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Exploration of the Devices and Techniques Employed in the Selected Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar is a notable Marathi playwright. His original Marathi plays are popular in the professional as well as experimental Marathi theatre. The translations of his plays into Hindi, other regional languages in Indian and in English language made him known to all over India and abroad. His plays have a universal appeal. He freed Indian theatre from the traditional bindings of subjects and techniques by introducing new subjects and techniques. He also experimented with the old techniques. Besides, the translations of Tendulkar's plays have their own beauty and aesthetic value. They stand on their own. Irony is a considerable strength of Tendulkar's dramatic writing. Broadly speaking, he employs verbal irony and dramatic irony in his plays to show the contrast between fact and expectations.

Keywords: Irony, Contrast, Games and play.

Introduction: Vijay Tendulkar's one of the most celebrated plays is *Encounter in Umbugland*. It was originally written in Marathi as a *Dumbdwipcha Mukabala* (1974) and then translated into English by Priya Adarkar. This play is a satire on contemporary opportunistic politics. Playwright through this play criticizes hypocrisy, selfishness, opportunistic tendency, short-sightedness, crookedness of the statesmen and foolishness, tendency of hero-worship, dumbness, helplessness, facelessness of the common people. In a way it is a 'non-conventional political play' (168:2012). In the play the King and his Ministers bear a symbolic significance. They present the disgusting condition of Indian democratic system. The names of the characters are very symbolic and bear distinctive meaning.

Before the Crisis: At the very opening of the first act, which is not further divided into scenes; Prannarayan, one of the characters in the drama playing a part of Sutradhar (anchor) prepares the ground of further conflict in the play. From the very first act events in the play catches the momentum. Prannarayan is an attendant to Princess Vijayas. He is a scapegoat of the power politics played in the big capitals. He was castrated and made third sex (eunuch) and then made attendant to the princess. He informs the reader a brief history and present conditions of the Umbugland. His opening comments are very ironic. He says,

“...I mean, we too have three kinds of truth: conventional truth, diplomatic truth, and the real truth. The truth I spoke just now was of all three kinds...”

(269:2006)

According to him truth itself is of three kinds. So far the sages and philosophers stated that truth is ultimate. It is one and bright like a sun. But here, in the very opening Tendulkar criticizes the tendency of politicians to exploit the truth itself. Another ironic situation is King Vichitravirya's so called speech before his subjects. It was on the occasion of king's 60th anniversary of coronation where king was addressing his beloved subjects on the topic of 'importance of celibacy', 'agave planting' etc. His speech was endless and useless still, his subjects are compelled to listen to it and on the other hand his ministers are waiting for him in an assembly hall for hours. Karkshirsha, one of the ministers says'

“Terrible! It is a matter of shame that in the course of sixty years His Majesty has not once understood the value of his statesman's time. Does time hangs on our hands?”.

(272:2006)

It is very ironic to see that how can a king, who does not honour his statesman's time, lead a nation to prosperity. It is also possible that ruler delving only into addressing people and ministers cannot set a good example before the either of the parties. Besides, the king is over aged and still he speaks of youthfulness to his ministers and subjects. He still wants to live forever and wants to become immortal. He cherishes a wish to rule the Ubugland forever. Audience laughs at king's immature babble. Here Tendulkar portrays a king who is not ready to look out of his self-woven cod of idealism or pseudo-idealism, pseudo-principles and dreams. He wants everyone including his daughter Princess Vijaya to follow his way of idealism. On the contrary, his ministers are calling him abuses in private. His own behavior is not according to his principles. At one moment he criticizes power as a 'crown of thorns', 'torments', 'a burden on one's shoulders' and at the another moment desires the power to remain in his hands forever. He orders his ministers to work day and night for the welfare of the state and himself sits before a painter to have his painting drawn. He has crossed his sixties now and still orders the painter,

“Painter do not omit the resolute arch of our brows. It is most important....The chest – observe our chest, how prominent it is! Or you will make an error....”.

(2812006)

As the play proceeds playwright showers a sardonic criticism on ministers in the play. The names of these ministers are bit strange for example, Karkshirsha (one whose head is like scorpion), Pisthkeshi (one whose hair are white), King Vichitravirya (one who is abnormal by birth), Vratyasom (one who is mischievous), Bhagdanta, Aranyaketu etc. These ministers are dishonest, disloyal and scheming still; it is very interesting and amusing to see them making a show of loyalty, honesty, before the king itself. The stark reality is that they all are disloyal to the nation and constitution and have every defect a real politician could have. This is brought to the surface by Vratyasom's following comment,

“Ha! Don't you promote your relations for your belly's sake, Karkshirsha?...Let us not open our mouths too wide about principles and honesty....to observe these two virtues in politics is as inappropriate and stupid as celibacy after marriage....we are partners in the most profitable game of skullduggery ”.

(273:2006)

At the end of the first act king dies and crisis of power begins.

During the Crisis: Tendulkar successfully brings forth the contrast between what is imagined and what is the fact. In his plays the fact is always cruel and still convincing than that of imagination. Here, in this play ministers parley to decide the successor of the king Vichitravirya. Everyone is advocating his suit. Nobody is withdrawing from the race. Each one is more cunning than the other and still they speak of welfare of the state, welfare of the common people, honour of the constitution so on and so forth. Ultimately and accidentally, the choice fell on Princess Vijaya. Ministers, by putting forth Vijaya as a pawn, wanted to rule the state. But to their heart's shock she is obstinate and out of their advice. At the coronation ceremony she orders to cut the legs short of 'sacred throne' so that her legs could touch the ground. She has every logical counter-argument for minister's argument. She did not even follow code of conduct laid down by so called ancestors and cabinet of the state. She tries patience of the ministers to the end-point. She demands a resolution to be passed as to let her play a hotchpotch and jacks in the palace. In addition to that she mixes with the Kadamba people who are considered to be the greatest threat to the unity of the nation. She shows her complete sympathy for them, plans to rehabilitate them. Queen Vijaya wants to uplift them and bring them to the mainstream of the society. So far she is unaware of pride and prestige if the Queen. She behaves like a child. Sometimes, she becomes so obstinate that she starts playing jacks or hotchpotch in the palace itself. She makes the cabinet wait outside till her game is over. The intention behind uplifting the Kadamba tribe is to create her image in the minds of the common people of the state and to prove that she is not a puppet ruler. She determines to rule in earnest from then on.

Her pride is hurt when her plan of 'Kadamba Rehabilitation' is rejected by the cabinet. She starts playing a power game. She imposes emergency, issues decree without cabinet's permission. She challenges the very sovereignty of the constitutions and the state. Playwright is successful here to arouse curiosity of the audience/reader. The real conflict of the play begins here onwards. Both the parties become sworn enemies of each-other. Each one tries every possible means to subdue the other. Vratyasom plan to arouse riots and demolish the Queen's palace through the hired people. Queen Vijaya, too, hires some roughs to checkmate her enemies. Great havoc is created. Vratyasom's men protest against the Queen's Kadamba rehabilitation plan. They shouted slogans against the Queen. They are about to demolish the palace. The whole cabinet is enjoying the scene. The Queen, too, is prepared. She plays dirty politics as a part of tit for tat. She made Bhagdanta a pawn and compels him to face the mad crowd. Everybody thinks that Bhagdanta is done for. Queen Vijaya visits to the house of these ministers. Further she bravely faces the crowd, calms the crowd by accepting its demands and turned ministers' dirty plan against them. In doing so she used practical wisdom which she had learned so far. She tactfully turned the table and aroused the same crowd against the cabinet. As the mad-in-rage crowd approaches to the ministers, they are thoroughly terrified. The three ministers Karkshirsha, Pisthakeshi, Vryatyasom surrendered themselves to the Queen. She allows them to disguise as a woman and protect them from the maddening crowd. Bhagdanta saved but with some minor injuries. Aranyaketu, from the beginning, is playing as a mediator to bring compromise between cabinet and the Queen. But his intention is to secure a minister's chair in either of the parties. Finally all are saved by the Queen. The cabinet gives consent to the Queen's Kadamba Rehabilitation plan without any condition. They all cheer to the victory of Queen Vijaya.

Conclusion: Technique of game of play is found in this play also. Princess Vijaya and her attendant Prannarayan play a jacks and hotchpotch in the palace. That shows indifference of Vijaya towards the cabinet itself. It is sort of safety valve for Vijaya to keep herself aloof from worldly nuisances. But her attendant plays a role of her friend, philosopher and mentor. Prannarayan make her aware of the happenings around her and give her a proper counsel every now and then. Tendulkar employs irony throughout this play. Not only this play but his other notable plays also have ironical interplays. This irony results,

“...through the imbalance of knowledge between Playwright and the audience...the irony rest in the incompleteness of meaning of words and actions...only we in the audience see ‘the full picture...’.”

(82:2010)

Playwright criticizes the social evils through his plays. *Encounter...* is such a one. Playwright's method of criticizing is not harsh but soft and indirect. He also employs some comic scenes, dialogues to reduce the unnecessary stress on the reader. He employs the symbols to hide the real persons and this allows the scope of his criticism to widen too far. The playwright tries successfully to show the contrast in the behavior of the people. Commoners and the statesmen all are alike. Tendulkar chronicles and criticizes his time and, successfully blends social criticism and entertainment. He does not give any solution to these problems. He just holds up heightened reflection of society. The play *Encounter...* is a critique of the then politics and the leaders. As well as it also comments upon gross mentality of the people of the state who blindly believe in their leaders, who make protest and perform gross destruction of the wealth of the nation, kills their own countrymen. Tendulkar very successfully employs irony to bring surface the hidden reality under the veil of hypocrisy, malice, cunningness.

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