limp state of the nation. Badal Sircar's *Indrajit* reflects "the loneliness of post-Independence urban youth with dismaying accuracy[15]" New bourgeois language was the same old oppressor's language; English language came with its snobbery and license of providing a rehearsal space, advertisements and food for the theatre practitioners. Girish Karnad's plays see the extension of middle-class' educated ideas, he owes his inspiration to C. Rajagopalchari's *Mahabharata* in 1951, and ventures out to bring forth the existential crises of modern men through native mythic lens. His texts like *Hayavadana* deal with identity crises, which is crux of modern Bourgeois ideology. Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure* deals with a similar pathos, which is tragic, but far removed from Leftist class ethos, and their desperate outcries calling for equality and freedom from exploitation. Post independence bourgeoisie was in luxury and comfort, like Badal Sircar's protagonists, they had time to plunge in philosophical depths of exploring their identity. *Sharad* is a middle aged armchair-intellectual, a closet rebel, who like the protagonist of *Shesh Nei* ,wrestles with his lack of responsibility in doing something concrete for the less fortunate.[16] Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh ka ek Din (1958)* ends in frustration, with unsatisfied indecisive protagonists lamenting their decisions and abruptly leaving their chosen paths. Tendulkar's plays are categorized as nihilistic[17], an idea that feeds on Bourgeoisie pessimism. Heidegger states that existentialism rises through inward gaze of the thinker[18], a phenomena exclusive to Indian theatre of 1960s. Tendulkar's *Benare* has a monologue charged with individual's liberty, *Savitri's* fails looking inward to identify something wrong in the *air we (characters) breathe,* While protagonist of Sircar's *Baki itihas* takes radical nihilist decision of committing suicide. Unfortunately

Nationalist Bourgeoisie had engulfed the political volatility inseminated by Leftist practitioners and thinkers. Sircar did not believe in Marxist- Leninist principle that theatre must lead to revolution; he was merely exposing the bitter realities. While Tendulkar was trying to shake Bourgeois ideology, and others were no different. It remained an era where floppy protest theatre was performed by the middle class intellectuals, for the middle class.

Tanvir, a former member of radical Leftist IPTA came back from RADA in this era. He had come with a realization that RADA's methodological approach was futile in India. He created *Miti ki gadi* in 1958, a colloquial adaptation of Sanskrit play, after the play he "was thrown out"[19] and was trying to fit in the newly formed theatre space of India. He had got six actors from Bhopal with him, in an effort to make new production. But the way slave India had made way for its expressions to be heard, breaking the then conventional English theatre and debunking the *Natyashatra,* was nearly impossible to be found in Modern Indian Theatre. It was a time when theatre became a commodity for sale and confined in the auditorium.[20] Street theatre had disappeared and Bourgeoisie theatre flourished in confined walls of auditorium. In the consumerist theatre scenario entered Ford Foundation, a major Cultural funder giving grants to Indian Playwrights to specifically work with folk art-form. It was then when Tanvir reached out to "Nacha" of Chhattisgarh, His effort was not Left oriented, the motive did not lie in making the rural class perform to make their demands heard, but because they were the kernel of folk art traditions. While inception of "Naya theatre" had begun, India's CPI was disintegrating further weakening Left representation, with possible ideological conflict and shadowed clash of Congress supporters and dissenters. A section was drawn into favouring Right winged Congress and the rest formed CPI-M (Communist party of India, Marxist). Tanvir was jobless in 1972 and accepted membership at Rajya Sabha, siding with the powerful Right center, ironically a man who was running away trying to save himself from being jailed in honeymoon period of free India, was now campaigning for the same rulers. Tanvir's productions went

smoothly, he says in an interview:

> *By now we were getting enough money…There was a Department of Culture subsidy for professional theatres, and in 1973 we got it. It used to be Rs 300 a month each for 10 actors…Last year it became Rs 1500 per head…*[21]

Tanvir, like the English elite groups of 60s, was making productions funded on luxury provided by the Right winged ruling Party. His group was "regularly invited to every major theatre festival in India, and to the festivals of India that Indira Gandhi began to sell abroad."[22] He was creating plays on social issues for the Government; he was commissioned to do a play on Literacy by department of Culture, and play on Family by Madhya Pradesh Government. While Tanvir was participating in what came to be called as his period of brief flirtation with Congress,[23] Badal Sircar had abandoned his satisfaction with mere exposing-of-bitter-realities-and-injustices and had ventured on the streets with eruption of Naxalbari Movement, He created *Satabadi* and moved away from elevated stage to intimate theatre (Third theatre) with his newly formed theatre group. Jan Natya Manch was born in 1973, backed by CPI-M, carrying the anti fascist culture and Safdar Hashmi's radical expressions in form of Street Theatre. This could have been history repeating itself; yet again the methodological theatre formats were twisted and broken to reach out to people. However, Tanvir remained unaffected for long time, though he did write plays with Hashmi, he was not the one who was performing in *chawls* and running to save his life. Tanvir had defended Emergency, an action that espoused the latent Leftists of the nation. Post-Emergency India witnessed activist theatre sprouting in various parts of India, from *Janam* in Delhi to Gurcharan Singh's road shows in Punjab among peasants, Prasanna's Samudaya Movement in Karnataka involving students and artists, *Koothu-p-pattari* street form in Tamil Nadu to Maoist charged theatre in Andhra Pradesh.[24] It seemed like arrival of New Leftist cultural phase, Which like the old one, came to an abrupt end with Safdar Hashmi's demise and resultant tumult.

Tanvir, like many theatre practitioners was agitated by Hashmi's demise; he wrote a play *Muzrim number Gyarah* a short comedy on the tragedy. Left sensibilities had been shook, and Right in its diplomatic advances swallowed the bitter mushrooming of protests and reactionary theatre. Recalling the performance of *Halla bol*, Hashmi's final play performed for factory workers in 1989, is assurance of threat that comradeship produces for the ruling establishment. With Safdar Hashmi's demise, a cultural movement lay frozen. Tendulkar's play like *Footpath ke samrat* (2000) has symbol of class ladder and desire for elevation, but unlike the direct approach of Leftist street theatre, which ventures on street to encounter the oppressors and instigate a revolution, Bourgeoisie theatre approaches the issue in round-about manner, it is founded on the luxury of Sircar's middle class protagonists who dwell on how to make their lives more productive. This touch-and-go doesn't trouble the established order, satires may come and go, but pregnancy of direct urge transferred through Third theatre[25] is absent in Bourgeoisie stylistic techniques. Leftist cultural movements are still sprouting and hushed in parts of India, they appear and disappear in Bourgeoisie intellectual conferences, but only national cultural comradeship, akin to IPTA of slave India can put forth the outcries of exploitation at national level; Bourgeoisie is too tamed to shake the establishment.

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16

PRESENTATION OF VICTIMIZATION OF WOMAN THROUGH INNOVATIVE SYMBOLS AND TECHNIQUE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

Dr. Mangesh Madhukar Gore

Silence! The Court is in Session is an epoch making play that rocked the Marathi stage, because of its innovative technique and bold way of presentation. One of the main features of the modernism is the plentiful use of symbols. Using symbols in literature is not a new concept. They are in use of ages. The quality of a symbol depends on the effectiveness of its use. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, they have been used so, and, that is why, we need to know them better.

A symbol is a sign, place or thing, which represents something else. Gold, for example, is a symbol of rare and precious things. Rose is the symbol of love and beauty. White dove is the symbol of piece. Green is the symbol of rawness and affluence. Elephant is the symbol of strength and deer of beauty and agility (quickness). The symbols are used to express deeper meaning of what the author

wants to say. *Silence! The Court is in Session* uses them to a very good effect. They make the play more fascinating, more suggestive, more meaningful and more tempting. So it is necessary to see what they are and how they are put to use.

The most important symbol in the play is *the green cloth parro.* When Raghu Samant enters with Miss Leela Benare on the stage, he carries with him a green cloth parrot. Benare asks him about it and he answers that it is a toy for his nephew. We naturally do not think anything special about it then. But as the play progresses, the parrot beings to assume importance and it becomes an important symbol.

A parrot is a domestic bird. It is kept in a cage, that is, in a prison from where there is no escape. He is a trapped creature. Similar is the life of Miss Leela Benare, trapped in her pregnancy. First her maternal uncle trapped her and then Damle trapped her. The toy parrot is not in a cage and so is not Benare at the moment. But there is a song in the play which described the sparrow that has lost her nest and is seeking it. Miss Benare has also lost her nest and is seeking one. The parrot in the song offers her his cage and in the same manner Miss Leela Benare is seeking a home for her coming child and that amounts to nothing but seeking a cage. The sparrow in the son would not lose her freedom for the golden cage, but Miss Benare is ready to lose her freedom, it she gets a cage, a prison, a house. The type of cage does not matter. She is ready to sacrifice her freedom and get into, a cage for her infant.

The parrot in Samant's hand is a toy and so is Miss Benare a toy. First her maternal uncle played with this toy and forsook it when matters came to marriage. Then Prof. Damale, a man married and having five children, played with this toy and when Miss Benare became pregnant washed his hands off her. In the mock trial, her teammates make a toy of her and play with her, without caring for what she must be feeling. In each case it is a heartless game in which this toy of a woman is made a scapegoat.

The parrot accompanies Benare as a guide to the hall. The green cloth parrot, introduced at the very beginning of the action,

does not just remain a toy parrot as the play progresses. It acquires symbolic meaning. A parrot is a domestic bird. It is kept in a cage, that is, in a prison from where there is no escape. He is a trapped creature. Similar is the life of Miss Leela Benare, entrapped in her pregnancy. The toy parrot is not in a cage and so is not Benare at the moment. But she is seeking a home for her coming child and that amounts to nothing but seeking a cage. She is ready to lose her freedom, if she gets a cage, a prison, a house. It does not matter, what cage it is. She is ready to sacrifice her freedom and get into the cage for her infant. This resemblance has been underlined in what Samant does at the end. He leaves the green cloth parrot near Benare, who does not react to his call and leaves her alone like the parrot-the green cloth parrot without a home.

The two other symbols that draw our attention are *two* of the three *songs* that Miss Benare sings in the play. One of them is an English poem and the other is the translation of a Marathi poem of the famous poet Balkavi. The Marathi poem is not used as it is but has been adapted. It is interesting to see what they mean. The English poem states:

Oh, I have got a sweetheart

Who carries all my books,

He plays in doll house,

And says he likes my looks.

The singer / speaker has a lover, who does all her work and makes much of her. He pleases her in all probable ways and wants to marry her, but her mother objects saying that she is too young to think of marriage.

The other poem is about a sparrow, whose nest has been stolen and she is searching for it, asking every bird or animal she meets on the way, about it. Nobody has seen it being stolen. Then she asks a cow about it, but none has seen it being stolen or knows who did it. Finally,

The parrot to the sparrow said,

'Why, oh why are your eyes so red?'

'Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say?

Someone has stolen my nest away.'

Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow!

The two poems represent two different phases in Benare's life. The first refers to her teenage love affair with her maternal uncle and her failure in it. She wanted to marry him, but it was not acceptable in the social system to which her family belonged and so it became an aborted attempt at love marriage. The other song is the symbol of her situation at the present moment. She is in search of a house, because she is pregnant. The child of Prof. Damle is in her womb. Naturally, she seeks it with Prof. Damle first. He is a married man and she knows it. But this new love, she believes, is intellectual love. But her intellectual lover turns out to be an ordinary man. He rejects her but she is resolute to give birth to the child and find him a name and a home. She seeks a home with Balu Rokde, who is not her equal in any sense. It is effort born out of frustration. But she gets nothing but rejection. Then she attempts to convince Gopal Ponkshe the need of being generous and marrying her. But even he is not ready to accept the responsibility of a sinful union. Her search for a home for her child fails as the search of the sparrow for the lost house fails. The two different situations in the life of Benare, the unfortunate girl. One represents her past and the other stands for her present situation.

The door and its bolt is another meaningful symbol in the play. It is Benare who first shuts the hall door without pulling the bolt fully back. Samant explains to her that the old bolts are always like that. They would lock you from outside, if you do not pull them back. Samant explains to her that the old bolts are always like that. They would lock you from outside, if you do not pull them back cautiously. Others, who follow her, also do the same. Samant goes out to buy cigarettes and so on, but he too does the same mistake. He opens the door from outside, shuts from inside without carefully

pulling the bolt fully back. The bold locks from outside, trapping all inside. The one who really feels the trap is Miss Benare, when she attempts to leave the hall and the trial in a bid to end this game unearthing her past. But, however she tried, the bolt stays put. It won't budge. Her effort to escape fails and we see Mrs. Kashikar forcibly bringing her back to the dock. This symbolically throws light on her life. The old bolts are the bondages and restrictions imposed on man by the society. If you must set them away, you will have to be careful to remove them from your way. Benare has failed to do so in her life. Her relationships with her maternal uncle and Prof. Damle have locked her in a sort of a prison from which she cannot escape, because the bolts of morality and purity applied by the society have not been pulled back cautiously and successfully by her. She is trapped and helpless. She is trapped by the physical bolt in the same manner and finds herself helpless even in escaping from the public dissection of her private life.

The characters, who successfully hunt Miss Benare down, represent the middle class hypocrisy. The middle classes consider themselves as keepers of civilization and morality, but when they get an opportunity, they are the ones who are on the forefront of disrupting moral codes of conduct. The characters in the play do this very thing, when they hunt Benare down. They also symbolize the effect of mob psychology. Individually, each is good having a stable standing in society. But as a member of a mob, they forget their goodness and act like barbarians, because they enjoy the protection of the mob. Balu Rokde is a good instance of it. He represents weak males. Everybody orders him about, makes fun of him and blames him for everything. But even such a weak man becomes so strong as to implicate Benare, when he finds that he has full backing from the crowd. The same man, who is so unwilling to come to the box at the beginning, is seen tendering information freely.

Miss Leela *Benare's Soliloquy* can also be seen as a symbolic representation of human beings. When she speaks it, she is almost tendering admission of her guilt. But that is not significant. The

stage is in darkness and the floodlight is on her. Others in darkness are sitting like statues, motionless and tense. She describes them as "the mortal remains of some cultured men of 20th century." They represent the people in the world, who deliberately put on a mask of senselessness and lack of emotion and throw the life of its victim in total darkness that is never ending sorrow.

Use of Metafiction in Silence! The Court is in Session:

Vijay Tendulkar also uses the modern technique called metafiction. But he has used it so deftly that the viewers watching the play are hardly aware of it. The stage, when the play opens, is bare save for a dais in the hall. A group of amateur actors is to perform a mock trial on President Johnson. When the play opens they are yet to reach the place. Visibly, their set and the stage property is not there. They bring it with them and arrange the stage right in front of the viewers. Balu Rokde and Gopal Ponkshe take active part in producing something on the stage that would look like a courtroom. The witness box and the box for the accused are placed when they decide upon a mock trail, not a rehearsal of what they were to perform but on a new charge. While Miss Leela Benare is away to refresh herself, they decide that she will be the accused and the charge would be infanticide. And when she returns from the sanitary unit, Ponkshe dramatically places the box around her declaring that she has been under arrest and that she is to be tried on the charge of infanticide. All this is in keeping with the technique, for in it we are given to understand that we watching a play within a play. When we think about all this independently, we become aware that the play proceeds on the new technique of the modern rather the post modern drama.

It would be interesting to see why critics have chosen to describe the play as the one using metafiction technique. For that we must know what metafiction is. Metafiction is a kind of fiction which self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction. The term first came in use in the field of novel, but later the technique is used even in drama. It usually involves irony and is self-reflective. It can be compared to presentational theatre in a sense. The presentational

theatre does not let the audience forget they are viewing a play, and metafiction does not let the readers forget they are reading a work of fiction. Metafication is primarily connected with postmodern literature but can be found at least as far back as Cervante's *Don Quixote* and Geofrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Even Shakespeare has used it in *Hamlet* where a play within a play has been staged presenting the story named *The Murder of Ganzalo.*

It is true that as the play progresses, we get engrossed in the action and become so one with it that we really forget that it is a mock trial on an imaginary charge on one of the actors who have come to perform a mock courtroom drama in a wayside village. But time and again, the characters themselves keep us reminding that it is just a funny game that is being played and it has nothing to do with the life of the woman named Miss Leela Benare. Till the beginning of the third act we are kept in an fluctuating situation, for we are not allowed to feel sure whether it is a real life story of Miss Benare being unfolded or it is simply a case based on sheer imagination. When Raghu Samant, the only person that does not belong to the troupe, begins to read from the novel in his hands as his deposition, we begin to wonder what is what. We at one time feel, of course, because of the reactions of Miss Benare, that her own story is being unfolded before the viewers. At other time we agree with the speaker when he reminds her that it is just a game, a fun. A drama within a drama is thus implanted and this implanting continues till the end of the second act. Then alone we become conscious that these vultures are hunting for and digging out the past of Miss Benare. But by that time we have come to accept that all this is fun and take time to understand that the past of the woman is the real target of the other amateur actors in the troupe. Tendulkar has managed this in such an astonishing way, the unification of fact and fiction has been made so delicately that we have to admit that he has very fruitfully and efficiently used the metafiction technique in the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

Silence! The Court is in Session as an Experimental play

Silence! The Court is in Session, originally written in Marathi, is a

unique play in more than one sense. In it Tendulkar was making some experiments, which were new to the Marathi stage. However, we cannot label the play as belonging to the experimental theatre. The most essential thing in experimental theatre is the participation of the viewers in it. For example, questions are directly asked to the people by the actors and answers are expected from them. Such experiments have been made on the Marathi stage, but Tendulkar is not one of them. His experiments are limited to basically subject and the bold treatment given to them. Let us have a look at them in a nutshell.

When the play opens, the theatre is bare. The performers were supposed to present a courtroom play, but the set does not show any courtroom implements. They are brought by the actors on the stage and arranged as per Kashikar's plan by Rokde and others. They have come there to present a trail on President Johnson for producing atomic weapons and they have brought the stage property with them. They place the witness boxes, chairs, judge's seat and such other things on the stage before they begin the mock trial of infanticide on the charge. Other stage property like the gavel, the wig, the gown of the judge and the coat of the prosecutor are also with them and we see them being arranged or put on, on the stage.

Then unlike the traditional play, the characters do not change their costumes after every act or scene. From the beginning to the end the same costume is used. The only exception is the judge, who puts on his gown, when the play, there is no perceptible breaks in between the acts. The second act begins where the first ends and the third begins where the second ends. Even the positions or the of the characters do not change during the acts

The theme is equally experimental as no other dramatist has been bold enough to discuss pregnancy before marriage in such open way on the Marathi stage. It was an experiment by Tendulkar. Tendulkar had attempted bold themes even before but this was a new experiment.

Experimental theatres all over the world take the audience into their confidence and make them a part of the play. Tendulkar does

not do anything of that sort but he uses the technique of metafiction which is an experiment on the Marathi stage. He does not let either the spectator or the characters on the stage to forget that it is just a play that they are watching.

It is through the symbols and technique that we reach the deeper meaning of *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

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17

POPULAR THEATRE, TRADITION AND CONTINUITY: INTERROGATING THE JOURNEY OF *JATRA* AS A SYNTHESIS OF CULTURE

Shubhra Ghoshal

Jatra is a form of performative art practice, popular in the eastern part of India, specially the Bengali speaking regions. The term '*jatra*' is derived from the Sanskrit root word 'ja', which means 'to go'. It comes to be associated and used in a wide range of meanings, e.g., Gaya jatra (going for a pilgrimage), yuddha jatra (going to a war), Maha jatra (death, the ultimate journey), etc. Though there is no manifest documentation regarding the origin of *Jatra* as a performative art form, but it is believed that it has originated from the connotation of *Jatra* as a religious journey or procession, as a form of expressing *devotion* to God. It assumes different names and gets attached to different festivals with changing religious beliefs, such as Shiv Jatra, Chandi Jatra, Ratha Jatra, and Krishna Jatra. *Jatra* begins to be accompanied with songs and instruments gradually. There is another belief, which says that *Jatra* is derived from a type of singing, called 'charjya', which existed in

Bengal between 9th and the 12th centuries. It believes that *Jatra* specifically means performance, and the dominance of music in *Jatra* follows from this origin. In both the cases, gradually, the themes of the songs, which used to be purely devotional, begin to be more diversified, including episodes from popular mythical stories and mysteries of God. Besides being sources of entertainment, these festivals and performances are mainly aimed at providing moral and religious erudition to the people.

Around 16th century, growing popularity of Vaishnavism in Bengal influences the direction of *Jatra* to a great extent. The Vaishnava sect (followers of God Vishnu) starts elaborate performances on mythical episodes of the various incarnations of Him, where Krishna *Jatra* becomes the most widely explored form. With the advent of Mahaprabhu Chaitanya, *Jatra* takes the tangible shape of an artistic performance. He is the first to combine song, dance, acting and expression in his performance. His emphasis on dressing, costume, and sitting arrangement for the audience, provides *Jatra* the seeds to germinate in future. With him, the episodes are given concrete dramatised forms with sectional division of acts, and dialogues replace elaborate songs. So *Jatra* is very much indebted to Chaitanya for the systematized performative approach. With the demise of this influential personality, and the subsequent invasion by foreign powers in the 17th century, *Jatra* gets a setback. By the end of 18th century, *Jatra* revives under the colonial rule, taking an altogether different shape. During this period, the Indian intellectuals with western education, starts producing theatrical plays, adapting mythological and Sanskrit plays in the western models. However, *Jatra* couldn't flourish on its own, and so, it submits to wealthy patrons for its survival, which worsens the situation. In its attempt to entertain the affluent class, it loses its own unique rustic form, and degenerates into coarseness and vulgarity.

With the upsurge of nationalist waves in the succeeding years, *Jatra* regains its vitality, emerging as the most powerful medium of arousing nationalistic feelings and sentiments. The *Jatra*

performances act not only as the harbinger of nationalism, but also, with their emotional appeal, serve as the platform of union of ideas among people. As *Jatra* has always been extemporaneous in nature, the *Jatra* palas (script of *Jatra*) provide ample scope to modifications and contextualizations, which are explored to its maximum in the performances of the palas like *Mayabati, Matripuja* and *Padmini*. The *Jatra* based on novel *Anandamath* (1882) of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, which features the revolutionary song 'Vande Mataram', and the performances given by Swadeshi *Jatra* Party of Mukunda Das, have a profound influence on the audience in enhancing the enthusiastic nationalist zeal resulting in collective patriotic action. This form of *Jatra* succeeds in gaining so much popularity because it could access all classes of people as its audience, and also, the actors and the audience both are swayed with the nationalistic vision, infusing the sense of togetherness.

After independence, the nationalistic concept fragments and so, patriotic theme fades away, however, *Jatra* as a vehicle of political propaganda and protest continues. With the rise of leftist ideals in Bengal during the 1960s, *jatra*s are seen to be increasingly portraying and propagating the communist ideals. Another trend of *Jatra* can be noted during this time, which focuses on dramatising the lives of political figures ranging from Karl Marx to Hitler, from Gandhi to Subhash Chandra Bose. The genre of political *Jatra* is being experimented and suffused with modernization approach by a few *Jatra* stalwarts, as Ponchu Sen, Utpal Dutt and Shombhu Baag. Ponchu Sen (1914-1972), a distinguished actor, also introduces *Jatra* to professionalism and innovations in subject matter breaking the monotony of mythical and historical themes. His successor Utpal Dutt (1929-1993), a committed leftist with his dream of bringing about social and political revolution, plays a major role in the politicization of *Jatra*. Disillusioned with IPTA and alienated from leftist parties (for his initial support to Naxal movement), Dutt creates his own vernacular theatre 'Little Theatre Group', staging many commercially successful plays, as European classics (i.e. *Macbeth*), historical plays of Girish Chandra Ghosh, (i.e. *Siraj-ud-daula*), and intense dramatic plays (*Kallol*, *Feraari Fauj*). At the

same time, Dutt feels the need to reach to a larger audience, the mass, which seemed possible to him through the medium of *Jatra*, as it can present the political impulses of the present time in a familiar way to a large section of people. Arnab Banerjee in his article 'Rehearsals for a Revolution: The Political Theatre of Utpal Dutt' talks about Dutt's *Jatra* play *Sanyasir Tarabaari* (The Crusade of the Monk). It presents the anti-British rebellion of Sanyasis in the 18th century, and subtly draws a parallel between crushing of the Sanyasi rebellion by the Warren Hastings government and crushing of the Naxalite movement by the Bengal government. This blend of historical and political events as themes, presented in the traditional form of *Jatra*, is well comprehended and received by the audience. Shombhu Baag is instrumental in equipping political *jatra* with modern technologies, such as, using tape recorders and modern war-weapons in his famous and widely acclaimed productions like *Hitler, Lenin*, and *Mohenjodaro*. However, with the coming of leftist to power, *Jatra* gets relegated to propagandist forms only making it a monolithic one-way communication, which continues even after the opposition party holds the administration, and thus, political *jatra* loses its appeal gradually after the 1980's.

Apart from political jatra, mythical and historical jatra could also be noticed during this period. Mythical jatra, whose characteristic objective was to further morale and religious beliefs amongst the mass, has served a different purpose during colonial rule, aiming to arouse nationalism and political consciousness in the garb of mythical plots. After independence, as political *jatra* establishes as a different genre, mythical *jatra* with purely mythological themes try to make their presence felt, but couldn't succeed. With the change in socio-political situations, thought patterns and scientific advancements, the purely mythical episodes couldn't be portrayed in the purely traditional forms with the same spirit and vitality as earlier, and devotional sentiments couldn't be raised through this form as earlier. Another probable reason of its not gaining popularity may be the existence of various other folk forms, e.g., kirtan, gaajan and kabi gaan, which deals mythological

themes in a much more diversified and entertaining way. The same fate awaits the purely historical *jatra*s, which coudn't establish themselves lacking contextualization. Watching the huge success of biographical themes concerning political figures as Hitler, Lenin and Marx, attempts to Biographical Jatra also start, portraying popular figures like Vidyasagar, Derozio, Vivekananda, Rammohan, but it also couldn't hold the interest of the audience.

However, against this sad picture of *Jatra*, and the advent of other easily available forms of entertainment, as radio broadcasts, television shows, visual shows (magic, circus), and theatre plays, social jatra becomes able to attune itself according to the hue of the present age. Motilal Rai, also referred to as the father of modern *Jatra*, fuses mythical *Jatra* with music, dance and social relevance to make it accessible and acceptable to the common people. His scripts, as *Kaaliya Sarpadaman, Brajaleela, Ramrajya, Sita Anweshan, Bheeshmer Sarsajjya* and *Mahaleela* focus on using *Jatra* as a means of propagating traditional values and character development. He not only carries musical jatra to a different level, but also shows his proficiency in using language according to characters (scholarly as well as naive); in employing costly and attractive costumes; in experimenting with new forms of singing and dancing (as the form of table dance); and innovative stage directions (in the episodes as, Bheeshma's laying on arrow-tips, Krishna's weighing on real huge weighing scales, etc.). Another influential personality Haripada Chattyopadhyay, with his historical jatras *Padmini* and *Mahiravana,* grabs audience attention, due to his use of theatrical and classical music, as well as, well directed ballet dances.

The transitions in *Jatra* during the 1930's and 40's are immensely contributed by Phoni Bhushan Vidyabinod, being the first to receive Sangeet Natak Academy Award. As an actor, he holds expertise in dialogue deliverance, facial expression and smooth physical movements. Phoni Bhushan, being a humanist, moralist and a well read person of history, mythology and Sanskrit literature, stresses on social transformation by dint of developing ethos and morality in his palas, as *Mahakabi Kalidas, Janaknandini* and *Shroter Jatri*. He

also experiments with characters; for instance, in one of his production, he creates a character of the shadow of Sita, which has become a popular character type in the modern times.

Bholanath Rai Kabyashastri, a distinguished script writer, excels in producing both mythical and historical genres. Though he dies young, he succeeds in bringing about a transformation in language, characterization and emotional intensity hitherto used in *Jatra*. He also initiates the trend of creating additional characters, which is explored to new measures by Brajendra Kumar Dey, popularly known as Brojen Dey(1907-1976), who helps in advancing Kabyashastri's responsible approach towards propagating *Jatra* as an art form, as well as *Jatra* as a potential tool to effectuate betterment of the society, acting as the helmsman of social Jatra during the 1930's to 70's. Popularly known as palasamrat (king of *jatra* script writers), Brojen Dey brings about a gradual transformation to *jatra*, restructuring *Jatra* regarding its thematic, structural and presentational style. His wide knowledge in politics, ethics and literature of many countries makes him a man of progressive outlook rooted in own culture and tradition. Brojen Dey follows the trend of presenting social issues through myth and history like the then accustomed social *jatra*s, but becomes unique in his way of presentating the themes through the lens of his imagination. In his very first pala *Swarnalanka* (1925), derived/ emanating from an episode of Ramayana, he creates new episodes and characters (Kalyani and Manasi) to impart his message creatively/innovatively. He starts taking unfamiliar episodes from myths to provide dynamism to typical mythical *jatra*, as in *Shobaar Debota* (1954), and also revives old devotional *jatra* with his *Kolonkini Rai* (1972) and *Noti Binodini* (1973). He realizes the exigency of creating connection with the audience and so, brings *jatra* close to the common people. He initiates a wide vista of current original topics in his plays, for instance, national and international contemporary events, imperialism, nationalism, communalism, religious and regional discord, and class, caste and gender issues. He starts the trend of creating characters and even protagonists from humble social classes, as *Leelabasaan* (1934), focuses on Jara

(a hunter), whose arrow takes away the life of Lord Krishna. Most of his *jatra* plays are intended to establish communal harmony, starting with *Chaander Meye* (1936) to his last play *Porajito Meghnad* (1976). His play *Bangaali* (1946) forcefully stresses on the need to bridge the religious and communal disparities, by attemptting to propagate 'Khodabaan' (Khuda and Bhagabaan), and 'Hindulam' (Hindu and Islam). In this play, he also uses the crafty technique of critiquing Hindus or Muslims by people of the same community to make his message more emphatic. For instance, Daayud Khan and Mubarak logically argue with the religious fanatic Ali Mansoor, Naseer Khan and Bahadur; and Bikramadita's selfish immorality is rebelled by his own son Pratapaditya. Even at that age, Brojen Dey portrays powerful, deterministic, and revolutionary female characters. Aaleya (in *Chaander Meye)* and Madina (in *Bangaalir Meye)* don't compromise with their principles, and take the bold decision of leaving their cruelly patriarch husbands. Promila and Mandodari (in *Swarnalanka*) represent devoted wives (of Indrajit and Ravana), though they could foresee the sad consequences of the events; Jana (in *Matripuja*) mirrors an affectionate anxious mother; Chhobi and Asmaan (in *Bangaali*) present sharp witted straightforward young women; Sonaai (in *Sonaai Dighi*) represents a dignified and selfless woman, who sacrifices herself to save the life of her husband and father in law; and Lokkhi (in *Akaaler Desh*) portrays the role that a women could play in transformation of the society. He emphasizes on homely costumes, natural prosaic conversation style, and presenting the stage as the exact replica of real scenes. His *Maayer Daak* and *Dhoraar Debota* symbolically refers to the topical events, drawing parallels of the figures of Subhaas Chandra, Gandhi, Nehru and Oten. Brojen Dey also breaks the trend of using Sanskrit language by all characters, and starts using the language types, typical and identifiable to the social class of the particular character. His *Shonai Dighi* (1959) breaks all previous records of success, introducing omen actresses for women roles. He also adapts themes from the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. He scripts *Bindur Chhele* from Sarat Chandra's famous novel with the same name, and scripts *Protishodh* following

Rabindranath's *Mastakbikroy*, imparting the message that 'forgiveness is the best revenge'. Thus, Brojen Dey's liberal outlook, humanistic approach, wide trajectory of themes, introduction of ordinary characters, short and natural dialogues, dynamic characterization, implications of communal harmony and women liberation- all contributed in transforming *Jatra* to a great extent. The immense popularity and success of Brojen Dey plays encourage an overflow of social *jatra* productions. Sourindramohan Chattopadhyay's *Rokter Taan*, Binoykrishna Mukhopadhyay's *Hindu Musalmaan*, Nandagopal Raichoudhury's *Milansetu*, Jitendranath Basak's *Daakinir Char* are some of the plays that help in adapting *Jatra* according to the age, and also making it socially useful.

A new form of hitherto unseen *jatra* is brought into scene by the script writer and director Shailesh Guhoniyogi (1931-2007), which is similar to Musical Romantic Comedy. His plays, along with giving a light touch to the serious chords, bring a sophisticated and unprofessional taste to *jatra*. He himself enjoys writing his plays, and aims to entertain all types of audience with his productions *Akdin Raatre* , *Abhinetri, Boudir Biye, Faans, Bibaho Bibhraat*, etc. He once again proves that the proper combination of the trio, dance, music and acting can only make *Jatra* a success. His *Shudhu Akdin Raatre* adapted from a play *King for a Day*, and *Nagarbodhu* and *Jhumur* illustrates how the same script can be successfully presented through both the mediums of *jatra* and theatre.

Bhairab Ganguly (1934-98), hailing from a poor family, ends up becoming the most highly salaried *Jatra* personality. He can be said to reign the *Jatra* industry from the 1980's, producing one after another huge commercially successful *jatra*s. He believes and eventually proves that rather than Tollywood star cast, advertisement in high class newspapers can increase the status and demand of *Jatra*. Rather than short dialogues, he focuses on long speeches with a number of literary references and complexities, and succeeds in creating a puzzling spell of enlightenment. His innovative contribution to social *jatra* is his emphasis on character for plots

rather than story lines and excellent conglomeration of myth, history and realistic social issues in his productions. He explores real folk music in his song compositions, and also picturises real rural life in his productions. He achieves so much success, that he not only draws unexpectedly high salary, but also raises the standard of this art form, and paves the way for a financially secured life to many of the people related to this industry.

These days *Jatra* industry has acquired a glamorized and financially secured status. Amidst some attempts to historical and political *jatra*, social *jatra* is still swaying the age with its relevance, and easy acceptability among the audience. Inspired by Brojen Dey, Satya Prakash Dutt is a well renowned *Jatra* pala writer, devoted to the cause of reformation of the society with his palas *Kaagojer Phool, Pother Daabi, Debdas, Ke Amaar Aapon* and *Pathorer Chokh*. Among the contemporary *Jatra* artists, Ujjwal Bishwas has earned much recognition with his palas *Sindur Khonje Shunyo Sinthi, Sukher Prodeep, Kolir Draupodi Kaandchhe* and *Godhuli Logne Jolchhe Chitaa, Netaraai Bogobaan,* featuring land acquisition issues, gender and class issues, social and political corruption etc., presented in a highly dramatised intensity. Sajal Ghosh, has been an avid writer, producing a number of palas, *as Maago Aar Jaabo Na Shwashur Baadi, Chaap, Fire Eso Anuradha , obaak prithivi, Abaar Ashibo Fire, Abhishaap* and *Lojja,* wich bear evidences of his well knit plots and scholarly bent of thought. Tripti Bandyopadhyay, being a successful female *Jatra* script writer, has been able to establish her distinguished imprint on *Jatra* with her palas as *Hirer Tukdo Meye* and *Ak Raater Kolonko.* However, the characteristic traits of social *jatra* have altered. Stage settings have grown more technical, plots have become more familiar in the line of family dramas, and the interest relies to a great extent on action and visual effects on the stage.

The above description traces the gradual transformation of this performative art form from devotional to commercial. During this long journey, the elaborate musical dialogism gives way to short prosaic conversations, the plots are shortened, the frequency and use of songs (which used to be the specific characteristic and

attraction of *Jatra*) lessens, the tone of dialogues change, the time duration of performances are also reduced. However, audience is not the only factor behind these transformations. For instance, long speeches delivered by single characters are reduced to short dialogues not only to break the monotonous effect on the audience, but also to ease the actors' task. The aged actors couldn't deliver the elaborate bold speeches with the same force for long, and the new actors are not capable of and comfortable with cultivating that talent. Chorus songs and dances reduced, not just to limit the time duration, but also due to unavailability of such performers. Elaborate costume and dressing fade away to give a natural look, as well as to reduce the production cost of the *jatra* performances. Though commercialization has helped the *jatra* industry to survive, it has also drawn out the essence and passion of the traditional *jatra*. The earlier performances used to depend totally on the acting, singing and expressive skills, which has now shifted to visual and technical tactics. It has also increased competition among the various *jatra* groups, along with threats from other entertainment options. Except a few stalwarts of *jatra*, most of the *jatra* teams imitate third grade cinema plots, invite Tollywood starcast to act in *jatra*, and promises other visually attractive forms, as Kabre, magic, putul naach etc. to draw the attention of the audience. Mathur Saha uses the term 'Theatrical *Jatra*party' to name his team, which expressly shows the attempt to glamorize *Jatra* submitting to Theatre.

However, it is high time to realize that to achieve success, *Jatra* need not compromise with the quintessence of its form and style. It is evident from the popularity and sustenance of the renowned old *jatra* productions even to this age. Changes are inevitable, and also required, but it should not be at the cost of undermining/ endangering its own unique originality and configuration. The artistic proficiency regarding content and presentation should be balanced with the commercial aspects to establish *Jatra* again as an art. Also, artists should be encouraged to opt for this field by establishing teaching and training institutes; *Jatra* festivals, seminars and events should be organised; and social and financial security must be provided to propagate this form further.

This journey of *Jatra* ending with the picture of commercially successful *Jatra* troupes is mainly Chitpur based, the hub of *jatra* troupes in Bengal. *Jatra* is a marginalised art form in itself, but there are many other further marginalised existing *jatra* groups performing in remote areas of Bardhamaan, Khejuri, Digambarpur, and various other places, of which no systematic documentation is available. These *jatra* groups are not controlled by monetary ends, and perform *jatra* out of their passion for this form. They have still been able to maintain *Jatra* in its traditional form, least influenced by modern transformations. So, there is the possibility of regeneration of *Jatra* as a folk form through these fringe *jatra* troupes, and also, there is a scope of an alternate history of *Jatra*, tracing an altogether different journey.

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18

CLASH OF DIVERGENCES IN MAHESH DATTANI'S *BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN*

Dr. T. Sasikanth Reddy

A closer look at theatre in India from the time of the emergence of Sanskrit drama and its traditions, or the folk performance art still current in rural India is, however, beyond the span of this study. Our attempt will be to assess the place of modern Indian theatre that is predominantly urban, manifestly influenced by Western traditions even as it tries to find its own feet, still evolving and searching for a distinctive identity. This drama, nonetheless, is part of the larger 'Indian theatre', decidedly influenced by, and drawing inspiration from many of its traditional forms. To narrow down our focus further, we shall look at the place of English language drama in postcolonial India, a genre that unfortunately, (until recently) retains a somewhat mongrel nature, especially so when one juxtaposes it with the flourishing tribe of Indian novelists who write in English.

Modern theatre in India is not a rural phenomenon. It owes its origins to the growth of large urban settlements like Calcutta,

Madras, and Bombay beginning sometime in the eighteenth century, under the British, who had established secure centers of trade by the mid-nineteenth century. Around the same time, three major universities were founded in these three cities, and English education was firmly underway. An entire class of intelligentsia was thus initiated and exposed to Western literature and drama. By the last part of the nineteenth century, drama in Indian languages, but modeled on Western lines, began to be performed, particularly in Kolkata, catering to private audiences from the upper classes. A powerful political tool, theatre quickly began to make both overt and insidious attempts to subvert the existing oppressive political order. This drama also began to look inwards and often exposed the social injustices and corruption within the greater Indian society.

By the time India finally achieved independence; theatre was struggling to survive in the face of the tremendous popularity of cinema. Modern theatre in India has however, come a long way. Many forms of profit generating, commercially viable professional drama, a whole gamut of amateur theatre with varying degrees of commitment and competence, some experimental theatre of a very serious nature that makes radical departures from convention, and a host of dramatic activities that are seen in school and college campuses are some of the truly heterogeneous terrain of modern, urban theatre.

In a typically reactionary postcolonial situation, to write in English - the language of the colonial ruler - in newly independent India, came to be largely considered politically incorrect. While it still had its uses for the more run-of-the-mill administrative purposes, it was considered presumptuous for it to aspire to the territory of artistic or creative expression. However, it is one of India's recognized languages, invaluable as a link language between divert linguistic groups, the communicative tool for people from different states. It is also the language of the upwardly mobile middle classes - or those who aspire to be part of the middle classes - with some amount of snob-value still remaining as the trace of its earlier status as the language of the masters. English is also the

language of higher education and for any Indian with a college degree, a working knowledge of the language comes as a matter of course. It is still the language of officialdom, although great efforts have been made to change the situation. Hence a grasp over the language would open up employment opportunities in all sectors. English is however, used as an everyday speech habit by only a fraction of the Indian population, mostly those living in the urban areas who are necessarily a minority. With early novelists writing in English like Mulk Raj Anand or Raja Rao or even R.K.Narayan, the situation was extremely different and their work was received differently. In the 1960s, writers like Anita Desai, had to deal with tremendous suspicion, even resentment, in her own country. The situation we have today, especially in fiction, is vastly different, with contemporary Indian writers hogging the center-stage wherever English writing is read, not having to depend upon readership at home alone, which generally follows the international response. But to shift focus to contemporary drama in English by Indian writers, the problems become more intricate. Few Indian writers in English become playwrights. Fewer still are able to achieve literary/critical acclaim, and rarely find appreciative and faithful audiences in performances in cities and towns other than the metropolises. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were English 'plays' written by Michael Madhsudhan Dutt, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyay which were hardly 'stage worthy', indeed, such attempts can be seen as mere literary exercises; not real theatre that would draw audiences. In the 1970s came plays of Dina Mehta, Snehalata Reddy and Shiv K. Kumar, Asif Currimbhoy, Partap Sharma and the poet Nissim Ezekiel all wrote a few plays that were actually staged but had little impact. The plays just failed to relate to the audiences, who were not yet ready to accept plays in English written by Indians. Also, English theatre seemed to become associated with light amusement for the urban elite. Significantly, this was also the time that the Theatre of Roots movement was making its impact felt in terms of using indigenous material for contemporary theatre, written and performed in vernacular Indian languages.

Writing is only one aspect of theatre; the other predominant one is the performance. These plays did not amount to anything substantial like a tradition of play writing, nor did their staging lead to the emergence of a tradition of Indian theatre in English. The problems here are enmeshed with the reception of a play. A book is verily meant for the educated. Not so the theatre, because performances could be watched by anyone. Does English theatre then, exclude the majority of the populace, an audience that would otherwise have easily received a play in their own tongue? To write a text (fiction or drama) requires a degree of competence and prowess that most Indian writers possess. To actually translate the text into a living performance that a given Indian audience is to watch and relate to is quite another thing. This is the crux of the problem that posed and still poses the major obstacle for Indian dramatic performances in English. Whatever degree of comfort that an Indian, irrespective of the part of India he/she may belong to, feels in reading English, the same degree of ease would never be maintained in watching a full performance with the actors speaking in English. The reason is simple enough. The entire spectacle rings false. The great majority of Indians, rural or urban, still communicate orally with each other in the vernacular. Dramatic performances are generally seen as a slice of, an extension of that lived experience itself. Hence, the difficulty for the audiences to come to terms with English as the language of performance. This remains the major problem that must be tackled before the playwright begins to envisage a play in English for Indian audiences. It is only in the 1980s that such a movement seems to begin, albeit in a very small way. After decades of active urban usage and in a sense, homogenization of the English language, with the audiences becoming much more at home with the many varieties of Indian English that is internalized and spoken without premeditation, Indian theatre in English begins to emerge with a distinctive and vigorous identity.

Mahesh Dattani is in the vanguard of those who have made this happen; he is an actor and director with his own theatre group and has an innate sense of dialogue that is vital, stimulating, lucid

and effective. Dealing with compelling issues rooted in his milieu, he has dispelled the perception about English theatre being just gratuitous fizz. His audiences have been large and responsive, both to the spectacle and the language. Theatre is not a mute and mechanical representation of social dynamics but it is a lively representation of social dynamics and the voices resounding in context of totality of human experience that consciously or unconsciously affect the existing dynamics of human sensibility. Mahesh Dattani, one of the exponents of modern Indian drama, thematically shows about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. Dattani in the process of engineering the current of Indian drama by bringing it closer to the real life experiences tried to articulate the voice of the oppressed sections of the society whose identity is shrouded in the cover of myths and social prejudices. They have been dragged in darkness, doomed to survive in perpetual silence bearing the oppressive burden of the hegemony of the elitist class.

Dattani's play script casts its focus and locus entirely on the urban space, specifically rooted in the dynamics of domestic space. Environmental sustainability of the cities like Bangalore or Mumbai in his plays are the symbolic tropes and modes of economic power that can be categorized as the material element for discussing the issue of citizenship that raise(s) questions around notions of equality and rights, issues of individual, group and community rights, active and passive citizenship and the relationship between, and relative primacy of, rights and duties. India, be it Bangalore or Mumbai, with the socio-cultural pluralism becomes a trope where differences are immensely negotiated and Dattani is successful in capturing, inter societal relations'.

Dattani can be described as the glorious taker of Indian English drama from the imaginative land of expectations to the space of glorious reality through his creative synchronicity of constructive spirit. In his art, there is no Macbeth, but there is ambition; there is no Iago, but there is utter villainy; there is no grand royalty, but there is the strong sense of Community; there is no imaginative

great Wessex, but there is real India. His plays lack the rand presence of hero and heroine because there is no self-flagellation appearance of the characters in his dramas.

Drama is the most wide-ranging, the most polyphonic of all the arts: it both represents life and is also a way of seeing it. It can never become a 'private' statement - in the way a novel or a poem can - without ceasing to be meaningful theatre. As a play is staged, a multitude of signs are unleashed for the audience to react to, requiring considerable agility on their part. The performance is forever in flight, and in the wealth of signs and the perceptive capacities of the spectator. Dattani within the framework of dramatic structure tries to investigate the identities of those who occupy no space in social order. The social awareness, social discrimination in the name of religion, humiliation of humanity in the aroma of social pride, irrational acceptance of prejudices, sacrificing the ethical code based on human love, are brought to the stage through the dramatic vision of Dattani. The social conventions often hamper the growth of individual and do not acknowledge the call of human love. The perpetual clash of the commitments of an individual for social order and the force of personal derives makes life intolerable. Dattani with the fine balance of stage and performance imparts an exceptional vehemence to such situations. In the traditional society of India, the identity of gays, lesbians, hijjras and homosexuals has not yet been organized. Dattani dramatizes the crisis of those relationships that are not rigidly demarcated in terms of socially accepted gender constructions. All his works so far-plays, films, screenplays, focus on the marginalized entity. Mahesh Dattani is responsible for successfully launching the Indian theatre in English. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as 'fresh arrival' in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. With the coming of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Dattani is now considered an officially recognized part of the Indian literary establishment. Michael Walling, the artistic director of the multi-cultural theatre company Border Crossings in his introductory note to *Bravely Fought the Queen:*

> *His plays fuse the physical and special awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual rigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. It's a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs through its accuracy, and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives. Post-colonial India and multi-cultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public spaces in which the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place. Through his fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh creates such a space. This is in itself a political and social statement of astonishing force.* (Dattani, ii)

In the larger context of contemporary Indian theatre, it is difficult to situate him as a part of a continuum in a given 'tradition' of Indian playwriting, or even as a break, within the larger framework of Indian dramaturgy. Dattani himself would locate himself as the 'change' in that strand, evolving out of his roots without needing to unnecessarily hark back to the past, or drawing from a milieu that no longer sustains him or his audiences:

> *... I do see myself as the change element of that thread. I'm not so sure even that I want to go back to my roots .. .I don't need to revisit it. I'm more interested in pushing it forward. .. .I am pushing, and I'm pushing the audience.* (Vardhan, 2)

The paper examines the marital and familial conflicts in *Bravely Fought the Queen* in terms of the communication styles adopted by the different characters. It looks particularly at the manner in which characters hide and disclose information as the key method of exerting and maintaining power over others. 'Words, the weapon to crucify' said the Indo-English poet Eunice de Souza in a poem, and indeed, Dattani's characters use words to attack, control, humiliate and expose. Used more to conceal than to reveal, to hurt than to heal, they become mere pawns in the games people play, games in which language is used to dominate as well as to resist. Since the interpersonal conflicts in the play are deeply rooted in issues of gender, the paper makes use of insights derived from the interface between language and gender in tandem with communication theory to understand the flawed relationships

between the characters. The paper examines the manner in which the communication styles of the main characters reveal hidden agendas and lay bare the masks they try desperately to hide behind.

The family is as hierarchically structured as the rest of society, which is why issues of power and resistance apply here just as they do in the public sphere. The family exists as a closed, private space within whose confines members adopt different communication patterns as a means to negotiate their own sense of self. These patterns are often learnt from parents in childhood, and perpetuated or rejected in adulthood These communicative styles can be supportive, helping its users affirm a positive sense of self for themselves and others, or they can be destructive and steadily erode self-esteem and identity. Either way, there is something distinctive about interpersonal communication as it works within the confines of that space we call home. The very private nature of the communication between family members can allow for extremely vicious attacks on each other. For one thing, members share a long history of communication, with very personal and fragile facts being known about each other. Hence, in conditions of conflict, members use the little secrets they know as arsenal against each other, as is indeed the pattern we often see in Dattani's plays. Spangle and Warren help us understand what makes interpersonal communication within the family distinctive: "*The structure of interpersonal negotiations differs from negotiation in other contexts. These types of negotiations are private, involve small numbers of people, involve moral obligations established by culture, and are characterized by communication based on norms and tacit rules negotiated in a history of interaction.... The privacy component of interpersonal discussions allows for more uninhibited, frank and emotional statements that might not be present in ther settings. Without the norms associated with other settings, interpersonal disagreements can become loud and even abusive*" *(Negotiation, 201).*

The opening Act is set in the home of the Trivedis. Aptly entitled 'The Women', this Act focuses on four women, the sisters Dolly and Alka, married to the two brothers Jiten and Nitin respectively, their bed-ridden mother-in-law, Baa, and Lalitha, Jiten

and Nitin's colleague's wife who drops by to discuss the masked ball for the office party. When we first encounter Dolly, she is wearing a face mask, and she tells Lalitha that she is afraid to laugh for-fear of cracking her mask. However, a little while later, she does crack it by laughing out aloud. Dattani makes interesting use of the mask as a device in this act: the concept of masking and demasking mirrors the characters' use of words to effectively mask and demask themselves and their family members. For instance, Dolly's constant complaint that her husband does not tell her anything reflects both, the barrenness of her relationship with Jiten, and the fact that depriving her of information is his way of exerting control and denying her agency. The hollowness that marks the communication between the members of this family is brought out by having characters talk at cross-purposes. The dramatic device that has sets of characters talk simultaneously from two different spaces on the stage highlights the sense of chaos and the breakdown of communication. Thus, in Act II, the spotlight suddenly goes on in Baa's room, and we have a dialogue between Dolly and Baa while Nitin and Jiten are simultaneously discussing the fate of their company. The result is almost farcical. For instance, Baa's statement that her sons spend extravagantly with Jiten always wanting to go to the cinema and Nitin only wanting ice cream is immediately followed by Nitin saying: "*We must please the client*" (Dattani, 277). In the meantime, while Baa is caught in a time warp and is re-living the past, pleading with her husband not to beat the boys, the 'boys' are anticipating acquiring crores of rupees by selling the ancestral house after their mother's death. And while Baa is frantically asserting her right over the house, Nitin is simultaneously insisting that the house belongs to his niece, Daksha. The two sets of conversations reach a climax and converge with Baa crying out in pain as she relives the physical abuse by her husband even as her sons aver that they would not want to live in that house because of the traumatic memories.

The dialogues between the characters are marked by skirting around issues and hedging, signaling a deliberate strategy to confuse and unsettle the listener, leaving him/her unsure or clueless about

what's really going on. In Act II, we see Jiten playing the cat and mouse game with Nitin, adopting an unconcerned attitude about the fate of the company because he has already sought financial assistance from his brother-in-law Pram. Jiten's act of consulting Praful, and deciding matters without his brother's knowledge is an effective way of rendering Nitin powerless. In this scene, we also see Jiten deliberately talking at cross-purposes in an attempt to belittle Nitin, deriving sadistic pleasure from his brother's ignorance:

> *Nitin: What are you thinking of? (No response). If it's private borrowing, we are sunk for the rest of our lives.*
>
> *Jiten: (looks at his drink distastefully). Nothing to beat Black Label.* (Dattani, 266)

Jiten takes his time to reveal matters that Nitin has a right to know. Jiten's tactics are designed to keep Nitin on tenterhooks, and non-verbal factors like not responding when an answer is expected, and avoiding eye-contact further negate Nitin's role in the conversation, belittling his identity as brother and business partner. If hedging can be used as a controlling device, refusing to hedge becomes a way of appropriating a position of power. At the end of the play, Dolly empowers herself by finally saying it like it is:

> *Jiten (sobbing): No! No. (Points to Baa's room.) She made me do it! She did it!*
>
> *Dolly: No! Oh no! I will not let you get away so easily! They were your hands hitting me! Your feet kicking me! It's in your blood! It's in your blood to do bad!* (Dattani, 312)

No bandying around with words, no glossing over the brutal details, only the power of the truth. In recounting the series of events from the past and exposing Jiten's role in causing their daughter to be born a spastic. Dolly's refusal to be silent anymore, leaves Jiten no mask to hide behind. It is now apparent that his arrogant posturing was simply a front for his guilt. Dolly's assertive statements strip him of his bravado, and when she has Iiten where she wants him, sobbing and pleading for mercy, sheeven goes so far as to imitate her daughter's *"... uncoordinated arm and neck movement*

with her eyes dilated" (Dattani, 312) insisting that Jiten not look away as a means of escape. Her mocking reference to Daksha's movements as 'dancing', and her apparently casual laughter belie the pain she has repressed all these years as wife and mother. It is now payback time. Adopting a confrontationist stance, she liberates herself by bringing all the murky details of that fateful episode out in the open. By saying the unsayable, she evokes a fight or flight' response in the now defeated Jiten. The 'fight' having gone out of him, he runs out of the house, where, in a classic case of displacement, he vents his repressed emotions on the hapless beggar woman, killing her by repeatedly running his car over her.

An interesting question to consider is, would Jiten have-accepted defeat if Dolly's words had been uttered when they were alone and not in front of Lalitha? It seems to me that Lalitha's presence acts as a catalyst, giving Dolly a golden opportunity to expose her guilty husband in front of a stranger who represents the outside world, the public sphere. Since Lalitha is the outsider, saying things in front of her somehow makes them seem more real. Perhaps that is what breaks Jiten: if it was only Dolly, the masquerade could have gone on as it had all these years, but Lalitha's presence changes things. While hedging and beating about the bush is one thing, lying is quite another. We see that Jiten is not only an adept but also a compulsive liar. Moreover, his casualness about it symbolises his lack of respect to the people he lies to as well as those he lies about. For instance, when Praful calls, he tells him that his sisters have gone out, a lie cleverly aimed at preventing them from communicating with each other. In this instance, we see Nitin actively colluding with Jiten in withholding information from their respective wives, by insisting that Dolly and Alka must know nothing about Praful's financial involvement in their company affairs. The play abounds in instances of lies of omission and commission, and the conflicts in the play are essentially created by these lies. Lying becomes a way of preventing people from seeing the true picture, and consequently disempowering them. The cycle of lies and deceit sets off a chain of traumatic events, as is seen in Dolly's case. Her father deceived their mother about being a married man

with children, a fact they discovered too late. To save themselves from being shunned as illegitimate children, they, in their turn, lie to the Neighbors, telling them that their father is dead. However, Praful extends the lie to his future brothers-in-law, keeping his sisters in the dark about this, who learn much later that their husbands were not told about their illegitimacy. When their mother-in-law accidentally discovers the truth, Dolly and Alka are held responsible for deliberately deceiving their husbands' family. For no fault of their own, they are labelled whores like their mother, and Dolly is suspected of bearing an illegitimate child. Moreover, on her mother-in-Iaw's provocation, she is beaten up by her husband while she is pregnant, with the result that their daughter Daksha is born premature and is now a spastic.

It is clear that Jiten derives his sense of power, and his very identity as a man, from his ability to shout and swear at will. Eckhert and McConnell-Ginet explain that "*Swearing is widely considered an expression of very strong emotion: anger at specific others or simply deep frustration, often manifest as anger directed at the closest available target. It is viewed as potent language ...*" (Language and Gender, 181). They go on to add that: "*Anger is the emotion most expected and tolerated (in some context even encouraged) from men. Raised voices and abusive insults are part of expressing anger: they can be frightening and thus function in social control. Anger is seen as heightening someone's power, their capacity to get others to respond as they want*" (Language and Gender, 182).

Jiten's fatal flaw lies in his failure to realize that anger and intimidation can only be effective in controlling someone up to a point, and that even when people do not fight back it is not always because they fear their oppressor. On the positive side, we see that if language is used for destructive and disruptive purposes, it also becomes a crucial strategy of survival. Games of make-believe become an important source of distraction for the sisters, particularly for Dolly. Left to fend for themselves, dependent entirely on their husbands for fulfilling their personal, social and sexual needs, Dolly and Alka take recourse to the power of words to create a fantasy that empowers them. They bring into existence an

imaginary lover aptly called Kanhaiya. The fact that Kanhaiya happens to be "*The toothless cook's friend's grandson. Only twenty*" (Dattani, 260) subversively allows the fantasy to be acted out in the realm of the home itself. Alka takes on the role of narrator, recounting for Lalitha's benefit, details of the tryst between Dolly and Kanhaiya, while Dolly chips in, adding a few bits to spice up the narrative: "*Dolly. The thumri plays-And it ends. Another one plays. I forget when that ends and a new one begins! All I'm aware of are two powerful black arms around me and the beautiful sound of the heartbeat of a warm gentle soul*" (Dattani, 262). By voicing their thoughts and fantasies aloud, to themselves, to each other, and more importantly, to a stranger (Lalitha) they give concrete existence to this fantasy, a fantasy they can control because they created it. Nevertheless, while the fantasy serves as a coping mechanism, helping them compensate in some way for their powerlessness as wives, the fact that their husbands have the power to fulfill their sexual desires/ fantasies in reality rather than through their imagination, ironically underscores the tragedy of their marital and sexual lives.

While words can create fantasies, they can also make things happen by the simple act of repeatedly saying so. The power of words to act as self-fulfilling prophecies is brought out at the beginning of Act III. Entitled 'Free for All!', the Act begins with Dolly creating a fantasy for Alka:

Alka: Is it raining?
Dolly: Yes! Come look.
Alka: Why?
Dolly: Because you like the rain!
Alka: Do I?
Dolly: Of course you do. You love getting wet and having your sari cling to you. Your bra and choli showing .... And you love doing a filmi number in the rain.
Alka: No, I don't." (Dattani, 292).

Alka retracts her denial a few moments later when she steps out of the house, uninhibitedly getting wet and dirty in the rain, thus making true the fantasy scripted for her by her sister.

Unfortunately, her harmless dancing in the rain is deliberately made to look like an act of promiscuity, and is used by Jiten as the final excuse to get her thrown out of the house. A defiant Alka tries calling a spade a spade, alluding to her husband's homosexuality / impotence, Jiten's lecherousness, and her brother's manipulation that led to them marrying Jiten and Nitin; but the odds are so strongly against her, that her words fail to evoke any reaction from anyone. If anything, they are ironically interpreted as further evidence of her 'shamelessness'. Why is it that Jiten isnot threatened by Alka? Why does he not lose control when she calls him a leech in front of everyone? And why do Dolly's words a few minutes later break him so completely? The answer may lie in the fact that words have only as much power over us as we give them. Since Alka has no credibility because of her alcoholism, no one takes her seriously. Dolly's words, on the other hand, touch a raw nerve. Maybe Dolly's words remind him how much he is like the very father he hates., and that is a truth he can neither deny nor accept. In sharp contrast to Dolly and Alka, it is interesting how Baa, confined to her bed, and unable to move, is yet able to exerdse such control over others. Her physical inability to act is compensated for by her ability to instigate her sons against their wives. If that strategy does notwork, she resorts to emotional blackmail: Nitin will not inherit the house as a punishment for marrying Alka against her wishes. She also uses her physical abuse at his father's hands to seek sympathy for herself, forcing Nitin to admit that he hates his father. As for Jiten, she keeps him at a distance by telling him that he's like his father, cleverly creating a divide between the brothers. It is she who instigates Jiten into believing that the child Dolly is carrying is not his, and later insists that Daksha *is* indeed her granddaughter. She even claim that Prafulloves Daksha more than Jiten. Are Baa's statements meant to be taken seriously? It is really not clear whether they are the product of a confused mind or part of a clever ploy to ensure that her sons and daughters-in- law are at her mercy. What emerges as a clear fact, however, is that the 'spoken of' rather than 'speaking' Praful is the master-strategist who has everyone exactly where he wants them. His real agenda

behind urging Alka to marry Nitin is revealed at the very end of the play through Nitin. When Nitin confesses his homosexual relationship with Praful to his sleeping wife, we realise what a master-stroke it was, on Praful's part, to get his sister married to his sexual partner so that he could continue his tryst with Nitin even after his marriage. By telling Nitin Alka doesn't mind marrying a homosexual as she only wants economic security through marriage, Alka's sexuality is sacrificed at the altar of her brother's desire for her husband. Thus Praful emerges as omnipresent even in his absence, controlling other people's lives through his lies, conveniently playing one against the other to fulfil his own (sexual) needs at the expense of others', including his sister's. And does he really love Daksha as much as Baa thinks he does or is it another of his deceptions that finally lead to his being made the trustee of Baa's house that Daksha is to inherit after Baa's death?

Bravely Fought the Queen reveals how unhealthy relationships and underhand communication strategies aimed at appropriating power go hand in hand; and here, the women are not very different from their male counterparts. Except for the 'outsiders', Sridhar and Lalitha, the rest are caught in a vicious cycle of lies and deceit. The characters are denied hope because they believe that lies are a legitimate method of communication, and because they refuse to give up their little games. Except for Dolly, and Alka to some extent, no one even makes an attempt to set the record straight so that conflicts can be dealt with. Suppressing one's own emotions, dismissing another's right to have a point of *view,* denying others the power to express their views, not validating each other's emotions, disregarding feedback these are just some of the unhealthy patterns of communication that create and intensify the interrpersonal conflicts in the play; and although we see the characters fighting all the time, neither the men nor the women have the courage to fight fair.

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19

EVAM INDRAJITH: AN EXPLORATION IN THE LIGHT OF SARTREAN EXISTENTIALISM

Milda Mary Savio

Badal Sircar's plays provided new definitions to Indian drama primarily by its theatrically effective and crisp projection of prevalent attitudes that traverses through a wide range of subjects specially the undefined frustrations and vague feelings of the urban middle class braced with the defects of the society and helplessness encountered by humanity of which *Evam Indrajith* demands particular attention. Sircar in this impressive masterpiece utilizes telling expressions and thought provoking remarks, thus capturing the pulse of the reader as he embarks on a sojourn of providing didactic messages aimed at social and political reformation which serves to be a pointer that expresses the meaninglessness of our futile existence propagated by his own theatrical company *Shatabdi* commonly referred to as The Third Theatre that revolted against conventions and laid focus on issues at the pragmatic level.

The philosophy of existentialism prompts us to make rational

decisions and abide by meaning, in spite of being entrapped in an irrational universe, it is in the light of this pattern were *Evam Indrajith* mirrors Sartre's concepts on bad faith and angst. In his seminal work *Of Being and Nothingness* Sartre puts forth his most crucial tenet which contends, "Existence precedes essence" which parallels a statement that is explored in the play "*Our existence is a pointless particle of dust*" (Sircar, 233). Man initially exists, encounters, and surges to define himself. Quite contrary to his predecessor Edmund Husserl who developed theories via bracketing, emphasizes on his notion of transphenomenality where he borders two realms of consciousness, being in itself and being for itself where the former involves a state of fullness, Thad or upholds the notions if Thathwamasi enumerated in Indian philosophy, a physicality which is in fact an Other to us whereas the latter is conceived to encounter the external world which marks the frustrated journey of a subject to become an object.

The character of Indrajith, the protagonist who identifies himself, with the mass or sequence of people Amal Vimal and Kamal which makes him call himself Nirmal. This inter-subjectivity enables him to express his despair and disillusionment that explicates the search of a vantage point, he is merely surrounded by a group of people heading to a world without meaningful interactions, who has a pseudo-existence based on materialistic pursuits. The very title *Evam Indrajith* –And Indrajith suggests that he is only a part of the whole. This also hints on the myth of Indrajith's son, Meghnath who hides admist clouds.

Sartre's concept on anguish revels throughout the play especially through the characters of the writer and Indrajith who meticulously seek, to question even at the cost of their biological functions. Questioning involves the quest of certainty as well as recognizing the possibility of what happened in the past, that our present dispositions need not determine us and the future is open to unimagined changes. When the writer asks Indrajith, if he is dead he immediately retorts that he is not sure. The deliberately fragmented elliptic dialogues and inconsistent characterization

stands testimony to this fact. The repeated use of the phrase "*I'am tired now*" at several instances of the play represents the idea of existential boredom which shows that he has done nothing useful. "*From home to school from school to college. From college to the world. They are growing up. They are going round and round. Round and round and round.One-two-three-two-one. Amal, Vimal, Kamal. And Indrajith*" (Ibid 213). The repetitive use of numbers expresses infinity and the activities which express the anguish which he is subjected to. We find Indrajith who ultimately gives up his dreams and says "*Most people suffer under any system"*. A passage says:

> *Calcutta-Bhopal- Jullunder- London. Everything goes round and round, like a wheel. Still it's not a proper wheel, it's spiral. And that precisely is the tragedy of knowing. I catch something. And just when I understand it, it suddenly ends and I throw it away.*(Ibid 239)

The statements rightly express self-questioning to be a form of disengagement, we experience vertigo-the result is personal destabilization and anguish for experiencing freedom that has its price to be paid. The yearnings and dissatisfactions of Indrajith and his insistence and failure to find his world beyond geography is a self-deception, an avoidance of freedom which Sartre would term bad faith. This construction of stability and solid characterization creates a false sense of security where one escapes personal responsibility. "*Why should you sneeze? Everybody does it."* (Ibid 228)

This revolt against oppressive structures of patriarchy, ceremony and nation is well evident in the lines which depict bad faith "*If I hadn't tasted the fruit of knowledge I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules*" (Ibid 216) . The key process in bad faith, objectification which provides impetus to be an escapist and establish a certain kind of permanent character; the innumerable instances which the author substantiates can well be taken into account with regard to the interviews, the importance of security when Amal urges the pertinence of having an insurance are all vital.

However, the classic statement which Indrajith makes "*Life-Engaging oneself in petty trivialities when one can't answer the only question that matters. The lie in my life is the lie in the lives of millions*" (Ibid 240). The writer asserts his belief in a travel toward no defined goal with faith and knowing that the road is endless drawing analogies on Sisyphus. Both of them realize that the past and present are the two ends of a rope kept alive by dream. The challenge is to accept the human condition as it is and bear it with dignity so as to not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation as we face the harsh realities of life.

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20

UTPAL DUTT'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE THEATRE

Dr. Brajesh Kumar Gupta "Mewadev"

Utpal Dutt often produced on open-air stages in rural Bengal, as well as for his commitment to communist ideology. Many of the approaches used to analyze politics, economies, societies, and cultures were often gender-blind and tended to ignore people's lives, experiences, contributions, voices, perceptions, representations, and struggles. The dramatists who owe the honor for this glorious height of the Bengali theater are Rabindranath Tagore, Madhusudan Dutta, Bijan Bhattacharya, Sombhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt etc. But with the increase in the literary activity in India, playwrights here developed a style of their own, which explored issues specific to India, its culture, and psyche. Now if we look at the style and technique of Utpal Dutt's plays we can observe that themes and techniques of Naturalistic play merge with an experiment of form to adopt the anti-traditional themes of his drama. It is especially hard to find any commentary on his own acting methods and experience. Utpal Dutt was much more than

an actor. As an avowed communist, his greatest contribution to the arts scene has been the revolutionary stage successes which have altered the course of Bengali drama.

Therefore, it was his national duty to record and write all this in his own words. People watched these things and if any of these reactions found expression in plays, these plays were found success immediately. He did not merge himself into the character; he illuminates the character from the outside for us to see. Dutt was also a lifelong Marxist and an active supporter of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and his leftist "Revolutionary Theater" was a phenomenon in the contemporary Bengali theater. He staged many street dramas in favor of the Communist Party.

India, the country of cultural diversity, has a long tradition of dramatic performance with regional specificities. More commonly, it is known as folk tradition/folk theatre. It is the folk theatre that gives the essence of the Indianness. During the 1970s, most of the prominent playwrights of India broke the barriers of regional language and produced many good plays at the national level. Most of their experimental works were centered on bringing the performance tradition or elements of the folk theatre of India into the popular theatre.

Utpal Dutt, (born March 29, 1929, Barisal, Bengal [now in Bangladesh]—died August 19, 1993, Calcutta [now Kolkata], India), Indian actor, director, and writer who was a radical figure in Bengali theatre and cinema for more than 40 years. He was primarily an actor in Bengali Theatre, but he also acted in many Bengali and Hindi films. He received National Film Award for Best Actor in 1970 and three Film fare Best Comedian Awards. Utpal Dutt's surname reveals an equally strong anglicisation of the Bengali surname Datta. Another arbitrary coincidence is that both of these two theatre personalities were upper caste Bengali Kayasthas.

He wrote and directed what he called "Epic Theatre" (a term he borrowed from Bertolt Brecht) to bring about discussion and change in Bangladesh. He was one of the most influential personalities in the Group Theater movement. He acted in many

Bengali films, including many films by Satyajit Ray. He played the role of Richard III as part of the Shakespearean Theatre Company, which had been set up by Geoffrey Kendal and Laura Kendal. He toured with the Kendals across the subcontinent for a couple of years. Later he continued acting and producing plays as part of the Little Theatre Group.

Dutt's range was vast. He acted in and directed Jatra (The term "Jatra" probably derives from the Oraon language in which it means an important ritual dance festival. On the occasion of the festival, dramatic performances are held. In Bengal and Odisha, where Chaitanya's school of Vaishnavism had a great impact, Jatra is always associated with a Vaishnava festival. Thus its themes are drawn from the story of Krishna's life. With the decline of Vaishnavite influence on the social life of Bengal from the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jatra began to draw on Purapic and secular themes too. The new form of Jatra introduced an orchestra with indigenous and foreign instruments—a characteristic retained to this day. This form is known as "Nutan Jatra". It added prose dialogue in imitation of Western theatre. During the national movement, Jatra turned to social themes aiming at removal of social evils such as untouchability and casteism. Jatra is a moving theatre and the professional troupes travel around performing in different places, generally between October and June.

Dutt was a careful student of political theater movements in the West. Dutt came of age as a theater actor, director and eventually playwright in mid nineteen the fifties and early nineteen sixties India. Starting off with Shakespeare in college, the heady years of newly achieved political independence from the British colonial rulers moved him towards theater work in the language of the masses, Bengali, and with more pronounced political tendencies. The great merit of the two new collections of Dutt's combative essays written from the fifties to the nineties, 'On Theatre' and 'On Cinema', is that he writes not just from viewpoint of someone with a definite politics but also as a practitioner in these arts, trawling the artistic seas of his time in search of productions that catch his

eye. He had directed one impressionistic short film, By-Lane2, based on the works of Assamese film journalist Pabitra Kumar Deka. The film was selected for several Film Festivals and for Indian Panorama 2013. His second film is Through Trust and Fear, based on the philosophy of Assamese writer Nirupama Barghohain. This film was produced by Mihir Goswami. Datta's third film, *Borgeet - Eti Dhrupadi Ratna*, is based on the borgeets of Assam. He was married to Namrata Datta, a writer; they lived in Guwahati with their daughter Ragamala.

His plays, notably *Ajeya Vietnam* (Unconquered Vietnam), *Angar* (Coal), *Ferari Fauj* (The Runaway Soldier), and *Kallol* (Waves) are all intensely dramatic and entertaining. Critics have often called the climactic scenes melodramatic and over-emotional, though admitting in the same breath that it is precisely these qualities that make Dutt's plays resonate with his audience. Dutt wanted his audience to think for themselves about their respective social situations. He realized that he would have to adopt Brechtian stage conventions in order to involve the audience.

In Utpal Dutt's own acting there was both involvement and detachment no matter what role he performed. The audience felt that Dutt became the character he portrayed but was also critically analyzing it all the time and conveying his own impression. He performs the role of a choric commentator by informing the audience about the chaotic social conditions which constitute the background of Nightmare City:

Song of the City

How long will you call her names, how long call her a slut?

She is dressed in rags, gray with dust,

Sells her body, trades in lust,

But I love her so

And Calcutta's her name...

The bustards came in the night and raped her – bad news!

And killed her kids in front of her.

So she's dressed in battle-green,

Submachine-gun in the sling, and fights like the devil.

Calcutta's her name. (224-225)

In spite of his commercial success, Dutt was always steadfast in his theory of the revolutionary theater. Even if he was not able to incite an actual social revolution, he did create a politically subversive theater of a kind that was previously unseen and unheard in Bengal.

As Dutt put it in a 1972 interview with theater critic Samik Bandyopadhyay, published in the New Delhi-based theater journal Enact:

What you said about Teer is absolutely right. The CPI (M) did not accept the point of view of Teer; they even came to condemn the Naxalbari movement. But when we first staged Teer, they hadn't decided on a line…But once they had a clearly marked line, they disowned us. On the other hand, the new Party that came up with the Naxalbari movement was bent against the Cultural Front from the beginning…they were all convinced that the theater was a diversion to occupy the minds of the best city cadre…We had to go on performing Teer without support from any political Party.

In the article, "*Theatre as Weapon of Revolution*", Dutt writes:

The people's theatre-movement in India owes its origin to the Communist Party... One would imagine that a movement initiated by the Communist Party would be politically sound and deeply rooted in the working-class. But unfortunately, the IPTA failed to acquire a proletarian standpoint, failed to move beyond the frontiers of anti-imperialist mass-sentiment, failed to politicize its leading cadre. While acknowledging our debt to the pioneering work of the IPTA, in retrospect now we cannot help noticing the IPTA's almost naive portrayals of poverty, sorrow and famine under British rule, and its neglect of calls to armed resistance. But the great IPTA legacy survives in numerous groups throughout the country, and the struggle still is to overcome political weakness, to find roots in the toiling masses, to take the movement from a stage of 'progressive' platitudes to one of revolutionary propaganda. (Saha, 113)

Speaking to theater scholar A.J. Gunawardena in 1970, Dutt said:

> *In 1967, the peasants of Naxalbari in northern Bengal suddenly burst into armed revolt and guerrilla warfare of the most advanced kind, panicking the ruling classes. Plays and songs came forth almost spontaneously. Rakter Rang [The Color of Blood] by Anal Gupta and my play Teer [Arrow] tried to recount the daring and heroism of the peasant-guerrilla and expose the brutalities of the soldiers and policemen sent in droves to the area. But there was a hue and cry among "Marxists" and "Communists" that the leaders of the Naxalbari uprising were Adventurists and therefore all references to it were taboo. We disagreed. We held that the heroism of armed peasants was an important material for the revolutionary theater.* (Dutt 1971, 226)

On such a reading Dutt's detailed stage directions take on a different status in the text in so far as they figure annotations about the customs, rituals, practices etc of the tribal people. He considered it crucial to depict the ruling class as a ruthless enemy and to focus on the urgent need for the revolution in order to transform the contemporary social system. Utpal Dutt's work, in general, invites us to read and contextualize it within different frames of comparison. The atmosphere is rife with excitement as events unfold on stage and twenty-thousand people react in unison. It helps that the form is so deeply rooted in traditional folklore and speaks to the people in such a familiar voice.

Utpal Dutt's philosophy of the theater and acting was based on a firm belief in Marxian dialectics which he explained as "*a scientific principle which declares that nothing in this universe is static, everything is always changing.*" The idea is not new. Dutt's plays including Hunting The Sun deal with political issues, their purpose being spreading the "message" as he strongly felt that besides being entertainment, another important aim of drama is to "teach and raise" the people to higher ideological and cultural levels.

But then, my knowledge, or rather the lack thereof, is immaterial. What we are splitting hairs about is in re to what Mr. Dutt had to say. As opposed to 'why' or the justifiability of his viewpoints.

Utpal Dutt is how he managed to believe in one ideology so strongly and yet could act in movies that are a cultural embodiment of what he warned us against. One tends to conclude with Utpal Dutt that this practice of searching for reactionary and progressive elements was arbitrary and that it led to nowhere. To tell the truth, this approach was hopelessly confusing because each and every cardinal figure partly fitted into the laudatory mode and partly into the condemnatory mode. How self-serving of Dutt (as an exemplar of the left) to assume that most people are blinded by the 'veil of false consciousness' and that he alone sees how 'inverted' the world is... That he alone has managed to escape the intoxication of the 'opiate of the masses'. In the limited scope of this one article, it may not be possible to give a detailed analysis of Dutt's dialectical approach.

It is a vehicle for his ideology, and this consideration colours his choice of the target audience, theme and style. Hence its relevance and significance. He aimed at self-development in his actors. Here communication does not remain one sided, with a leading character imposing his ideology on the rest, but becomes alive in the constant flow of participation from others also. The personal involvement created on their behalf makes them leave the theatre with a troubled conscience which will result in a silent revolution in the years to come. When he came into the world of creativity he was quick to realize that the quality of work was hardly a consideration for getting recognition. Utpal Dutt's short stories raise some very interesting questions about the trajectory of the left movement which advanced in the aftermath of the collapse of Bengali nationalism as a viable intellectual-cultural-social-political force. Although Utpal Dutt himself branded himself to be a propagandist of Marxist philosophy, Dutt denied of having written any 'political' play as such. He insisted that his plays did contain elements of politics in them. He was an eminent director, playwright, and actor, Utpal Dutt was active primarily in Bengali theatre, though he also achieved fame in English theatre. Utpal Dutt's famous plays include *Fairy Faul, Titas Ekti Nodir Naam, Kollol, Din Bodoler Pala* and *Leniner Daak* which illustrate his Marxist views.

His views on human rights and democracy are best highlighted by the plays *Tiner Talowar* and *Manusher Odhikare*. His dramas showcased the sufferings of the common people. He was also a founding member of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA).

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21

SANICHARI'S JOURNEY FROM A HELPLESS VICTIM TOWARDS AN EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY IN USHA GANGULI'S *RUDALI*

Supriya Mandal

Usha Ganguli's '*Rudali'*, a dramatic adaptation of Mahasweta Devi's novella '*Rudali',* appears as a mode of activism in a doubly colonized society. *"Kristen Holst Peterson and Anna Ruthford in 1986 proposed that women in colonialism experience a 'double colonization'. By this they were gesturing at the extraordinarily oppressive and circumscribe context of women lives in colonialism, trapped by / within both patriarchy and colonialism*" (Nayar*,* 172-173). Usha Ganguli's Rudali highlights those aspects of exploitation of the Ganju's and Dushad's women by the patriarchal and upper class societies in the name of religion, caste and creed. Ganguli reveals the power politics of those snobbish Brahmin and '*Malik-Mahajan'* who thrust them in a wretched poverty. She employs Dulan and unmasks their (Brahmins and *Malik-Mahajan)* trickery. She takes the charge in her hand and gives voice to those voiceless, employs them against the exploitation. Man made poverty leads them towards prostitution, makes them

outcaste and downtrodden.

Ganguli's drama plans to turn the situation through the character of Sanichari and Bikhni and helps them to use the system instead of just being exploited by it. She points out how Sanichari at the beginning of the drama was bounded by patriarchal norms and regulations. She was deeply entangled with the system. She was consistently plundered by the system. Usha Ganguli decodes the cultural ideological knot, firstly by Bikhni and then by Dulan. She encourages and strengthens Sanichari and Bikhni's willpower and helps them to turn a ritualistic ceremony into a professional regular business. I want to show here how Sanichari turned the situation and used the system on behalf of herself.

Ganguli uses proscenium theatre as a medium for her realistic play. At the very beginning of the play, Ganguli uses some significant props that portray the actual condition of Sanichari's life. In the off stage, we can hear the monotonous creaking of the *'chakki',* later we saw her ailing son Budhua lying on the *'charpoy'* and her old mother-in-law Somri wrapped in a tattered covering. She (Somri) is constantly nagging for some *'roti'*. The stage direction of the play suggests the '*real*' poverty with some appropriate props. She creates realistic impression by using material details for particular social setting. She proceeds through a well constructed story line with definite beginning, middle and end. As the play proceeds, we find Sanichari is grinding wheat and *dal* for others. Of course she is grinding wheat but she has no permission to take some flour from the grinded wheat. Like the grinding of *'chakki'* her life is also grinding within the wretched poverty. The death of her only son, husband and mother-in-law makes her life more miserable. Death abducted everything from her and led her towards poverty. I want to question here if only death is the main factor for Sanichari's wretchedness or anything else. The play reveals the reality behind her misery. It is not the Death who abducted everything but the upper class Brahmins and *'Malik-Mahajan'* exploited all her resources in the name of religion and class. The so called ritualistic *'kriya'* ceremony forced her to take loan from Ramavatar Singh

and made her bonded labour for five years. The death of Budhua forced to sell her only means of living, her *chakki*. It is clear that though we live in a post-colonial era, apparently we are free from colonial rules but the real situation does not change. The so called upper class takes the position of the colonizer and exploits the low-caste people in name of religion, caste and creed. They (the upper class) make them inferior, ignorant, outcaste and 'other' and create their own image as superior 'self'. The self/other binary gives them upper hand to the low-caste people. In this context, I want to quote Vaid Ji's statement "...*All you low-caste people are the same — no knowledge of religion, no faith, no education*." (Ganguli, 132)

It is getting clearer that how the Brahmins exploit them by making them inferior and 'other'. This is an ideological trick that everything seems natural. The low-caste people accept their superiority unquestioningly and think that it is their (low-caste) fate to acknowledge their (upper class) domination. Sanichari helps to understand this truth to her grand-son by her statement when the boy refuses to work under Lachman Singh's son. He refuses to work there because Lachman Sing's son thrashes him with his shoes. But Sanichari takes it as normal behaviour without questioning it and says *"That's a poor man's fate Beta --——— that kicks of the master" (Rudali, 138).* We can see how the power politics is deeply rooted here. The ritualistic norms and regulations lead her towards extreme poverty, make her condition wretched and it is clear from the statement of Bijua... "...*living is tough for us poor people, but dying is even worse."* (Ibid 136)

At the beginning of the drama, Sanichari comes as docile, submissive and bounded to the pre-existing social system. The part of the drama displays women's difficulty due to poverty and partly due to their subjugation and indifference. Ganguli employs her life because she wants to prove how the ideology rules over her. If we go through the text, we will find that she works as an instrumental against the exploitation of the patriarchy. Firstly, she did not able to realize the patriarchal strategy to use a woman against another woman for their own sake. This is evident by the

statement when Bikhni comes to live with her and she helps her (Sanichari) in household chores. She was overwhelmed with Bikhni's work and caring. She was surprised because it had broken her pre-existing notion of woman-woman relationship. She says, *"You know, when I was girl my mother used to always tell me that a woman's worst enemy was other women..."* (Ibid 157)

Bikhni decodes the strategy and says, "*Arre, that's stuff made up by men"* (Ibid). Ganguli examines the whole patriarchal social system which reinforces distrust among women through the process of socialization. This socialisation process makes them feel inferior to men and makes them one-another's enemy. At the beginning of the drama Sanichari acts as an agent of patriarchy. She rebukes Parbatia for her callous attitude towards her dying husband and for her frivolousness. I want to quote here Sanichari's statement in this context, ...*Her husband is lying there sick, and the whore preens in trashy trinkets!* (Ibid 127)

Actually she (Sanichari) nourishes the notion that a woman must be loyal, faithful, decent and caring to her husband. This notion is injected by patriarchy. The dramatist actually wants to enkindle a thought provoking attitude to her audience. In our society if a woman is ill or she is not able to gratify her husband's sexual urge, the man looks for another. But this is not immoral. Morality, loyalty, and decency are only applicable to women, not to men. Sanichari rebukes Parbatia with harsh words because she was bound to that system. She does not realize Parbatia's helplessness. She is young, so *'her appetite is huge'*. Budhua satisfies neither her hunger for food nor her physical appetite. Parbatia acknowledges Sanichari's accusation to Lachman Singh and accepts that *"He may be a devil, but at least he's a man!"* (Ibid) who can satisfy her both hunger. Ganguli implicitly questions here if men is free to do anything for his sexual gratification, why patriarchy always demand for women's chastity, virtuosity and decency. At the beginning, she never addresses her with decent words but at the later stage she realizes this and calls her 'bahu'.

Usha Ganguli emphasises more on female-relationship within

a preoccupied male dominated society than the cross-gendered relationship. She accentuates on Sanichari-Bikhni relationship than any other relationship. The relation between them was a supportive relationship, full of affection and caring while the relation with other male members was full of treachery and betrayal. After her husband's death, Sanichari brought up her only son Budhua with great difficulty. She fed her family by her hard work. Her life had been "*nothing but the stove, the chakki, and outside jobs*" (Ibid 154). After Budhua's untimely death, she reared up her grand-child Haroa. He was her only hope. She did not think her life except him. But as the time proceeds, Haroa changes his mind and denies his all responsibility towards an aged woman. When Sanichari rebukes him in anger, he also attacks her violently. He blames her and says, *"...You never gave anyone enough to eat. You starved my great-grandmother, you drove out my mother, you killed off my father..."* (Ibid 145) .He addresses her as '*daain*' who will devour him. He has no minimum gratitude for his aged grand-mother. Even he never thought what would happen with that woman. Gunguli portrays Haroa in a different way. In the original text Haroa leaves his house but he never attacks Sanichari. Mahasweta Devi portrays the character of Haroa in an idealized way. But Usha Ganguli emphatically tried to establish how treacherous a man could be. He never thought in what way Sanichari alone brought him up and how much hard labour she did to feed him. The same aspect is evident also in case of Bikhni. Bikhni's husband died before his son's birth. After her husband's death she alone reared up her only son. Firstly, she made her living by rearing up another people's calves, then she managed to get four cows of her own, and two milk-yielding goats. She arranged her son's marriage by taking loan from Mahajan. The Mahajan claimed her home and everything as repayment. But her son left her and sifted to his in-laws. She told her son to sell the cows and paid the loan. But her son thieved her cattle and ran-off to his in-laws. Both Haroa and Bikhni's son never thought about those women.

Usha Ganguli portrays the betrayal of men to highlight the wretched condition of women in a patriarchal society. She helps

Sanichari to understand the real situation and to move forward for better start. She criticizes the callous, snobbish attitude of the *Malik-Mahajan* who destroys many women's life. The artificially created miserable poverty thrusts Parbtia and another woman towards prostitution. Parbatia is forced to work for Lachman Singh because her family did not provide her square of meals. Though the drama apparently picturings that she willingly chooses to work for Lachman Singh, but the real situation is different. She confiscates Sanichari's wealth and frees herself from a severely circumscribed, poverty-ridden world, leaving behind all duties and responsibilities. Even she leaves her only infant son also. If her family was able to give her adequate food and accessaries, might be she will not choose the path. But she was forced to do so. Like Parbatia, Gulbadan is also thrusted towards prostitution by her father. Her own father suggests her to submit herself to her own cousin. How callous the man can be. He has no respect to blood relation, no affection to her daughter. Gulbadan does not accept the submission. She protests and as a mode of protest she chooses the life of prostitution. They ruin them and shamelessly claim for honour and respect from them. I want to quote here Bachchanlal's statement when he rebukes them for their disrespect to their master.

> *...You haven't the least consideration for your master's honour! All your life you've been fed, clothed and pampered by him! And you shameless hussies can't shed a tear at his passing*!(Ibid 168)

But Usha Ganguly sarcastically snaps back to the above statement by the dialogue of a prostitute,

"Yes yes the master was like a god to us! He made a whore of us, fed and clothed us..." (Ibid). They later understand their (*Malik-Mahajan*) pretension. So, they agree to Sanichari's proposal and choose the profession of rudali as a mode of activism. Ganguli effectively imprints the stoicism of man to him that a woman can be a sexual object and a productive machine. The situation is same in upper class also. Natuni Singh's midwife was neglected by her husband and her family because she did not give them any male heir.

The dramatist employs the character of Dulan and makes him instrumental for Sanichari's development. He (Dulan) explores the tricky ideological exploitation of the rich and unmasks them. He mocks the religion and the upper class. He discovers the weakness of the rich and their need. He realizes that there is no higher god than one's belly. So, one can do anything for serving one's belly. That appears as the core issue for Sanichari's development. According to Anjum Katyal, Mahasweta Devi does not intend to show any kind of meanness and exploitation among the villagers, neither among women nor among men but the deeper understanding of the play is another. Reality behind the portrayal of Dulan's character in Ganguli's play is different from Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Dulan. He persuades Sanichari and Bikhni and makes their profession as mourner. He helps them for a better start but he is not a self-less well wisher. Behind his help he sustains his personal betterment. He realizes that the profession of Rudali is not for him. The profession is only allotted to women. So, he chooses them for this task. He manages work for them and informs them about their work because he also wants to be benefitted from this profession. Instead of doing anything for them he wants his share. His intention is evident in his statement to Saichari when he told her that, *"...And listen Sanichari —I want my share of your earning from any job I arrange for you."*(Ibid 164) We have no doubt about Dulan who works as instrument for Sanichari's transformation. But as the time proceeds he becomes money minded, and corrupted. I would like to quote here his previous statement when he tries to persuade Sanichari and Bikhni for this work. He says, *"...I'm telling you, Sanichari, no god is more important than your belly. One does whatever it takes to feed one's stomach."* (Ibid 162).But later he changes his emphasis from belly to money. After Bikhni's departure he again tries to persuade Sanichari to take the task on her hand. He utters, *"For the sake of money you can do anything..."* (Ibid 183).Firstly, he persuades her on the name of stomach but here he tries to persuade her on the name of money. Though he apparently helps them to their empowerment but he also works as an exploiter like any other

male member of the society.

In the later part of the drama Sanichari makes herself free from patriarchal notion. Though Dulan comes as a crook but he is far better than any other male character. Dulan and Bikhni help her to decode these knots of patriarchal domination. At the end of the drama she realizes the wretched condition of the prostitutes. When Gulbadan argues with her about the benefit of prostitution because it is their regular business, Sanichari helps them to understand the real situation by her statement,

> ...*You stand in line for a measly fifty paise. Arre, does this work of yours earn you enough to fill your stomach? Does it bring you self-respect? Ask her (gesturing towards Gangu) did she get to eat two square meals yesterday? No clothes, no food, no self-respect...* (Ibid 189)

She recognises the existing injustice, makes them aware about the present situation of their profession. At this stage she overcomes her preoccupied notion of patriarchy. She addresses Parbatia as '*Bahu*'. She instigates Gulbadan by saying that, *"Gulbadan, you come along as well. Gambhir Singh has died; by wailing for him and taking their money, you'll be rubbing salt in their wound"* (Ibid 117)). She spreads out her helping hand and makes them understand that this is a way of revenge to the *'Malik-Mahajan*' who ruined them. This is the high time for them to use the system because now they *(Malik-Mahajan)* are bound to those rudali for the preservation of their false status.

Thus Usha Ganguli shows us that how Sanichari deals with *'Malik-Mahajan'*, gathers news about their business like a new woman and gets empowered. Rather, we can say that she is frying the fish in the oil of fish. She is able to overcome her inferior condition and explores the need of the rich and utilises it properly. She realises that *"The malik-mahajan now belongs to us*". So, she uses the system for her own sake**.** She not only changes her life but also the life of the wretched prostitutes who also were the victim. So, the drama offers an account of Sanichari's condition from a helpless victim towards an empowerment and agency.

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22

MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

Sujoy Barman

In society, "gender" is the cultural issue whereas "sex" is the biological. In every culture, according to gender, there are two categories of people; they are 'male' and 'female' ; the culture is divided into masculine and feminine on the basis of gender. But in society, the existence of the two genders or cultures is binary; that means that they are standing opposite sides, differ one with another in several grounds. At the same time, there begins a battle between genders; one pushes another into a subservient position and another struggles to establish own identity or to be equal with the other. One holds all the facilities, power of control whereas the other asks for the minimum right to live. India is a such country that has not possess any single culture, it has multiple cultures and there are lot of dissimilarities in Indian multicultural society. And among these dissimilarities; the gender discrimination is a burning topic. And Mahesh Dattani, being an Indian, through his writings, sketches this discrimination from different sides. For example "

Tara" is known for the misjudgement towards children by their parents, *"Seven Steps Around the Fire "* is identified for the domination of the third gender by patriarchan society etc. Mahesh Dattani, through the play writings, scrutinizes the most probable reasons behind the discrimination.

It would be wrong if it is accepted that there is only one way by which the discrimination of gender is practised. Mahesh Dattani; through his playwrightings, on the Indian context, has pointed out more than one perspectives by which the gender discrimination has been practised. Patriarchism is the foremost reason for this discrimination. Patriarchy is the all controlling power, like domestic, politics, economic etc centering on the world of men where the position of women is nothing. Mahesh Dattani, very cleverly has used his skill to portray this patriarchan society and its dominating power over women. The Trivedi brothers, in the play " *Bravely Fought the Queen "* are typical middle class Indian capitalist patriarchan figures. They are more conscious to launch a new design nightwear for the the 'Revatee company' but they have not a little conscious for their wives, Doli and Alka who are preparing themselves for going out of the house and their demand never be fulfilled :

> *Dolly. .....Oh, didn't Jiten tell you that? Nitin told me a week ago! Or, Nitin told me all four of us were going but Jiten changed his mind!"* (Ibid 247)

At the same time, Daksha, the deformed daughter of Dolly and Jiten is the result of patriarchan brutality:

> *Dolly. And you hit me! Jitu you beat me up! I was carring Daksha and you beat me up!* (Ibid 311)

Praful, brother of Dolly and Alka, is also a patriarchan figure who controls his sisters according to his wills and he doesn't like that his sisters should have a friendly relation with the neighbouring boy:

> *Alka. Praful saw. He didn't say a word to me. He just dragged me into the kitchen. He lit the stove and pushed my face in front of it! I thought he was going to burn my face!* (Ibid 257)

Mahesh Dattani's another important patriarchan figure is Amritlal Parekh who is a liberalist, freedom fighter, played an important role during the Indian revolution. He supports the liberty of common men, but he denies the liberty of his son Jairaj because of his practice of the feminine art form 'dance'. He wishes to control the life style of his son Jairaj. He doesn't accept his son Jairaj as a dancer because it is disreputable for his family background. On the other hand Jairaj decides to be a dancer . Dance is a feminine art for Amritlal and he wants to make his son to be a man. He criticises Jairaj thus:

> *Well, most boys are interested in cricket; my son is interested in dance.*
>
> (Ibid 415)

He also asks Jairaj:

> *Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. It is because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance?* (Ibid)

The play "*Dance Like a Man"* also highlights that a woman may easily succeed in the world of men, but a man can't succeed in the world of women. Hasmukh Mehta is another patriarchan figure of Mahesh Dattani in *"Where There's a Will "* who dominates his family members after his death through his will. Thus Mahesh Dattani shows that the patriarchism is the foremost reason for this discrimination.

In the play " *Tara " ,* Mahesh Dattani presents the issue of gender discrimination in a different way. At the very childhood one has been taught about the importance of gender. The play is an example that shows the discrimination between children, imposed by their own parents. And it is not a new side of gender study. In the early twentieth century, the British feminist Virginia Woolf has attacked this psychology of the parents. She has created the imaginary sister of Shakespeare, Judith Shakespeare in her *" The Room of One's Own "*. Virginia Woolf says:

> *...Meanwhile his extraordinary gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was an adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning*

grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil.... (Leitch, 896)

Like William, Judith Shakespeare is so talented; but her talent is restricted or prevented by her parents. She has been educated only on fine arts, painting, needle, music whereas William has been provided all the facilities to develope his intellectual power. And as a result, the world has received only one Shakespeare not two, that is male. The same subject has also been highlighted by Judith Butler in her text "*Gender Trouble* " where the conducts of parents towards their daughters have been criticised. Mahesh Dattani, in the play "*Tara* " attacks the same issue. Both Tara and Chandan are siamese twins with three legs and the extra leg medically belongs to Tara and the gender discrimination has been practised here during the surgery. It is Bharati who does not want a deformed son and she decides to give this extra leg to Chandan. But the surgery is not a successful one:

...As planned by them , Chandan had two legs- for two days. It didn't take them very long time to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated.(Dattani, 378)

There are a lot of reasons behind this injustice, done by Bharati. At first she might have the conscious that only Chandan would be the supporter in future when her old age would come because he is a male, and Tara, being a female can not be a supporter of Bharati. Or sometimes, it is the patriarchan concept of the Indian society that forces Bharati to prefer Chandan to Tara. Because in society, the value of man is higher than the value of woman. Tara is also hunted by her father Patel. She is the excellent and brilliant daughter of the family, but her talent is restricted, like Judith Shakespeare by her father Patel who doesn't offer higher education to Tara, whereas for Chandan, he has planned much, his education at abroad. Chandan is also asked for help to the office work by Patel but for Tara that is beyond the scope:

Patel. You will come with me to the office until your college starts.

Chandan. I don't want to go to college! (Fighting his tears.)Not without

Tara!.....

Patel. You will not . I won't allow it.(Ibid 351)

Only patriarchism is not the primary reason for the gender discrimination. It is Mahesh Dattani who shows other reasons for the discrimination besides patriarchism. His creation of Baa in the play " *Bravely Fought the Queen* "is an important field in that regard. Through her, Mahesh Dattani presents how Baa becomes a masculine figure from feminine. During her married life she was a victim of the brutality of her drunken husband then she possessed all the feminine qualities. But after the death of her husband, there is found lot of changes. She is inherited the family property. She has not shown a little sympathy for the daughter- in- laws Dolly and Alka. Baa is charged by Alka that it is she who prevents Nitin to have a physical relation with her and as a result they do not have a child:

Alka. You know why I can't have children. You won't let me. That's why! (Ibid 284)

Perhaps Baa finds some pleasure by giving the mental torture to Alka and it gives her some solace for her past life. Beside this explanation, it is also noticed that Baa has an oedipus relation with Nitin because Nitin possesses a different face from his father. Sometimes it may be said that it is the psychology of power that changes the morality of life. As Baa has the economical power, she has lost the capability to understand the plights of her daughter-in- laws. She dominates everyone of the family:

Jiten. She will have to change her will.

Nitin. She won't. She will never give it to you.

Jiten. But she will give it to you.

Nitin. No. She won't.

Jiten. I tell you she will.

Nitin. She has never forgive me!

Jiten. Make her forgive you!

Nitin. How?

Jiten. Get rid of Alka! (Ibid 290)

Besides this, in the relation among the characters Baa, Nitin, Praful, and Alka, sex plays the basic role and in every ground, it is Alka who is dominated and victimised. Praful has married off Alka to Nitin because of he wants to hide his secret homosexual relation with Nitin. Thus for sex, one gender is dominated by another gender. Baa does the same thing with Alka as she is in love for her son Nitin. On the other hand Nitin, being a heterosexual person avoids his wife Alka. Thus being a female, Alka is dominated from every sexual ground. So here Mahesh Dattani presents sex and power of money or capitalism as the issues of gender discrimination.

In the dramas like "*Dance Like a Man ", "Tara ","Bravely Fought the Queen ",* Mahesh Dattani presents the discrimination between men and women, but the situation for gender in the "*Seven Steps Around the Fire "* is totally different. Here he focuses on the Indian third gender and their plight in the Indian community rather than man-woman relation. Anarkali is a hijra and is imprisoned on the charge of the murder of the fellow hijra Kamla but who is actually victimised by the Indian patriarchan society, represented by Mr.Sharma who is an M.L.A . In the police station, Anarkali is put in the cell which is already full of male imprisoners. This marks the lackness of Indian administrative facilities for the hijras in India:

Uma. She is being beaten by all the male prisoners. (Ibid 9)

Besides this, Munswamy is the representative of all the official persons who think the hijras are not human; they are animals in the society:

Munswamy (hits the bars again). Back! Beat it! Kick the hijra!

The other inmates begin to beat Anarkali up. (Ibid)

If the hijra is regarded as the third gender then men are the first and the women are the second. Men , being the first, possess

all the facilities and for women the facilities are restricted, but for the hijra, these are totally blocked. And they are dominated in two ways in a same time , for the first by men and then the woman. Mr.Sharma presents the first category and Uma Rao is for the second. Through the research work of Uma on the hijra, Mahesh Dattani discloses the mystery of the murder of Kamla. Uma is a teacher of sociology at Bangalore University and doing a research on the Indian third gender. She has come to know the injustice against the Kamla and Anarkali but she is not active to punish the culprits. She does only those things which are informative for her thesis:

> *Uma. I think this particular one is of interest to me at this time.* (Ibid 7)

Dattani very carefully has pointed out this speechless condition of the Indian third gender:

> *Anarkali. They will kill me also if I tell you the truth. If I don't tell the truth, I will die in jail.* (Ibid 14)

Besides this, Mahesh Dattani ends the play without solving the case. The audience has come to know about the culprits, but they will not be punished because of the the system that is controlled by the patriarchan society.

The gender discrimination has presented also in the radio play " *Uma and The Fairy Queen* "by Mahesh Dattani with the background of Islum. It is a detective play on the murder of Michael. But it also focuses on the women and their sexual rights in the Muslim world. Before the relation with Michael, Nila was a famous Pakistani T. V actress and every household in Pakistan knew her as Ruksana, the ideal housewife. But Nila has been charged that she had immoral sexual relation during her glamorous career and there was restriction, like fatwa by the authority of the Muslim society. On the other hand her first husband Malik is capable to have two wives, Nila and Sohaila at a time. This marks the sexual freedom for the men and the restriction for women on the basis of gender in that society according to religion. Feroz is the son of Nila and

Malik. Both of his parents have multiple sex relations in their lives. But the life of Feroz becomes critical for his mother's immoral relations, not for his father Malik. And it is that society that forces Feroz to intend to murder his mother:

> *Feroz. She was an immoral woman and that is something we do not forgive! She slept with her actor friends! For money, for pleasure or just to please the Devil. And I was born out of her cesspool of lust.* (Ibid 465)

These are all the situations by which Mahesh Dattani presents the gender discrimination. But at the same time, he tries to create some situations where the discrimination marks its impact very little. Mahesh Dattani introduces some good couples who lead very successful marital lives. He has used same names of his characters but there are some little differences behind the backgrounds, for example Uma and Suresh in both of his plays *" Seven Steps Around the Fire "* and " *Uma and The Fairy Queen ".* In both cases, they prove themselves good companions for each other. In " *Seven Steps Around the Fire ",* Suresh has applauded the importance of the dream of his wife Uma and after the marriage, Suresh allows his wife to continue her study and the research work on the Indian third gender. Besides this, in the play " *Uma and The Fairy Queen "* Uma has been introduced as a detective and her journey to disclose the mystery of the murder of Michael is appreciated by her husband Suresh. And it is she who solves the case of the murder rather than her husband Suresh. Lalitha and Sridhar is another good couple by Mahesh Dattani in the play " *Bravely Fought the Queen ".* Lalitha is not helping her h usband in the domestic field but also in his office work. She has gone to the Trivedi family as the representative of her husband to Dolly and Alka for the preparation of the mask ball for the 'Revatee company' that is going to launch a new range of colour- coordinated nightwear and underwear for women, as Dolly has some experience of the mask ball arrangement. Besides that part of Lalitha, Sridhar knows how to maintain the dignity of his wife. He involves in fighting with the Trivedi brothers while Lalitha is insulted. He quarrels with Jiten when he insults her:

Sridhar. Be more polite! It's my wife you are talking to!

Jiten. Screw your wife. (Ibid 306)

Sridhar later leaves the job for the dignity of his wife. Mahesh Dattani has created some situations where for women have no value, for examples in the cases of Baa and her dead husband, Dolly and Jiten, Alka and Nitin; but in the cases of Lalitha and Sridhar, Uma and Suresh, he has created a different position of man-woman relation.

Mahesh Dattani is the greatest Indian playwright. His dramatical works are closely related with the present issues of India or the present India is the theme of his writings. It has already explained that his dramas reflect the conflict of gender but besides that he is also known for religious problems, conflict between the personal and moral choices. Mahesh Dattani has shown that the women in India and their plight in India are not satisfactory. They are humiliated, pushed into the subservient positions in life. At the same time he also suggests to increase the position of women in the Indian society. In short, his plays talk of a lot of themes about life and its relation in society. "I (Mahesh Dattani) write for my plays to be performed and appreciated by as wide as section of the society that my plays speak to and are about." (Ibid XI)

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23

PANGS OF CONSCIENCE: *TARA*

Subhrajyoti Roy

Moral conscience is the internal tension between social standards and our less than perfect behaviour. In *Tara*, we see parents suffering from the pangs of conscience due to their initial prejudice against Tara. Similarly Chandan also suffers from the guilt that he is responsible for all the misfortunes of Tara.

The play is a memory. It is Chandan's flashback that we see. Thus, When Mahesh Dattani created Chandan he pulled a trick. He created a character who exists outside and inside the play at the same time.

Mahesh Dattani delineates Bharti a tragic heroine in the classical sense. The play faces the audience with the question what would they do if they were in the exact same situation. She had to make her choice of giving the second leg between her Siemens twin, and they are to be separated surgilically by Dr. Thakkar. The problem Bharti and the family faces is that which one of the twins should get the natural leg. After realising the adults of their family choose Chandan to have two legs out of the three legs that they share. And Tara to be deprived both physically and medically because the

blood circulation of the third leg comes from Tara. So, the leg should have suited Tara because the blood circulation from the limb was happening from Tara's body not from Chandan's. Bharti consented to the decision of the hierarchy of the family of prioritizing boy over the girl, and once they are separated the boy should be able to stand properly.

Bharati thinks that if the operation becomes successful she will have order in the family. But in reality Chandan had two legs only for two days because the doctor realised their error and ampulated the "*piece of dead flesh which could have-might have-been Tara.*" Once the operation failed she could not find any sanity in the world.

> *Soon after the surgical operation, she realizes her mistake by denying the legitimate leg of Tara. Her pangs of conscience begin to disturb her mind and body. She tries to compensate her guilt as it becomes clear with her own speech, when she says, "Yes, I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It is what she . . . deserves. Love can make up for a lot.* (Act i, 744 – 755)

Bharati's pangs of conscience are to such an extent that she is willing to donate her kidney to Tara so that Tara may survive for a few more years and she may have the contentment of doing something for her daughter. It is quite extraordinary that Bharati is so keen to donate something from her own body to purge off her sin that she committed in the past.

> *Bharti. Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much.*
>
> *Tara (enjoying this affection). Yes, mummy. I know that.*
>
> *Bharati. I want you to remember that, Tara.* (Act ii, 1 – 4)

Bharati emphasises that Tara mustn't forget what she is going to do for her. She tries to show that good people who sometimes make bad choices which then haunt them for the rest of her life.

> She acclaims that "*everything will be all right. Now that I am giving you a part of me. Everything will be all right."* (Act ii, 6 – 7) In

addition, she goes on to say "*After the operation, we will all be happy together. And I will make up for . . . for . . . your father, and I will make up for all the things God hasn't given you.*" (Act ii, 11 – 14)

Bharati is fully aware about the discrimination meted out to women. Therefore, she is worried about Tara's future. She contemplates about the situations Tara is going to face in near future. Chandan as a male will enjoy so lots of privileges in comparison to Tara.

BHARATI. It's time Tara decided what she wants to be. Women have to do that as well these days. She must have a career. (Act i, 717 - 718)

BHARATI. . . . Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you-but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God! (Act i, 730 – 733)

Bharati is interested in providing a happy and healthy atmosphere for Tara. She goes to the extent of bringing her intrusive and garrulous neighbour, Roopa to be her daughter's friend. She expresses her feelings to Roopa about Tara in these words.

BHARATI. Tara is a very nice girl. (Act i, 482)

BHARATI. She. . . she must make more friends. Chandan is all right – he has his writing, but she. . .He is different, he is a sort of self contained, but Tara. . . she can be very good company and she has her talents. She can be very witty and of course she is intelligent. I have seen to it that she . . . more than makes up in some ways for what she . . . doesn't have. (Act i, 488 – 493)

Bharati feels so much attached to Tara that while lying in the hospital, she speaks to Tara as if she is talking to an infant in her arms. She utters "*Tara! My beautiful little girl. Look at her smile! Smile, Tara. Smile again for me! Oh! See how her eyes twinkle. You are my most beautiful baby!*" (Act ii, 685 – 687)

Although Bharati worries about the future of Tara, she herself was responsible as mentioned earlier in taking the decision to

provide the leg to the boy. When Tara comes to know this stark reality she utters-"*And she called me her star*."

On the otherhand, Chandan's conscience drives him to write a tragedy called "*Twinkle Tara*" commemorating his loving sibling Tara, now dead. His sense of trauma is so intense that, at the end of the play, we find Chandan apologises to Tara in one of the most moving lines of the play, "*Forgive me, Tara. Forgive it making it my tragedy*." (Act ii, 727)

Finally, he thinks he has become successful in writing a tragedy, but at the same time he is horrified by the thought that the subject of his tragedy is none other than his own sister. He repents and asks for forgiveness from Tara. From their infancy they were together. She had no friends to speak of except her only brother. His love for Tara is so intense that he could not bear the idea that they were forcefully separated.

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24

EXISTENCE AND DISTANCE OF SELF IN BADAL SIRCAR'S PLAYS

Anupam Das

Post independence Bengali theatre was revolutionized by stalwarts like Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Shambhu Mitra and Rudrapratap Sengupta. They revolutionized the theatre not only technically but also thematically, and their long lasting influence gave the Bengali theatre-goers as well as those people who love drama so much a renewed experience which is quite foreign to them. Utpal Dutt believed that drama means struggle and drama can be the weapon of struggle. His enthusiasm made him one of the foremost practitioners of the political drama in Bengali theatre. Earlier Bijan Bhattacharjee tried his hand in this genre, but in Dutt's hand it became fruitful. Like Sircar, he also believed that drama should be enacted before thousands of weary labourer, not before few petty middleclass men and women and those who are so called intellectuals. Quiet same view about theatre was expressed by Sircar when he told about his Anganmancha and 'third theatre': "*For third theatre could not be a synthesis of anything if it had to be an alternative theatre. … third theatre , to be a free theatre should not be costly, immobile or*

infested with commercialism. It should attempt a dialogue with the audience."(*Sunday Times of India*)

Sudhindra Sarkar, known as Badal Sircar was born in Calcutta, on July 15, 1925. Sircar's father was earlier a professor and later he became the principal of Scottish Church College, Calcutta. His mother was Sarla Mona Sircar. He came from a middleclass family. He did his graduation in civil engineering. Badal Sircar started his career as a town planner. Badal Sircar had always refused to live life the ordinary middle-class way. While a student of the Bengal Engineering College, he joined the undivided Communist Party of India only to be suspended during the turbulent post-1947 period for questioning the leadership. After serving as a civil engineer in India for ten years, Sircar went to study and work in England (1957-59), France (1963) and Nigeria (1964-67). Writing almost all his major proscenium plays in these years, he finally settled down in Kolkata and formed his own group *Satabdi*.

Badal Sircar wrote the 'Third Theatre' plays with a principle. In fact, many of his plays revolve round characters that are so much like him: an educated middle-class Bengali who tries to declass himself, refuses to accept the existing unjust socio-political system and urges others to take an active part in bringing about a radical change in the society. However, not just theatre, he involved himself in making collages, sketching and inventing simple educative games for children and young adults. At an age of retirement, he went to study MA in Comparative literature at Jadavpur University. He visited Thailand again and again and even wrote a travelogue when his age was more than eighty.

Badal Sircar with his deep understanding of the concerns and anxieties of the Indian middle class coupled with his delightful sense of humour and wit, made an immediate connect with the people and brought a new energy and excitement to the theatre arena with his large body of plays. He stands out for his innovativeness and the sheer range of his plays in terms of subjects, forms and styles. He is probably the most translated and staged Indian playwright of the last century. Sircar's *Ebong Indrajit* (And

Indrajit), *Pagla Ghoda* (Mad Horse), *Baki Itihas* (Remaining History), *Tringsha Satabdi* (The Thirtieth Century), *Shesh Nei* (There's No End) are some nationwide popular plays.

After some light-hearted comedies, Sircar immediately came with *Ebong Indrajit* (And Indrajit) (1963) which created a storm in the theatre. Satyadev Dubey, in his introduction to *Ebong Indrajit,* praises the play as a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama, as he says: "*With the performance of Sircar's Ebong Indrajit in Bengali in Calcutta in September 1965, theatre practitioners all over India became aware of a major talent and a major play. The play provided for them the shock of recognition. It was about the Indian reality as they knew it; it was a theatrically effective and crystallized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class."(Evam Indrajit,* VI) Although it was written in 1963, it was drafted and its poems were composed during 1957-59 in London. This drama poses the story of a middle class man who wants to prove his existence in the vast sea of people but at the same time he seeks a distance from all of them. As everything in this play is vague, Sircar does not provide any list of characters. That is why Lekhak, Amal, Bimal, Kamal and Indrajit —all of them represent that middleclass Bengali youth who tries to choose a distinct path but the path remains the same. Like Camus' Meursalt in *The Stranger*, Indrajit is aimless, as he claims to be petty middleclass man who has love for his life, affection for his loved ones and fear of the dark inevitability of life. He proclaims himself to be 'Nirmal' like Amal, Bimal, and Kamal, but in no time he discards the idea walking through the beaten track of them. He only loves the concept of love derived from his beloved Manasi, but cannot gather courage to break the barriers of social rules because she is his cousin. But he marries another Manasi not out of love but to prove his existence. He even continues his love relationship with Manasi, his cousin, only to walk through the track, because he cannot bear the distance from himself. Like everyone, he has to walk through the track of life because only walking proves that he exists. Lekhak's questions to Masimapose the ultimate reality of the life of every single character in this play. Although the questions are queer, they are

worth citing:

LEKHAK : I think —who are we?

MASIMA : Is there anything to think? You are you. Who else can be?

LEKHAK :That's right. We are we. It did not come to my mind. But —what are we?

MASIMA : Hear his words. What are we! All of you are pieces of diamond. You have passed so many exams and have good jobs.

LEKHAK : You are right! Pieces of diamond. I guessed the piece. But that diamond did not come to my mind.

MASIMA: Why do you make such riddles!

LEKHAK : These are really riddles. Puzzles.You have answered two and now answer this one. This is not that easy.

MASIMA : What should I answer?

LEKHAK : Why are we?

MASIMA : Why are you? What does it mean?

(*Natok Samagra,* Vol-I, Act -II, 290)

These queer questions emphasize the search for the meaning of the middle class life when compared with this limitless cosmos. Men have hardly any existence and ideal happiness proves to be a distant dream. They are nothing when their tiny existence is placed side by side with the mammoth presence of the universe, this entire world. And, at the same moment, worldly happiness and worldly demands dominate their lives. They become so much bounded by those demands that they distance them from themselves. They are chocked by those barriers and they pretend to be contended with what they already have. In this way, their lives become meaningless, their loves turn worthless and they are cursed as lifeless. The playwright scraps out this meaninglessness, worthlessness and lifelessness of existence, love, happiness and satisfaction again and again through Lekhak, Amal, Bimal, Kamal and Indrajit. To them, life is nothing but a math of rotation. And it is an open secret that the answer of this math is zero. So no one has the courage to take

the bull by its horn. They always want to cut it short with some easier arrangements of life: "*School to college. College and exam. Exam and passed. After that the world."*(Act-I, 277)

At the very end of the play, Lekhak says: "*Path. We have only path. We will walk. I have nothing to write but I will write. You have nothing to say but you will say. Manasi has nothing to live but Manasi have to live. We have path before us and we will walk.*" And Indrajit symbolizes the cycle of life with his reply: "*By the curse of Jupiter, the ghost of Sisyphus lifts the heavy rock on the peak of the hill. On reaching the peak the rock rolls down. He lifts it again. It again rolls down and he again lifts.*"(Act-III, 311) This drama has also no end like the heavy rock of the ghost of the Sisyphus. This drama is also a continuous parallel track like the path laid before Lekhak or Indrajit or every middleclass youth. Its end is just a new beginning of it just like a racing track. Thus, everyone have to watch it or read it again and again to understand the ultimate meaning of life fully.

The protagonist of *Baki Itihas* (Remaining History) (1965), it can be said, is modeled on the character of Indrajit. Like Indrajit, Sharadindu is also a collage or blended type character, although there are various dissimilarities. As the ultimate truth and reality is blurred in Sircar's dramatic technique of myth making, this play provides the spectators and the characters a vantage point. Sharadindu, a middleclass man, with his presentable social position, can be called a successful man. He is a professor of literature and his wife Basanti is a storywriter with some fame. Thus, their family can be called a creative one and Sircar makes usage of this creativity fully. Basanti searches for a well-knit plot to write a story and she is suggested by Sharadindu to write a story about certain Sitanath Chackraborty, whose suicide report is published on the newspaper. That half known name created commotion in the life of Sharadindu as he vaguely recalls the meeting with Sitanath's family at Botanical Garden some months before.

Sircar's deep mediation on the nature of death was excited by news of a man's suicide read in France. In his diary written on 23th January, 1964, he scrawled his ideas in random ways, "*A picture*

comes. A story of man's suicide read in a newspaper. An imagination – first scene, the wife's opinion. Second imagination – second scene. And the last scene – the version of the ghost of the dead" (*Prabaser Hijibiji, 230).* The whole story is an enactment of a creative process happening within the mind of Sircar. Sircar himself becomes the character in this play. Sharad and Vasanti are none but Sircar himself.

Sircar creates a multi dimensional reality and searches the root cause of Sitanath's suicide. In first version of Sitanath's story, Basanti pens a reliable cause of his anxiety, his worst situation in life and ultimate withdrawal of himself from life. Here, Sitanath is a petty middle class man in search of the familial happiness and he tries hard to build a house of his own. He accumulates money and his wife, Kona feels secured at the prospect of a new house. But the horrible truth is revealed when the man from the court came to their house. Sitanath admits to his wife that he spent all his money for a secret principle — the secret about his father-in-law. His wife immediately leaves him with no hope to live. But this story can hardly impress Sharadindu and he builds another kind of artificial reality. In this version, Sitanath is a secretly perverted man who punishes his student for reading *Lolita* in the classroom. He rusticates that student and remains strict to his principle as a headmaster. But he could not escape from his perverted mind and at once recalls the bloody and scandalous past of his life. He recalls the rape of Parbati several years ago and admits that Parbati has returned in the shape of Gouri. To save his dear one, to save the humanity from his own perverted teeth and talons, he decides to end his life.

But the reality strikes in the last version of Sitanath's story and it is revealed in the nightmare or the subconscious of Sharadindu. Sharadindu is surprised when he encounters the familial similarities of his daily life with that of Sitanath's. He tries to refuse them but he is compelled to stand before the mirror where he finds out the image of Sitanath as a kind of alter ego. He realizes his heritage, his past, the past of inhumanity and they are not easy to escape. The futile existence of life and distance from their alienated soul

bring both Sitanath and Sharadindu vis-à-vis and they could not differentiate themselves from each other. In real life they are masked to hide themselves from the fear of history —remaining history. They only pretend to be happy with a pseudo financial stability, a laughable ideal of familial happiness and an alienation from the past heritage full of cruelty. They simply cannot escape from this death-in-life situation and Sharadindu becomes gradually aware of this '*half in love with easeful death'* situation. Sitanath defines history as the "*history of meaninglessness of thousands of years. History of meaninglessness of thousands of men, of thousands of insects*." And Sharadindu becomes one of those men or insects— only a mere part of history.

SITANATH: They are all men and women. Like you. Like me. All of them are trying to live by finding a meaning of life.

SHARADINDU: Yet aren't they living?

SITANATH: Pretending to live. When there is no meaning, they pretend to live relying on habits. As I had did. As you are doing. (Vol-II, Act-III, 94)

Sharadindu was saved at last by Basudeb, his colleague, who gave him the news of his promotion as an assistant professor. But this catastrophic end only brings him back to his usual habits and the fear of ignoring the history. He just seeks to forget history as '*a worst false meaningless nightmare*' and tries to be happy in his promotion.

Pagla Ghoda (Mad Horse) (1967) can be traced as a different theatrical experience, but the same theme of distance from self and the futility of existence runs like an undercurrent throughout the play. A similar four types of men are chosen to represent different culture, class, mentality and profession —Shashi, Satu, Kartick and Himadri. Despite the difference of their age and social standpoint, they are driven by the same fuel of unrequited love and woven by the same regrets and yearning for that love. When the thin lines of formality are broken they cannot keep the distance and all of them become permeated with their same regrettable past. Plain actuality, coarse demands of the mundane world dwarf

their passion, and wishes and the now turn as an uncontrollable rush — mad horse.

They gathered in crematorium to burn the pyre of a half known girl. They were playing cards as their pastime and everyone proposed to drink some wine, except Himadri. In this hobnob, the ghost of the dead girl comes to them and requests them to reveal their respective love stories one by one. But the spectators watch different love stories which can be said more as stories of heartbreak. The living ones try to find out the story of the dead girl while the dead one forces them to recall their past. And in this way, they, including the girl, feel the bursting speed of mad horse which can hardly be controlled. They find out the void created in their lives by unrequited love, and the meaninglessness and futility of their lives. The dead girl becomes Malati to Shashi, Lachhmi to Satu and Mili to Himadri. They, including Himadri, try to quench their thirst of love by wine, and the girl laughs at them. Their dear beloveds are standing at an unattainable distance and they can only wait for ending of their meaningless existence of lives.

Kartick's story is differently painted as he loved the dead girl. He recalls the girl's question: "*Why do people want to live? What do they get?"* (Vol-II, Act-II, 435) His confession to the ghost leaves the girl shell-shocked. Out of heartbreak, he decides to end his life by mixing poison in his glass of wine. However, the catastrophe of the play is an optimistic one like the weak but vital reply of Kartick: "*If one lives — everything is possible*." (Vol-II, Act-II, 438) People live with a hope that something new and better would happen one day. The best of life is yet to come and never loose your hope. In the gloomy lights of the burning pyres, Kartick discards the idea of suicide by draining the poison of the wine glass and follows that ultimate silver lining of hope. Sartre admitted that "*Suicide is anabsurdity which causes my life to besubmerged in absurd*" (*Being &Nothingness, 690).* For existentialist, death in the form of suicide is the temptation of illusionary freedom from nihilism. Actually, suicide is an escape from the battle. The redemption lies in the futile struggle with a conscious dissatisfaction and simultaneous

rejection. Thus Sisyphus who is embodiment of metaphysical rebellion never commits suicide. Both Sharadindu in *Baki Itihas* and Kartick in *Pagla Ghoda* can be enlisted in this category. When Sircar was asked about this recurring suicide theme of his plays, he answered that it happened with very few plays and "*even though they have suicide these are not pessimistic plays. They are full of life. They do not propagate suicide.It occurs simply because it fits into the framework of the play.*" (*Sunday Times of India*)

To show the distance from alienated self and futile existence, *Bibar* (Cave) (1967) can be cited as proper play. This play is an adaptation of a famous novel by Samaresh Basu bearing the same name. Sircar read the novel at Enugu, Africa and started writing it on 31st December and ended on 1st January 1968. He never staged it because the novel was charged with giving explicit sexual details. He told about this drama to the novelist, and he praised Sircar for a faithful dramatization and it was ultimately published after a long forty years.

The central character, Prodyut is a third grade officer of a bank, and lives a carefree life. He is well aware that this living is not a proper living because there is no freedom. He well understands the false caring of his secret and infamous beloved, Nita Roy. Neglecting his work, he joins with Kumaresh to drink in a bar. He confesses that he does not even know the name of the bar girl, as he recalls her as Dora or Clara. His attitude to Nita is not less dirty than Ruby Dutt, a high class prostitute. But his philosophy of life poses the questions of existence: "*I have feared freedom like fire. I have feared to express the freedom of my wish. I have taken shelter in a cave—passing my life by telling lies, like others. None of us speak the truth, truly behave, and so everyone finds their cave and becomes drunken by the parasitic happiness.*"(Vol-II, Scene-II, 358)

He leaves at a stroke his ancestral house, murders his beloved, is sacked from his decent job and avoids all sense of social duties and obligation. He becomes aware of his own freedom, and to prove his existence he is prepared to do anything. Otherwise, Prodyut is in a self-destructive mood and he is now able to reduce

distance from his own free self. Camus has explained this rebellion for those who destroy self. In *The Rebel* he says, "*Hatred for the creator can turn to hatred of creation or to exclusive and defiant love of what exists. But in both cases it ends in murder. … Apparently there are rebels who want to die and those who want to cause death. But they are identical, consumed with the desire for life, frustrated by their desire and therefore preferring generalized injustice to mutilate justice.*"(*The Rebel, 73*)

In the existential philosophy, the distance of self and soul and awareness of futility of human life are the final stages of the 'definite awakening'. Camus illustrates the destiny of the war between man and the universe in the following ways, "*Weariness comes at the end of the act of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return to the chain or it's a definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time the consequence: suicide or recovery.*"(*The Myth of Sisyphus, 19)*

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25

GENDER ISSUES IN GIRISH KARNAD'S *NAGA-MANDALA*

Saurabh Debnath

The most imaginative and well-crafted play of Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* is based on two different folk tales. The play explores the nature of story-telling and the nature of desire, and their interweaving relationship. It is open to a variety of interpretations. In this regard it can be said that gender issues seem to be suffused in most of the plays of Karnad. Basically the concept of gender emerges in post-independence Indian drama. The term gender refers to proposed social and cultural constructions of masculinities and feminities. The gender issues depict the inequality between man and woman. Specifically, the woman in the Indian society, whether of high or low social standing is always looked down upon and ill-treated by the domineering patriarchy.

Krishnamayi quotes, "*In the dramatic world of Karnad, women, within and without wedlock are subjected to various forms of deprivation, humiliation, violence and torture in almost every walk of life in one way or the other. The playwright not only exposes the arbitrariness of the society where women are considered as "Second Sex", "Other", "Non- persona but*

also questions the way women are socialized to internalize the reigning hegemonic ideology and degrade their own position to perpetuate the ongoing subordination and subjugation. Man who is ruled by the mastery motive has imposed her limits on her. She accepts it because of her bio- social reasons". (The Indian Journal of English Studies, Vol. XLI, 2003-04)

In other words it can be said that in Girish Karnad's plays, gender based discriminations and exploitations are widespread and the socio-culturally defined characteristics, aptitudes, abilities, desires, personality traits, roles, responsibilities and behavioural patterns of men and women contribute to the inequalities and hierarchies in society. The marginal position of women in the Indian society as a result has become an integral part of socio-cultural identity of the country. A woman has no identity of her own. As a victim of 'incompleteness' she craves for completeness in her relations, in love but usually finds none.

In Indian society though traditionally the man-woman relationship is compared to the two wheels of a cart, both equally important, yet in reality the female is always the broken, fragmented wheel clinging to the other (male) for support and survival. This inequality and imbalance is clearly visible in Rani's relationship with her husband Appanna. Rani cannot even question the behaviour of her husband who says, "*Look, I don't like the idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?*" (Karnad, 28)

Rani is a very traditional Indian woman who does not dare to do any harmful act against her husband. Therefore she pours the curry into the anthill to destroy it. But there is a King Cobra which is called Naga, tastes that liquid and starts to love Rani. With the help of a supernatural power the Cobra can assume any form as it likes. Naga which eats that liquid enters the house through the bathroom drain and takes the shape of Appanna. Naga feels very pity for Rani's dismal condition. When she wakes up, she assumes that her husband Appanna has just come. Naga starts to love her very affectionately:

Naga: Don't be afraid. Put your head against my shoulder. Now, don't

be silly. I am not a mongoose or a hawk that you should be so afraid of me. Good. Relax.(Ibid 56)

Rani cannot differentiate between appearance and reality and takes Naga to be her husband Appanna. But the reality is that Naga is in the form of Appanna. However, Rani is not aware that Naga comes to meet her in the form of Appanna at night, but real Appanna comes in the morning. Rani thinks that Appanna has changed his behaviour. So she greets him naturally without any burden but Appanna does not respond nicely to her. She gets very confused to see the double behavior of her husband who loves her at night very passionately but in the day time he maintains distance with her. Therefore, she complains to Naga:

Rani: What can I say if you behave like this?

Naga: Like this.

Rani: You talk so nicely at night. But during the day I only have to open my mouth and you hiss like a…..stupid snake. It's all very well for you to laugh I feel like crying. (Ibid 57)

So, Rani expresses her confusion about her husband's double behaviour and she cannot understand the reality. Rani cannot comprehend the situation since Appanna cannot be so affectionate and compassionate. Yet she willingly suspends her disbelief and enjoys the concern and affection of Naga who is in the guise of Appanna. It means that she meets Naga and enjoys his company assuming that he is her husband. In this connection, Girish Karnad says:

The position of Rani in the story af Mandala, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconcerned roles-as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night. Inevitably, the pattern of relationships she is forced to weave from these disjointed encounters must be something of a fiction. The empty house Rani is locked in could be the family she is married into.(Ibid 186)

Moreover, Rani has sufficient reasons to believe that the Naga is not Appanna. He is something else. At night when the cobra

enters the darkened front yard of Rani's house, she hears the sound of the dog's growling and fighting mixed with the hiss of a snake, which ends shortly after the dog gives a long painful howl. At night when she moves into his arms, she notices blood on Naga's cheeks and shoulders. She screams in fright as she looks at Naga in the mirror. At this place where the Naga is sitting, she sees a cobra. The next morning when Appanna comes, Rani's confusion is worst confounded. She says: "*But last night....he had blood on his cheeks……and shoulders. Now….*" (Ibid 60)

The above dialogues show that Rani's increasing suspicion about Naga's identity is more but she doesn't ask a single question to Naga. Such instinct on her part reveals that Rani wants to stay happy with her husband like other women in the society and also satisfies her sexual desire with Naga although in the disguise of her husband Appanna.

Considered from a realistic point of view, Naga represents the newly enlightened modern woman's much desired right to choose a life overcoming all obstacles to her happiness. It symbolizes the breaking of barriers, crossing of the lines that intend to imprison a woman and distance her from her surroundings as well as her own 'self'. More an initiator than a leader, Naga actually initiates Rani on to the path of transformation.

Naga's love is the life support for Rani. In her dream-like state, a result of her long moments of isolation and yearning, Rani is blissfully intoxicated with Naga's love and throws all caution to the winds regarding her husband's contrasting behaviour. Stranger by day and lover by night, Appanna reflects the schizophrenic temperament of the typical male nature, insensitive and selfish. Still a pinch of suspicion remains in Rani's mind, which is finally removed when she finds out that she is pregnant. The child within her finally proves to her that Naga's love is not an illusion but a reality. Assured by her pregnancy she says, "*I have definite evidence to prove I was not fantasizing.*" (Ibid 61)

In this respect, Girish Karnad presents the problem of chastity which is majorly related with women and they must care more for

chastity than men in Indian society. Traditionally the concept of chastity is a patriarchal term that has been used to weaken women and to control them in a male-dominated society. The Ramayana is the great epic of Hindu mythology. The female character Sita has to face 'fire ordeal' to prove her chastity in the presence of all the elders and her husband. It is a kind of example which shows that from very ancient times women are exploited in the name of chastity. In the same way, Girish Karnad presents 'snake ordeal' for Rani to prove her chastity in *Naga-Mandala.* The concept 'ordeal' is related with only women from the very ancient age to the modern age. Also such incidents show the reality that women in Indian society have very secondary place and they have to suffer in the name of purity in marital life.

It explains that Rani presents herself as a conscious woman who justifies her equal rights in the family; she does not hesitate to raise questions against the dominance of the male-dominated society where women are exploited. She asserts herself for the first time when she refuses to follow her husband blindly. She is presented as a tool in the hands of her male counterpart and it is closely related with traditional Indian women who are expressing their plight in a social structure existing in modern Indian society. In real life, however, Rani does not crave for any extraordinary status. She craves for happiness with her husband. Rani emerges as a strong individual with a mind of her own after she becomes pregnant. She questions her husband's authority and paradoxical behaviour without realizing that Naga and Appanna are two different individuals reacting to her pregnancy in their own manner. At the end to prove her chastity Rani accepts the 'Snake ordeal' and she puts hands into the snake pit. When she pulls the snake, the snake binds itself around her and does not bite. She is declared as a goddess. Appanna asks her pardon and lives with her.

Karnad presents that man and woman pass through several stages of doubt, uncertainty and even failures before they become mature and learn to live harmoniously as husband and wife within the married life. Karnad projects the significance of the institution

of marriage. Husband and wife have to adjust and understand each other in their married life. Even because of their marriage they are honoured in the community. Both man and woman accept the social pressure in putting aside personal feelings about selfhood, dreams and self freedom. When Appanna becomes a mature one in his married life, it is observed that Appanna's self-centered mentality and the physical relationship with the prostitute are given up and he begins to take interest in the matters regarding his family and community. Rani is in dilemma when she does not understand what the reason is so she is blamed as a whore. Indian ethics does not permit a woman to have extra-marital relations even if the woman is a deserted wife. Naturally Rani is shocked when she realizes that she is blamed as a whore.

Society can never accept or come to terms with a woman strong enough to be assertive and independent, even if it does accept a woman as the leader; it does so with grudge and after much ado. A woman can either be a slave or a goddess but never an equal. The extremes in the attitude of a patriarchal society towards a woman reveal an inherent fear of feminity which is the ultimate authority in the Indian psyche.

Rani accepts her subjugation submissively and her desire for love, comfort and companionship are repressed and suppressed and she is isolated and detached from any social interactions by the dictates of her tyrant husband. She dreams of herself being locked up by a 'demon', in a castle, while the 'prince' comes in the guise of the cobra and leads her to cross the line demarcated for her by her husband and society. In her "dream-like state" a result of her long moments of isolation and yearning, Rani is blissfully intoxicated with the love of Naga who comes in the guise of her husband Appanna. The suspicious husband finds out about her pregnancy and beats her up accusing her of adultery. In the trial before the village elders, she speaks the truth: "*Yes, my husband and this king Cobra. Except for these two, I have not touched any one of the male sex*" (Ibid 58). The villagers judge her to be innocent and hail her as a goddess. Rani's transformation form an immature and naive

girl to the ideal 'mother' becomes connected through the acceptance of socially approved roles. After the test of her fidelity, a brute husband who has an illicit relationship with a concubine becomes her slave and server with a sense of metaphysical mystique Rani has to prove her chastity by undergoing the 'snake ordeal'.

The power of sexuality comes when Rani keeps sexual relationship with Naga who is in the guise of Appanna. She totally forgets her husband's rude behavior and accepts his love for her at night. She does not express her desire openly. By the supernatural aid, she is able to satiate her desire. Another common belief is that the cobra by virtue of its divine power can assume any form it desires. So, in some sense, Rani has nothing to do with this unlawful sexual communion. It is with his supernatural powers, Naga saves Rani from her pitiable and dangerous plight to prove her chastity.

The discriminating treatment acts on Appanna and Rani in *Naga-Mandala*. Appanna openly and unashamedly commits adultery, but nobody objects to it. Even the village elders who sit in judgements of Rani's adultery do not find any fault with him. Nobody believes the innocence of Rani. She sleeps with Naga without knowing its identity. She does not discover the identity of Naga who assumes Appanna's form by using its magical power. If she had discovered the real identity of Naga she would not have allowed him to enter her bedroom. As a typical woman, she is frigid and despises sex. What she craves for is affection which Naga gives her in plenty by functioning as a surrogate parent for a while. By using his erotic art Naga cures her frigidity. Because of this, latter Appanna and Rani could enjoy marital life happily.

The play deals with the subjection of woman in patriarchal Indian orthodox society. The female protagonist Rani stands for India woman. Rani is placed in a world where orthodox social conventions, cultural taboos and coercive forces work. She is socialized to internalize the male superiority- an invisible conspiracy to derogate and marginalize her position in the society. She adopts new ways to transcend the age-old subjection of woman. Rani is surrounded by evil social forces where she finds herself helpless;

tortured by alienation and despair but never surrenders and continues her struggle for her identity- "*as a woman, as a wife and as a mother*". (Karkar, 50) Karnad's solution appears, at the first observation odd, unconvincing and unconventional violating traditional mode of treatment. It is clear that despite alienation, despair and antithetical conditions a woman must continue her struggle for her existence and transcend "nothingness" in life.

The appearance of love filling the emptiness of Rani's life with love and care is explained though the myth of 'Naga', a folk tale where it represents prosperity, happiness and fertility. A man does not need to explain his reasons for gratification of his sensual pleasures but a woman's instinctual need is ignored, and their desire is considered as a transgression of moral codes requiring supernatural justification. The Naga in the guise of Appanna presents a choice for Rani, a choice to live a fuller and happier life. It is her expression of desire and also the fulfillment of her wish for love, her desire to live life fully and with satisfaction. If Appanna is the 'demon' then Naga is the 'prince' in Rani's life. As a source of energy, the Naga represents the positive element, the cultural leader, and harbinger of a social change, generating a transformation not only in the character of Rani but also in the society at large.

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26

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND VALUES IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S *AAJIR* AND *WATER*

Amrita Datta

While speaking of human rights and values one can assume that there are some fundamental and universal principles related to human relations. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 is widely recognized for the statements of principles of human rights. Article-I, Article-2, Article-3, Article - 7, Article 22 of this Declaration in a nutshell speaks of human's equal dignity, liberty, security, equal protection against any discrimination or rights and freedom without distinction of any kind such as race , colour , sex and language. In our country human rights and values and their violations for caste hierarchies are widely seen where one caste constantly keeps violating the basic rights of the other. The state machineries as well as the upper caste Hindu or Brahminic system very cunningly connected themselves in the destructive practices of societal violence, human indignities and denial of very basic things of life. The self of every individual is tortured and the healthy and congenial relations within the human

individuals are gradually broken. The people who are living at the age of the society –the dispossessed tribal populations, the dalits and the marginalized segments are greatly suffered by the denial of human rights and values.

Mahasweta Devi, a prolific writer and social activist, is well known for her work for the uplift of tribals and marginal communities like landless labourers of eastern India. Mahasweta Devi says:

My literature has always sprung from a flight for the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden. My social activism is the driving force of all literary activities –be it literature, my newspaper columns or the journal I edit." (The Sunday Tribune- Spectrum)

With her first hand knowledge as a historically conscious writer Mahasweta Devi addresses the issues of social injustice and rights, moral bankruptcy and values. Her creative works speak of the release of human soul from all kinds of oppression, suppression and exploitation. In an interview with Jayanta Gupta in SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA, KOLKATA (dated 14th March, 2010), Mahasweta Devi says:

> *I shall continue to raise my voice whenever people are tortured. I tried to do my best for denotified tribes like Sabar and Lodhas. The Sabars would have rice only once a month. I was present during such an occasion. They served rise on sal leaves with salt and chilli powder.I was foolish enough to ask what I should have the rice with. One of them told me: 'peter bhook diye mekhe kheye ne, Ma' (mix it with the hunger in your stomach).* (Sunday Times of India)

Mahasweta Devi discusses through the characters in her works the concerns and issues of human rights in our country (specially border regions of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa) and its denial to the most downtrodden sections of the society. One feels that Mahasweta Devi's *Aajir and Water,* dramatized by the author in 1976 -77 from her short stories, present an expansive human rights and value concern in a distinct pattern. The play *Aajir* begins:

Paatan: I am an aajir. Sirs,my dear Sirs,I'm an aajir .Ages ago on the

hoary past ,there was once a terrible famine in the tracts of our Ayodhya hills .And then…It began with the drought , With the crops drying up in the fields , and hundreds dying of hunger , and all the rice and all the grain piling up in Raavan Shunri's granary, till my forefather Golak Kura to save his life …sold himself and his wife Gairabi Dasi away for only three rupees…He sold away all his descendants too at once. This is how it was. Watch, gentlemen, how a man becomes a slave from birth. (*Aajir* in Five Plays ,p 47)

In the very beginning of the play one can see the brutal attack upon the basic human rights and values of an individual. Man's inhumanity to man vividly exposed while Paatan addresses the audience directly by introducing himself as "aajir" .The term "aajir" in Bengali language stands for one who has sold himself into slavery for a paltry sum. A voice of an invisible 'Sutradhar' in back stage introducing the term "aajir" repeatedly (thrice) at the opening of the play highlights the lives and struggles of the exploited and marginalized sections of Indian society. Everything is available in the world- market including a substantial human being at a tag–price of "only three rupees". Paatan is a slave,a bonded labourer of rural region of our country. His present social position of "aajir" is caused for the decision of his forefathers who sold themselves (husband and wife), their children and descendants in only three rupees for utter poverty and hunger .Sentences like "That's be a great relief", "the greatest care of all , we'll never have to worry about our food again" shows quiet ironically the precarious socio- economic condition of the underprivileged segments of Indian society.

As the play approaches we come across a man with dhol reading out the bond in the typical manner of public announcement:

I, Golak Kura, son of Chetan Kura deceased residing at Village Mamudchawk in Ayodhya Pargana, hereby declare … that I and my wife by name Gairabi Dasi hereby enter into an agreement for perpetual slavery, which same will be binding on me and my wife, the two of us… and on our descendants at or for the price of three rupees for which we have voluntarily sold ourselves to you in consideration of your maintaining

us and we working for you …Dated the eleventh day of Kartik of the Bengali era 1101, corresponding to 1072 of the Hijri era… as acknowledged by the slave named Gairabi and subscribed by Sri Golak Kura. (Aajir in *Five Plays, P 48)*

Paatan, the protagonist of the play is deprived of his basic rights for the barbaric system of bonded labour . Scene 2 of the play *Aajir* opens with the sound of whiplashes and screams.The oppression and exploitation of the innocent Paatan in the hand of Maatang Shunri shows the trauma of inhuman subjugation of the slave to the master. Paatan is whiplashed like a creature by Maatang, the landlord and moneylender as Paatan wants to inculcate his basic human rights— for dreaming of "*marrying, having a family of his own, looking upon the face of his own son*". (*Aajir* in Five Plays, p 50) Mahasweta Devi shows us how a substantial human being is reduced to a sub-human level that negates his basic rights to love and marry.

The mistress of the house shows sympathy towards Paatan as she is also caged like him. Mistress feels that she is also aajir like Paatan in the hands of Maatang Shunri. Paatan earnestly craves for freedom from the bondage of slavery and for this reason agreed to the mistress's proposal of elopement. While the mistress speaks to Paatan that the bond has long turned to dust and there is no such bond by which Maatang can hold on him, Paatan out of rage pounces on her and kills her. Paatan feels cheated with the secretive nature of his mistress and thinks that his yearning for a life of freedom and a dream to lead a life of respectable human being is gone forever. Finally, the master Maatang confesses the truth that he as well as his father has not seen any bond in their life time and once upon a time the paper of bond is kept into a gamcha which has turned to dust long ago. Paatan's struggle against violation of human rights and values and restoration of freedom is fulfilled finally while he challenges his master by saying "*Come, bind me, do whatever you like to me. There's no aajir's bond. So it seems I was never a slave after all.*" (*Aajir* in *Five Plays, p 67)* Paatan is now a freeman raises his head and stretches his hands out in regal dignity and

moves to prison.

The second play *Water* appeared in Bengali as 'Jawl' which depicts powerfully the life of tribal people in rural areas of West Bengal and how they have been denied the very basic right to water by the upper caste feudal lords. Maghai, traditional water diviner is the protagonist of the play *Water*. Both Maghai and his son Dhura are the representatives of untouchable dome caste. Dhura states in Scene I of the play:

> *They won't allow us to touch it. Even at the government wells, we aren't allowed to draw water. That's why we have to go and dig at the sands of Charsa.* (*Water* in Five Plays, p 126)

The wells are dug with Maghai's help as he "*knows all about water*" (*Water* in Five Plays, p 126) but he and his community is not allowed to draw water from public wells. Santosh Pujari is the representative of the upper class feudal lord who has good connections with state machineries. By using the innocence of the poor folk Santosh collects "*all the rations and the relief*" (*Water* in Five Plays, p 139) and each time of the year creates artificial famine. Even the government doctor only visits Santosh's house while the whole village goes without treatment. Having denied collecting water in daytime when someone tries to steal water at night the land lord let dogs loose one him. When people raise voice against this type of injustice they are branded as Naxalities and brutally tortured. The demand for a new well for the dome caste by the villagers is not also accepted as there is an earlier application for digging well by Harchand Thakur who is an upper caste. Phulmani, the wife of Maghai Dom says:

> *These two hands of mine are full of sores, Santosh, all from scratching about the sands of Charsa for water …This year we demand a well for our use. ……We die without water, our little ones go thirsty, and our women dig at the sands of the river for a cupful of water. Who'd play such a cruel game that we need to quench our thirst?* (*Water* in Five Plays, p 138)

Actually, in the name of varna system or caste system, people

who belongs to the lower caste are inhumanely tortured and deprived by all means and also denied to their basic right of water. There is an utter violation of human values and rights which is repeatedly shown by the writer in the play. Mahasweta Devi was fighting throughout her life for the uplift of the marginalized section of the society.

Maghai is always sincere in his work of water diviner. He thinks it is his duty of being a dome caste. Phulmani looses faith on him as well as in God. Women in chorus sing for water but understand that all are vain. Phulmani in Scene 3 of the play states:

> *Could I turn into a thunder blast and pierce the hardened earth, or run into a cloud and pour into the ravines, I'd find solace. God, you are not there .If you had been there once, you're dead now. Else how'd Santosh alone have all your water, your gift to all living creatures?* (*Water* in Five Plays, p 141)

The sentences like "*God must be dead*" (P160), "*God you are not there*" (P 141), "*You are dead now*" (P141) etc. lead us towards Nietzsche's Godless theology which is the product of intense emotional suffering. As God, for Nietzsche, is dead divine sanctions are then of no use. Neitzsche favours the idea of a superman. At the very end of the play we come across the entire situation enables Maghai Dom to be a superhuman with the accumulation of energy, knowledge and will power.

Santosh's brother–in-law has bought town people for relief work in the rural areas in spite of government rules to employ local people. When someone of dome caste gets the work opportunity they are denied fair wages. Santosh dares Maghai by asking him to take the amount of thirty paise instead of fifty paise or leave the work. The people of the area are also deprived of their political and educational rights. Free books, slates, copy books for students in the primary schools are denied to the children of dome caste. "*In Charsa, the Brahman boys won't come to school for they won't be in the same school with doms and chandals.*" (*Water* in Five Plays, p 163)

Jiten Maiti , a good man by heart, a disciple of Gandhi and an idealist teacher of the area enquires of the SDO of the injustice done to the lower caste tribals by the upper caste, violation of human values and rights, inhuman oppression and suppression of the upper caste , ineffective and powerless government laws and government officials. The SDO comments:

> *Laws are made because they have to be made. They're never enforced .The law have abolished agricultural debt, the system of bonded labour is banned. But what do you find in reality? The landowners and the moneylenders still lend money and live off the interest. They still extort forced labour from their debtors. Me? Who the hell am I? I'm powerless. If I threaten a moneylender, the minister will jump on me. Do you think I don't know? There are millions of rupees lent out on interest in this district, multiplying continuously, but there are no papers.* (*Water* in Five Plays, p 173)

Jiten Maiti pursues the government officer to take action but all his attempt fails. Finally, he makes Maghai and his people defiant to fight for their own rights by building a dam across the river Charsa to collect water. Santosh having faced danger of his existence tries to bribe Jiten and also turns the state machineries against him by making him the main instigator of Naxal movement in the area. Santosh with the help of police force breaks down the dam. Maghai like an undaunted hero, a Superman asserts:

> *I will die but not before I h've killed. Come, come, come to me…It's the Bhagirath of the nether Ganga here,..I can't let them carry me as a corpse into their bloody morgue. My last journey will be with the water.* (*Water* in Five Plays, p 197)

The play comes to an end with the death of many of the tribal people including the protagonist Maghai who is snatched away by the waters of his beloved river Charsa.

Each of the two plays deal with different specifics .The themes of each plays represent Mahasweta Devi's unflinching faith in human dignity ,values , existence, rights and her deft use of elements to make her play successful on the stage. Mahasweta Devi has

chosen subjects from her time and environment. She consciously denied to accept the existing norms and ideals of the prevalent society and tried to reveal her concern of human rights and values for the downtrodden masses. The prime axioms of her works are humanitarian in nature and deals with her concern with human rights and values.

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CHANGING POWER STRUCTURE IN TERMS OF 'SEX', 'RELIGION' AND 'POLITICS': A STUDY OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

Dipak Giri

Along with suggesting on the surface level something that gives an individual "*the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way"*, the word 'Power' also implies "*the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events*" (Oxford Dictionaries). In its apparent meaning, the word 'Power' seems very strong and authoritarian, but in reality it is merely an abstract idea devoid of any existential identity and gets its reality only when it appears through the action of an individual. It is the action of an individual that becomes the only determiner of its existence. The action of an individual not only determines the existence of power but also its nature. For some, power is a matter of dignity and self-respect and they use it for wide public interest. But there are many who misuse it only for narrow self interest. When power is transferred to wrong man, it becomes corrupt and brings various forms of social evil and violence. "*System fails when people with ability*

don't have authority and people with authority don't have ability." (Kalantri, Amit) Domination and exploitation, torture and violence, force and imposition are the very signs of the corrupt power system against which many sensible writers and theorists have raised their voice. However, the way the concept has been treated by Vijay Tendulkar in *Ghashiram Kotwal* is an achievement in itself. The play shows "*the machinations of power in its several interfaces.*" (Bandyopadhyay, Samik: VII: 2014) Translated from the original Marathi version into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot, Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* leaves no stone unturned to bring out the hidden reality of corrupt power system and its shifts in divergent forms of evil under the cover of sex, religion and politics of deputation on the dramatic surface against the background of Marathi history under the leadership of Nana Phadanvis, the chief administrator of the Peshwa empire.

The role of power is all pervasive throughout Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*. From the very beginning to the end, shifts and changes in power structure runs through every page of the play and Nana's place is at the center of all these shifts and changes from where power in some form or other emerges out and submerges in. Nana regulates them according to his own wish. He is behind all these shifts and changes but still he has no active participation in them. He rather takes the position of a fountainhead of all the power from where varied forms of power come out and flow but their flow is not always same as it is controlled by Nana, the source and decider of all the action in the play. Almost every character who receives some sort of power fulfills merely Nana's some or other desire. They dance on his tune. Nana uses them as pawns in his game of power. Both Ghashiram as a Kotwal and Gauri as a means of Nana's erotic fulfillment enjoy powerful privileges of Nana for sometime but as soon as Nana's intention is fulfilled, they are thrown out from their position and they are made victim of humiliation and death. The play as a study of corrupt power game involves almost every character as a participant into this dirty and detestable game except Gauri who is innocent and harmless but comes to become the instrumental in the transfer of

this strategic game of power and becomes a helpless victim. The handover of power from Nana to Ghashi can hardly be possible if there is no presence of Gauri who prepares the meeting ground for Nana and Ghashi in this game of power and invites unexpected turn of event in her life. Gulabi also shares powerful privileges of Nana for she appeases Nana's sexual hunger. In her case, she does not become the victim of this corrupt game of power but her case is completely opposite from Ghashi and Gauri as she neither soars high like Ghashi nor she is exchanged to one for another's power as Gauri. Under the mask of sex, religion and politics of deputation, power seeks its dirty and detestable fulfillment in the form of sex, eroticism and violence and there is hardly anyone left untouched from its course of fulfillment. "*In Ghashiram, power is defined 'horizontally', in terms of individuals against individuals; from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power.*" (Ibid IX)

The opening of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* reminds us the devices employed in a folk theatre. Opening with the dance of Hindu mythological figures is one of the famous and popular devices employed in *Tamasha* and *Khela*, popularly known folk theatres in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively. Deploying the folk theatre, the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* attacks the contemporary society with satirical tone in the garb of old and mythological stories. The play presents the irony of the situation bringing contrasted time and place- mythology and history. Parallelism between great and mighty myth and the contemporary degenerated and immoral history shows the superb skill of the dramatist in creating paradoxical situation. The dancing entry of Ganapati and then Lakshmi and Saraswati and finally Gulabi shows the anti-climatic situation in order to satirize the present contemporary society. The juxtaposition of lavani, a love ballad with abhang, a devotional song shows the dramatist's mastery over handling paradoxical situation. The inclusion of dance and the music in *Ghashiram Kotwal* does not debar the dramatic action, rather it serves the dramatic design of the narrative, i.e. to mock and

ridicule the present social set up. "*The music and the dance numbers are not embellishments to the narrative. The changing musical notes express the changing moods.*"(Bhave, Pushpa: 47: 1989) The air of mismatch and contrast is no less appearing in the bodily image of Nana when he makes his first arrival on the stage. Nana comes with "*silver-handed walking stick"* and *"garland of flowers on wrist*."(Tendulkar,Vijay: 12: 2014) The blend of silver handed walking stick with garland of flower on wrist shows the admixture of power and sex. It also implies the main theme of the play, i.e. operation of power politics on two levels- violence and sex. Silver handed walking stick is the sign of violent power and garland of flower on wrist shows the intentional sexual and erotic drive of Nana. Similar tone of contrast is also observed in the action and attitude of the Brahmin; the most adorable and respected cast belonging to the most top level of Hindu hierarchical system of caste and religion. Alike Nana who also belong to Brahmin class, they juxtapose the holy prayer *Abhanga* and *Kirtan* with the unholy lusty and erotic song *Lavani* and prefer going to *Bavankhani* to temple. The employment of human wall comprising with Sutradhar and other Brahmins not only serves as a link between the different changing scenes but also makes us familiar with the moral decadence of Brahmin class of people. Playing the role of chorus like classical dramas of Greek and Rome, the human wall also observes the action of the play sometimes participates in them, comments on them and also gives force in the narrative giving the details of offstage actions. Regarding the role of Sutradhar, N. Ramadevi says, "*Tendulkar slightly deviates in Ghashiram Kotwal by enhancing the role of the Sutradhar from that of an active participant in the action of the play and an interlocutor who acts as a cohesive device bringing together the different and often disparate scenes of the play.*" (Ramadevi, N: 94-95: 2003) The beginning of the first act familiarizes us with a time of moral and religious crisis devoid of any working sense of duty and morality both among people of ruling class and plebeian class.

The initial setting suits well to the theme and design of the play. Drawing problematic and critical dramatic setting of moral and religious decay and degeneration, the dramatist advances for

further action with the theme of corrupt power politics and its shifts and changes in some form or other. In conflicting atmosphere of morality and immorality, religion and sex, the playwright introduces us with Ghashiram, a Kanauj Brahmin who has come Poona for livelihood with his wife and her daughter Gauri and after undergoing a course of struggles and sufferings to get an appropriate job according to his caste and class finally gets employed by Gulabi in a red light area where he uses to do menial tasks. This becomes clear in Gulabi's speech when Ghashi is asked to give his introduction before Nana, "GULABI *(coming forward with a coquettish air). He came four days ago. He dances with me. He was a foreigner, going without food. I said. Let him stay here. He washes my utensils. Sings for me. Does all sorts of things."* (Tendulkar,Vijay: 14: 2014) Attracted by the prospect and fame of the city Poona, Ghashiram moves from Kanauj to Poona but reaching there he only gets countless insults, tortures and humiliation. The hard and stern fact that the grass is always green on the side of the fence is lately realized by him. The main action of the play commences only after Ghashiram meets Nana at Gulabi's Place. This meeting is the turning point of all the action and movements in the play. Ghashiram saves Nana from getting injury in his ankle and is rewarded with a necklace. This incident later brings Ghashiram to Nana's palace where he is given the duty of Kotwali in exchange of her daughter Gauri. Had Ghashiram not met with Nana at Gulabi's place he would have perhaps saved from being a tragic figure. The meeting adds fuel to his hope of sparks and he meets Nana and blinded by the fire of revenge and anguish, he does not think a twice to exchange his daughter for Kotwali. The underlying irony of Ghashi's speech at the time of holding Nana's foot at Gulabi's place that it is a reward of grace and honour proves a fatal reward of disgrace and dishonor when the action develops a little bit. "GHASHIRAM. *Your Highness, I have been rewarded. (Gestures towards the slipped foot he holds in his hand.)In my hands has fallen- grace! All here envy me my place. This is a gift to last me all my days*".(Ibid) Driven out forcedly from Gulabi's place and spending a night lying on a cold stone in the prison without doing wrong to any, Ghashi starts to burn in the fire of revenge and

decides to meet Nana to punish the people of Poona:

> GHASHIRAM *(takes off his sash, throws it on the ground). But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made me an animal; I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more.* (Ibid 21)

With strong vow and revengeful drive, Ghashi comes to meet with Nana. But the second meeting of Ghashi with Nana presents a scene of deal between them. Ghashi accepts the deal of exchange and hands over his innocent and blameless daughter to Nana for Kotwali. This is a great mistake from the part of Ghashi and for this rash and immediate action he cannot be forgiven. Ghashi also realizes that he is doing wrong but his wisdom and reason has stopped working due to his revengeful motif and determination:

> GHASHIRAM *(suddenly cries out loud.) Now he's in my hand…oh, my daughter…the beast… (then yells at the audience.) Oh, you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter- a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach…Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs.* (Ibid 26)

Ghashi has to pay the heavy penalty for this deal. This deal not only takes away her only daughter's life and chastity but also causes for his humiliation and death. He cannot understand the dirty game of power in the form of politics of deputation. "*Nana needs Ghashiram, and Ghashiram needs Nana; but in the shifting game of power, it is only a temporary adjustment that Nana exploits as long as necessary and can drop unceremoniously the moment it has served its purpose.*" (Bandyopadhyay, Samik: IX: 2014) As soon as Ghashi goes out from Nana, Nana's remark reveals the political strategy of Nana hidden with his dark and mischievous intention:

NANA *(suddenly brightening). Go, Ghashya, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll make the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them; they'll never trust you even if you do. Because you're a stranger, you're an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the position of the Kotwali! We are your sole support. Oh, you're a bastard. Ghashya. Your manner will be more arrogant than that of the Chitpavan Brahmans. You'll manage the deference nicely. You'll create a court- and a half! No worry about that. What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our Kotwal pays for it. (Claps his hands.) The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be devoured by Nana. Excellent! Yes, Ghashya, be Kotwal. This Nana blesses you.* (Ibid 29)

The meeting between Ghashi and Nana is short on time but long on effects. Once the power starved insulted man gets power and authority he makes the most shameless display of it. Ghashiram's atrocities and coercion which makes Poona city dance to his tune and dry with fear is just one of the several forms of power. Having once found a formal designation, Ghashiram brings untold miseries through which he intends to fulfill his promise made to Poona city. He takes a dip into the water of violence and transforms himself into a ruthless and inhuman administrator before performing the duty of administrator. In the course of passing rules and orders, Ghashiram alters many rules of the past and replaces the old with the new. Reign of terror starts all around Poona under the Kotwali of Ghashi. Hardly any sign of peace and order exists in *Ghashiram Raj*. People cannot roam freely at night. For almost every action they need permit:

SUTRADHAR. *All the old orders will be implemented strictly.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *No whoring without a permit.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *No cremation without a permit.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Ghashiram Kotwal says to eat with a lower caste person is a crime.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit a misdemeanor, to steal, to live with one's divorced wife, to remarry if one's husband is alive, to hide one's caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide, without a permit, is a sin. A good woman may not prostitute herself, a Brahman may not sin, without a permit.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Whoever does wrong will be punished severely, with no mercy.* (Ibid 31-32)

Ghashiram Kotwal starts making the rounds of Poona to see whether the people of Poona are obeying his rules and if anyone is caught red handed or on the ground of suspicion he or she has to pay heavily for the guilt he is involved to. There is no mercy in Ghashiram's rule:

The line. *Such was Ghashiram Kotwal's harshness.*

Such was the trouble he brought.

Poona lost heart, Poona lost heart.(Ibid 37)

All doors of justice are shut for the people of Poona. To whom they should approach with a prayer for justice becomes uncertain as Sutradhar observes, "*Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you lay a hand on Ghashiram, Nana will smash you. If you don't then Ghashiram will get you anyway.*" (Ibid) Under such circumstances of negligence and disregard, Ghashiram's aggressive violence reaches to the height and many innocent and blameless people of Poona are made victim of it. "*No instance of greater neglect on the party of an administration or of more extraordinary criminality in a subordinate officer*

is recorded in the annals of any state than the case of Ghashiram Kotwal, or police superintendent, of the city of Poona." (Duff, James Grant, 1987) The play as a study of violence and power shows two kinds of violence- one in implicit sense which we see in womanizer Nana exercising violence to achieve his erotic drive and another explicitly in Ghashiram's aggressive acts of violence in ruling people of Poona as M. Sarat Babu observes, "Nana *exercises his power in exploiting women sexually while Ghashiram uses it aggressively. They exemplify two kinds of violence- erotic and aggressive."* (Babu, M. Sarat: 77: 2003)

The flow of power from the mainstream Nana to the off stream Ghashiram is the main shift of power in the play *Ghashiram Kotwal.* Ghashi is made victim by this power shift. His power and ability fails to understand the intricate mechanism of the politics of deputation. Through the instrument of power politics, Nana loses the centrality of position in administration and Ghashi gains it coming from the status of marginality to centrality. Ghashi becomes the channel of Nana's wrong doings. Transferring power to Ghashi, Nana starts doing what pleases him, unmindful of the rules, regulations, customs or conventions. Even he becomes more audacious and ruthless. Still he does not come in public criticism. Common people understand little about the mechanism or intricacies of power. They believe only in what they see, cannot go deeper to explore the truth. That the common people hardly understand the difference between appearance and reality is brought out in the final speech of Nana after Ghashi is stoned to death:

> NANA. *Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today. (The crowd cheers.) A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghashya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the gods. The mercy of gods is with us always.* (Tendulkar,Vijay: 61: 2014)

The cheering crowd hardly understands that the demon is not the one who is lying dead on the ground but the one whom they celebrate as a hero. Many ghashis will come and go and stoning one Ghashi to death is not the end of it all. Everytime they do it

they will revel and honour people like Nana for giving the order to finish him. Having knocked Ghashi down to a place where he belonged, power once again springs back to Nana. There seems to be something magical about it like Sudharsan Chakra of Vishnu which having performed its task goes back to its master. Nana raises his hand and gives a call for a festivity of three days during which nobody will remember him and his body will rot:

> *We have ordered that from this day forward, not a word, not a stone relating to the sinner shall survive. We have commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this happy occasion.* (Ibid)

Another shift of power comes in the form of Gauri in the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Though Gauri has no active role in this game of power, still she is drawn to this game against her will. A young and saucy woman like Gauri can easily reach to power making men folk dance to her whims but the case of Gauri is different. She becomes the sacrificial goat in the struggle of power. She tries but cannot escape the preying eyes of Nana. First time she anyhow manages to escape from them but second time she finds no option and becomes submissive to them. Nana observes her first in his private hall amidst the gathering people coming to listen to Haridasa and offering prayers to Lord Ganapati. Stealthily advancing her Nana expresses his erotic desire to Gauri who however, seeks excuse in the name of God but Nana at once rejects Gauri's excuse distorting the image of God to meet his erotic fulfillment:

> GIRL. *He will see.*
>
> NANA. *He will see? Who?*
>
> GIRL. *(Pointing to Ganapati). He.*
>
> NANA. *That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything.* (Ibid 22)

Gauri tries to save her chastity in the name of religion but Nana tries to cover his eroticism in the garb of religion. That people like Nana can go to any extreme to realize their plan is revealed

here. Gauri who escapes narrowly from the clutch of Nana during their first meeting succumbs to Nana as a helpless creature when they meet second time and this time she becomes an inescapable creature caught between characters. One side She finds Nana of the nine courts, the Peshwa's chief minister and in another side her own father Ghashiram and she finds no escape becoming entangled between these two characters and she is forced to do what her ego never permits. In the corrupt game of power, Ghashiram sacrifices his own daughter, the pang of which remains all the time fresh in his heart, even at the time of winning favour from Nana, he regrets over the fate of her daughter but it is the spirit of revenge working so high inside him that he cannot retreat as Vinita Bhatnagar opines, "*Gauri has few lines in the play and certainly none that hint at her own perception of her experience. But Ghashiram's guilt is voiced at various parts of the dramatic text. Thus even in the triumphant celebration of his power, Ghashiram worries over the fate of his daughter."* (Bhatnagar, Vinita: 146: 2000) When nothing remains and every opportunity has slipped out from his hand, Ghashiram lately realizes how he is made victim in the intricacy of power politics and he welcomes the attacks of enraged mob which seems to him less painful than his painful realization over his wrong doing to his daughter "*Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on your chest but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut of my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. Oh, that's good. Very good."* (Tendulkar,Vijay: 61: 2014)

Still, it cannot be denied that Gauri is also a part of sharing some authority in the changing structure of power. Nana falls so miserably into the sex appealing trap of Gauri that his thoughts become all absorbing into nothing but Gauri's thought and image all the time as Sutradhar presents the situation:

SUTRADHAR. *Nine court Nana only thought of Gauri.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Nine Court Nana only dreamed of Gauri.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Nothing but Gauri for Nana.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Couldn't think about his home.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Couldn't think about his work.*

…

SUTRADHAR. *Wouldn't do without Gauri.* (Ibid 26)

How power is imprisoned and made a hand toy by sex is revealed in the speech of Nana himself: "*Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan!"* (Ibid 24) and his tantalizing urge reaches to the climax when titillated by Gauri's appeals, he urges out his suppressed sexual hunger publicly: "*What a bosom! Buds just blossoming… We'll squeeze them like this!"* (Ibid)Nana plays with Gauri for some time and Gauri also enjoys power with Nana for some time as Sutradhar observes: "*Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules*", (Ibid 32) but the reversal of situation comes in Gauri's life as soon as Nana's fancy for her comes to an end. Gauri meets a very tragic and moving death. She is forsaken by Nana at the critical stage of her life. Having discovered her pregnancy, Nana sends her to the midwife Chandra for abortion and there she meets her end. With the death of Gauri, the power equation with Nana which Ghashi is enjoying till now also changes. Ghashiram tries to overthrow the power and the authority of Nana by not bowing before him when he comes with the death report of her daughter but in doing so he succumbs to Nana's authority. In overpowering power he rather is tamed to bow before power when Nana orders: "*Stay, Ghashi, you've made a mistake. You forgot to bow, you fool. (Ghashiram bows.) Very good. It should be done right. You didn't mean it as a slight, now, did you?"* (Ibid 51-52)

Unlike Gauri, Gulabi uses the bait of sex to trap the power. In case of Gauri, sex is implicit but Gulabi makes explicit display of sex to attain the power and when a woman like Gulabi so saucy in appearance takes part in the battle of power can easily turn its

result to her side and so the case is seen in the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Nana is a frequenter to Gulabi's place and as a result Gulabi enjoys some authority. She has muscle men of her own and enjoys all kind of materialistic pleasures. Though she is a woman, she can challenge man only for her lusty look and appearance which supplies enough fuel to keep her fire of power alive all the time. All men move around her and she employs her power of sex on them. She enjoys Nana's special privilege in this regard and so she is always escorted with some musclemen who work according to her wish and order. The necklace with which Ghashi is rewarded after Ghashi saves Nana from getting injury in his ankle is unjustly snatched away by Gulabi and her musclemen and Ghashi is thrown out from her house.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a study of power transfer, now in some form, now in other and every time either sex or religion or politics of deputation plays a major role in this regard. Though politics of deputation is the major theme of the play and more explicitly explained than sex and religion, it does not mean that sex and religion has nothing to do with the structural design of the play, rather religion and sex take part on an equal footing with politics of deputation in the game of power. Dealing with the universal theme of shifts and changes in power structure, the play reaches to the place of timelessness crossing the specific time and period of history as Tendulkar himself acknowledges, "*Though the incident was historical I did not have a historical play in mind. The context had a universal and timeless quality*." (Bandyopadhyay, Samik: XII: 2014) In his paper on Athol Fugard and Vijay Tendulkar, C. Coelho has rightly observed, "*In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egotistical man and equally self-centered society. He liberated Marathi stage from the tyranny of conventional theatre with its mild doses of social and political satire for purpose of pure entertainment*." (Coelho, C: 37: 1994) In the play Nana is the representative of power, Ghashi is the representative of politics of deputation, Gauri and Gulabi are the representatives of sex and they all stand for timelessness and it would be very absurd to seek any historical similarity in them as Tendulakar has rightly

observed, "*This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere.*" (Bandyopadhyay, Samik: VII: 2014) By showing the moral of *Ghashiram Kotwal* '*elsewhere*' our dramatist, though has not given any clear suggestion about the moral of the story, still we can perceive it within the story instead of going anywhere and the moral that the story itself makes clear is that a sensible man should not come under the spell of corrupt game of changing power structure which in shifting temporal authority takes the long time peace and security of an individual and the case of Ghashiram is as per true to this moralistic idea.

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