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Vasant Kanetkar's Marathi Play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods): An Artistic Fragment of Illusion and Reality

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Abstract:

Vasant Kanetkar is a Marathi playwright and novelist. Kanetkar is one of the leading figures in Marathi drama and literature. He has written 40 three-act plays in Marathi. It is one of the important features of Kanetkar as a writer is that he was not only the successful dramatist but also a short-story writer, essayist and a writer of operas in Marathi. He is famous for his comedies, which gave him name and fame in Marathi literature. Kanetkar's plays covered a wide range of subject matters. In the play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods), Kanetkar has successfully shown the combination of illusion and reality. In practice, the terms illusion and reality are contrary to each other. However, the able hand of Kanetkar could create such combination of illusion and reality in the play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods). Researcher has personally translated the Marathi play *Devanche Manorajya* into English as a part of his research.

Keywords: Illusion, Reality, Mystery of Cosmos, Heaven, Hallucination, Fantasy.

Introduction:

The terms 'illusion' and 'reality' have special significance in study of literature. According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, the word 'illusion' means 'something that seems to exist but in fact does not, or seems to be something that it is not' and 'reality' means 'a thing that is actually experienced or seen, in contrast to what people might imagine'. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines 'illusion' as 'the state or fact of being intellectually deceived or misled' or 'a misleading image presented to the vision'. Both these words 'illusion' and 'reality' are contrary to each other. In order to forget everyday worries and troubles, characters in literary world as well as human beings in their real life take shelter in imaginary world. This kind of world is far away from their actual life. However, it provides a safety valve to accomplish unfulfilled wishes and expectations. Hallucination, fantasy, day dreaming are some of the terms associated with this kind of illusionary world. Characters build castle in the air and roam pleasantly in the unknown world. Fairyland,

enchanted caves and kingdom, meeting with celestial figures, Gods, angels, demons have great significance in this kind of imaginary world. Every culture in the world has its own mythical, legendary and fictitious tales, which is the residue of our prolonged dreams and wishes. This kind of illusionary world is the major concern for man of literature. English romantic poet, S.T. Coleridge has successfully portrayed such an illusionary world in his poem *Kubla Khan*.

Vasant Shankar Kanetkar (1920-2000) is Marathi dramatist and novelist. Kanetkar wrote 40 three-act plays. Kanetkar's plays have achieved commercial success on the stage. His plays covered a wide range of subject matters like domestic life, love, romance, history, contemporary issues etc. Kanetkar has been credited with rejuvenating the Marathi Theater when it was in decline. In 1970, Kanetkar received a Filmfare Award for Best Story for the Hindi movie *Aansoo Ban Gaye Phool* (Tears turned into Flowers), the story having been an adaptation of his Marathi play *Ashrunchi Jhali Phule* (Tears turned into Flowers). He presided over *Marathi Sahitya Sammelan* in 1988. He received Padma Shri award in 1992 for his literary accomplishments. Typical Maharashtrian culture, traditions, ways of living life one may notice in the plays of Kanetkar. Kanetkar is famous for his most successful Marathi historical play *Raigadala Jenwaha Jag Yete* (When Raigarh Fort Awakens....) based on the life of great Maratha King Shivaji Maharaj.

The play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods) is written in 1958. *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods) is a three-act play by Vasant Kanetkar. Incidents in Act-I take place in heaven, events in Act-II and Act-III take place on the earth in the regal bungalow of an industrialist Dhananjay. Captain Priyadarshan Kirtikar, a young army man is the main connecting link between heaven and earth in the play. Apart from Priyadarshan and Dhananjay, there are other characters in the play like Nandini, Charushila, Shamsundar, Haribhau, Yogiraj, Kakasaheb and Doctor. Beside human characters, there are celestial figures as domineering characters in the play. For example Naradmuni, Lightning, Madan, Varun, Mahadev, Bramhadev and Bhagwant i.e. Lord Vishnu. Major incidents in the play take place either in the heaven or on the earth. Throughout the play, one realizes that human beings are merely puppets in the hands of destiny. The play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods) appeals to audience and readers in such a way and compel them to think about the basic questioned that have been raised by Priyadarshan in the play.

Priyadarshan: Yes. I watched it with my eyes and listened to it; so I have to believe in it. (Laughs pathetically) Yea! We consider such Gods as our savior foolishly; and worship them so far.

Narad: I have been watching the same for ages. Those huge temples of Gods, those adorations, that remembrance of God, festivals, such fasts, vows—

Priyadarshan: Thousands of holy men have ruined their entire life for the sake of God.

And such pungent hatred for human beings in the minds of Gods?

Narad: Now you have to think about that. Such boundless splendid heaven for the settlement of Gods –

Priyadarshan: And the hand-held piece of the earth falls to the share of human beings.

Narad: Immortality to the Gods –

Priyadarshan: And momentary life of human beings –

Narad: Gods are blessed with everlasting youth –

Priyadarshan: And human beings are cursed with old age –

Narad: Such is the scheme of gods. (p14)

Through this conversation, one easily realizes the disparity shown by Gods with human beings on the earth. Priyadarshan, who represents the entire humanity, makes a dispute with great sage and well-wisher of human beings, Naradmuni in relation to partiality made by Gods with humans in the opening scene of the play. Priyadarshan talks about mortality, troubles, sorrows and despairs as the destiny of human beings on the earth. If Gods have immortality and everlasting youth, then why are human beings cursed with old age? This is the basic question, which makes to think everybody. Gods have heaven and entire universe for their settlement. Their children can play with planets and orbs in this universe. According to Priyadarshan, the scheme of God is responsible for the fate of entire humanity. Gods do not want man should reach to the perfection. Gods have divided the land between people, Gods have created religions, castes, communities etc. so that human beings should fight against each other and they should not reach the perfection. When Priyadarshan disputes with Naradmuni in the play, it does not have any personal appeal. But on behalf of entire humanity he seeks justice. Priyadarshan gives exposure to the long cherished dreams, wishes and expectations of humanity through his dialogues. He tries to awaken Bhagwant i.e. Lord Vishnu from his reverie.

Illusion as the Main Framework of the Play:

Hallucination of Priyadarshan is the main subject matter of the play. The incidents in Act-I of the play are nothing but Priyadarshan's dream at night. Priyadarshan is an honest and sincere soldier of Indian army. In his dream, Lightening in the form of *Apsara* fascinates him and drags him from his army camp to the heaven. All the happening in Act-I of the play take place in heaven. Priyadarshan is rather startled. The opening scene of the play gives audience as well readers the glimpses of hallucination of Priyadarshan. A splendid description of heaven is given in the Act-I.

Tall walls at both sides; a high arch door leading to the inside gallery; a velvety curtain on it; beyond that a huge, round, decorative marble column; a kingly staircase near another wall; a curly pillar staying upright on a plinth close to the staircase; on the far side, a very long veranda; decorative golden railing to the veranda; beyond that, bluish sky appears; a cupboard close to the staircase; it is filled with scriptures and ancient letters. A round table at the centre of gallery, and three thrones have put around it. (p1)

There is dead silence when curtain rises. Prayers and singings are going on in mixed voice of male and female. Exalted and pathetic tone signifies that it is an invocation. In

between mantras –“ *Asato maa saat gamay! Tamaso maa jyotir gamay! Mrutyor maa amrut gamay!*” i.e. “Lead me from the ‘asat to sat’! Lead me from darkness to light! Lead me from death to immortality!” overhears.

Everything is confusing on the part of Priyadarshan. Priyadarshan is completely astounded. Naradmuni appears before him. However, he misunderstands Naradmuni and considers him as an enemy. He thinks, it is one of the strategies of their enemy. In real sense, his meeting with Naradmuni, the great sage gives him realization that he has to accomplish an important work for the betterment of entire humanity. Naradmuni familiarizes him with heavenly manuscript i.e. *Mystery of Cosmos*. Priyadarshan wants to bring that holy script with him on the earth. Madan and Varunraj enter on the stage. Priyadarshan overhears their conversation. Through their conversation, Priyadarshan comes to know that recklessness, insincerity and disinterestedness of celestial figures is the main reason of catastrophe in the lives of human beings on the earth.

Madan: (Vociferously) Varunraj, do not tell anything. It is your routine confusion.

Varun: (Embarrassingly) It is not so Madandeva. A little confusion occurred this year—I admit. But –

Madan: (Springs up) This year? It is your every year grouse. This year—the supply of clouds did not get in time; next year—the direction of thunderstorm missed the way – you know very well how to offer excuses in various ways!

Varun: Hello, these are not excuses—

Madan: Do you remember— it ever rained according to timetable?

Varun: But why?

Madan: Why? If it is asked to rain in *Sawan*, it splashes a little in *Phalguna*; and if it is asked to dispatch clouds to the west, thunder crashes in the east. It is your method of work!

Varun: I admit it, but could you listen to me—

Madan: What is leftover to listen? Do you have any idea that such chaos has broken out in the atmosphere because of your slovenliness?

Varun: Forget about the past. But from this year you’ll see –(p8)

Through their dialogues, one may readily understand how carelessly celestial figures decide destiny of creatures on the earth. Gods are engrossed with different joyful events. Nobody cares about life on the earth. Celestial figures are engaged in merry-making. Their carelessness causes calamities on the earth. This earth is the beautiful Creation of Bhagwant i.e. Lord Vishnu. It was the beautiful dream of Bhagwant to create *Vaishnavas* out of human beings on the earth. He had expectation that other Gods will support him to accomplish his dream. However, not all Gods give their equal contribution in this scheme of Bhagwant. There is lack of co-ordination among Gods. Therefore, the poor, hapless humans suffer a lot on this planet i.e. the earth. Natural calamities like drought, earthquake, flood, epidemics etc. are output of poor administration of Gods.

Varun: (Suddenly remembers) Hello, where is cluster of clouds?

Lightening: Maharaj, Suryadev (The Sun) closed the factory of clouds today.

Varun: Closed the factory of clouds? But why? Does the ocean dry up?

Lightening: It is said, the destruction department issued such decree to Suryadev!

Varun: Decree from the destruction department? Then everything is hold up of us. Have you seen this Madandeva? If there is no supply of clouds, now shall we go and roar only in the sky? (Smells a rat) Hey mean fellows, I had decided rain towards the east today. (Takes out timetable from the file) Yes—it is said clearly –“Heavy fall of rain”. (p9)

Insanity of Priyadarshan and Misfortunes of Entire Family:

After meeting with Naradmuni and other celestial figures in heaven, Priyadarshan set his goal to propagate *Mystery of Cosmos* on the earth. In order to propagate *Mystery of Cosmos*, he conducts meetings with political leaders, government officers, editors, professors, scientists, philosophers, artists and religious preceptors and troubles them. Moreover, members of his family like Nandini, Dhananjay, Charushila and Haribhau also get tired of his nonsensical talk. They all come to the conclusion that Priyadarshan has lost his senses. Doctor Bhagwantrao is summoned to treat Priyadarshan. Priyadarshan behaves strangely with everybody. So, nobody in the family believes in the words of Priyadarshan. Even more, he makes a claim firmly that Nandini is *Apsara* in the heaven; and in order to accomplish the scheme of Gods, she has married him.

Gods in the heaven do not want Priyadarshan should get success in his propagation of *Mystery of Cosmos*. In order to foil his plan Mahadev, Bramhadev, Madan, Varunraj, Bhagwant and Lightening enter in Dhananjay’s bungalow in the forms of his family members. It is Priyadarshan who hallucinates that Haribhau, Shamsundar, Kakasaheb, Yogiraj, Doctor and Nandini are not human beings and members in his family and relatives; but they are Varunraj, Madan, Bramhadev, Mahadev, Bhagwant and Lightening respectively in the forms of human characters. According to Yogiraj, Priyadarshan should be dispatched to an asylum. In order to ruin the scheme of Priyadarshan, these Gods not only bring calamity in the life of Priyadarshan but also spoil the life of Dhananjay also. Dhananjay is one of the victims of scheme of Gods.

Dhananjay is hard working, sincere and kindhearted industrialist. However, he has not become an industrialist overnight. He had joined the factory as ordinary fitter. Through hard work and honesty, he had become an industrialist. Now, he is the proprietor of ‘Charushila Industries’. His wife Charushila is beautiful and crazy for art and theatre. She is an amateur actor who works only for pleasure in the theatre. Shamsundar is a handsome sportsman, an artist; and he works as Labour Officer in ‘Charushila Industries’. Charushila and Shamsundar work in the theatre together as artists. Charushila has attachment for Shamsundar. However, both of them did not allow their love to cross the boundary. Madan in the form of Shamsundar enters in Dhananjay’s bungalow and completely spoils the husband –wife relationship of Dhananjay and Nandini. Dhananjay narrates the story of an accident in the factory and how Kisan, one of the workers has lost his hands. Dhananjay personally rescued the life of Kisan. Even more, he announced immediate assistance of five thousand rupees to the family of Kisan as compensation and decided to give a job to Kisan’s wife in the factory.

This incident indicates Dhananjay was very compassionate and generous towards his workers in the factory.

Madandev in the form of Shamsundar not only ruins the husband –wife relationship of Dhananjay and Nandini but also affects employer –employee relation in 'Charushila Industries'. Madandev in the form of Shamsundar provoked Kisan and other workers in the factory and caused revolt of workers. Haribhau and Kakasaheb tried to make mediation in the revolt of workers. Unfortunately, in the meeting with workers, at the last minute, somebody poisoned the minds of leaders, and leaders started eating their words. Therefore, they have to return without settlement. Even more, turbulent workers plan to burn down the godown of factory. Haribhau is the Chief-Minister of the province. Haribhau has crossed the age of sixty; he is one of the dynamic patriots of old age. Haribhau is one of the residues of competent men of previous generation who devoted their lives for revolutionary work. Haribhau is very simple, innocent social activists and former freedom fighter, who always believes in the principles of Mahatma Gandhi i.e. compassion and non-violence. He is very committed and loyal to his political party. He has played different roles according to the suggestions of High Command. Haribhau does not want to utilize his authority and power for any kind of personal gains. He firmly believes in the principles of democracy. Kakasaheb and Yogiraj insist Haribhau to take assistance of police force in order to crush the revolt of workers. According to Kakasaheb, government should not take fright of effective remedies like lathi-charge, if occasion arises firing and if requires assistance of military force. But Haribhau does not accept it as the remedy for their personal problem. According to Priyadarshan, Bramhadev and Mahadev have been disguised as Kakasaheb and Yogiraj and they want to devastate the image of loyal, sincere and committed activist like Haribhau. Priyadarshan firmly claims, Kakasaheb and Yogiraj do not want, Haribhau should reach to the perfection. Gods in heaven do not like that humans should realize their goal in the life and they should concentrate on their goal. Gods who are the real enemy of humanity wants to distract humans from their goal. Therefore, human beings roam without any ultimate aim and direction in the universe for the ages.

Settlement of the Puzzle and Self-Actualization to Priyadarshan in the Concluding Part:

Bhagwan in the form of Doctor finds remedy to the revolt of workers. Dhananjay also becomes agree with him. Thus, Doctor manages patch up between Dhananjay and workers; and rescues the family from further disaster. Yogiraj and Kakasaheb i.e. Mahadev and Bramhadev firmly insist that Priyadarshan should be dispatched to an asylum. It makes Priyadarshan to lose his temper. Nobody consoles him nor tries to understand him. Bhagwan i.e. Lord Vishnu who is very merciful and kind, does not approve the scheme of Gods to dispatch Priyadarshan to an asylum. Bhagwan sends back Mahadev, Bramhadev, Madan, Varun and Lightning also in the heaven in order to solve the case of Priyadarshan and to save his life.

In the concluding part of the play Bhagwant i.e. Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Lord appears in their original form. Priyadarshan also realizes that it is extremely arduous work to awaken an obtuse animal like human being and to propagate the *Mystery of Cosmos*. He gives confession that he has bowed his knees before the ignorance of humans! Finally, Naradmuni appears on the stage and he makes clear everything. Actually, it was the plan of Narad to wake up Bhagwant from his reverie.

Narad: Bhagwant, you were alone intoxicated with a beautiful reverie. Therefore, I thought to compel you to visit the earth once. If I tell you merely the fact, you won't come. As a result, I gave the *Mystery of Cosmos* in the hands of an over enthusiastic lad and caused consternation among Gods. Sorry for the inconvenience, Devahideva. But aren't you assured now? Didn't you become completely disillusioned now? (p81)

This Creation on the earth is the beautiful dream of Bhagwant. According to Narad, Bhagwant has failed this experiment. According Narad, death is permanent and universal fate of human beings on the earth. Naradmuni firmly says to Bhagwant, weak human beings, who are neither beasts nor Gods, hang about for the ages. They do not know the goal of their life. Haplessly they complete their cycle of life from birth to death; and half-hearted, blind divine power decides their fate. Finally, Narad asks Bhagwant, you rescued this family at this moment from disaster; but millions of human beings have invited hundreds of such disasters out of their stupidity in their lives, how can you recover them all? It brings tears in the eyes of Bhagwant and Bhagwant accepts his failure as Creator of this earth and humanity.

Bhagwant: (Tears come in the eyes of Bhagwant. Bhagwant is choked up) You are absolutely right, Narada. My experiment is failed. It was my beautiful dream to create great *Vaishnavas* out of human beings born on this soil. Thereupon, I have not only failed my experiment, but also shattered my beautiful dream! (81)

Through the conversation between Bhagwant and Naradmuni, Priyadarshan realizes everything and he awakens completely from his reverie in real sense. He tells Nandini, he does not have any hallucination now; and he will not intoxicate with any kind of reverie in coming future.

Conclusion:

To sum up, Vasant Kanetkar's Marathi play *Devanche Manorajya* (The Reverie of Gods) is an artistic fragment of illusion and reality. Gods, their schemes, their role in defining the destiny of human beings make the play exceptional. Beautiful combination of heaven and earth, celestial figures and human characters make a tour of audience as well as readers in a different world. Kanetkar has successfully employed the device of hallucination and fantasy to bring together heaven and earth. The hallucination of Priyadarshan is the main cause of entire happenings in the play. Dialogues in the play enable audience as well readers to think about the basic questions raised by Priyadarshan.

Whatever Bhagwant i.e. Lord Vishnu had assumed during the time of Creation is one thing. After the period of thousands of years, what is the actual condition of creatures like human

beings on this planet is main subject matter of this play. Other creatures like beasts and birds cannot think like humans. Therefore, beasts and birds are free. On the contrary, human being who is neither God nor beast leads miserable life on the earth. He has a little knowledge of this universe. He strives to achieve perfection. But divine power create hurdles on his way by names of diseases, old age, calamities and finally the death. Human beings have power to challenge the set rules and to make available entire universe for their settlement. But the divine power ruins the efforts of humans to the dust within twinkling of an eye. People give varied names like destiny, fate, fortune etc. to confine their goals. However, it is disinterestedness and unwillingness of divine power that causes the major obstruction in achieving perfection in the lives of human beings. The ultimate fear of death is the one and only truth on this beautiful planet like earth. And with the help of hallucination and fantasy, Vasant Kanetkar has tried to criticize this scheme of Gods.

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