



PROJECTION OF POLITICAL ALLEGORY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S ENCOUNTER IN UMBUGLAND: A BRIEF NOTE

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Abstract

*This article deals with the political allegory on the postcolonial politics of India. In the Vijay Tendulkar's play **Encounter in Umbugland**, India's first democratic women Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi is symbolically portrayed as Vijaya, the Queen of Umbugland. The original title of the play *Dambadwipcha Mukabala* represents the old name of India (Hindustan), *Dambadwipcha*. India Gandhi's period is the period of rapid change in people's life, economical status, westernization, government policies and education. As a socialist playwright, the relation between politics and people of India is the central concern of the author. The so called orthodox rule of male being a bread winner model was broken by her rule. The contradiction of india's written constitution and the practical reality exhibits in this play. As per Indian constitution defines India as, "Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic". Nevertheless, Vijay Tendulkar sarcastically portrayed the Autocracy, "Rule of the Queen (Vijaya)". This article will give a brief note on the political allegory of Indira Gandhi's governance of India.*

Key words: *Political Allegory, Politics, History, Indira Gandhi, Political skullduggery and Autocracy.*

Literature is the documentation of life. Literature reflects the people's life vice versa. There is a famous quote, "Art, freedom and creativity will change society faster than politics" (Victor Pinchuk). Some people take art, some people take freedom, some people take politics to influence and change the society but only very few have walked multidiscipline. As a social play wright Vijay Tendulkar used the medium of art to influence the society at the same time he has taken full freedom to express his ideas in a creative way. The people's lives were mirrored through a work of art and a work of art is a product of its society, culture and language. Vijay Tendulkar's plays were the products of the Postcolonial India's culture, politics and the society. He is one of the prominent writers of Indian English drama. His writings were mostly about the social issues, minority suppression, gender bias and human rights. After India got freedom from the Britain, Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister of the independent India. And his daughter Indira Gandhi comes to politics and become the Prime Minister after his dead. In the play *Encounter in Umbugland* was the story of historical context of the Indira Gandhi's political reign.

Encounter in Umbugland is Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi play translated into English by Priya Adarkar. Drama is a unique literary genre of literature. Drama in India is older than western literature. Indian drama is well established even two thousand years before the Aristotle's '**Poetics**'. The Sanskrit book **Natyashastra** is the text of 'the theory of the drama' is the best evidence proved that Indian literature has not only texts of drama but also has the guidebook of drama. Thus it is well proven fact that the Indian drama was established even in the early Vedic period. Literature in Sanskrit was classified into two categories as *Drishya* that art can be seen and *Sravya* that art can be heard. In early dramas were mimes but later it can be the combination of both *Sravya* (audio) and *Drishya* (visual). When the English education introduced in India, Indians were become the products of English education as well as English literature. And that leads them to think and write in English. In the early phase, Indian English literature is mostly of the cloning of western literature. However the unique identity of Indians can be seen in every work of art in Indian English literature. Although they were in English language the ideas and themes were of the Indian kind. The first Indian English drama was brought in by Krishna Mohan Banerji of his *The Persecuted* in 1837 of the theme of east-west encounter. The play *Is This Called Civilization* by Michael Madhu Dutt in 1871 is considered the real beginning of the Indian English drama. Being a foreign language, English has not reached the people of India that so English plays were only welcomed by the aristocrats in the beginning. In order to reach the people of India the writers took a convincing language and style of their own vernacular. India is a large secular country in where the people were diversified in language and culture in the same time united as Indian nationalists. So that, the writers of different state has written and acted plays in their own languages. And many of them were



translated into English to reach into nationally and internationally. Like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Bharati Sarabhai drew the themes from Indian mythology and mostly write in their regional language then translated into English.

The classical Indian drama were greatly influenced the modern English dramas. The regional Indian languages, the Sanskrit, the Hindi, the Bengali, the Tamil and the Marathi theatres were popularly the impacting factors of the modern theatre. In the early form of Marathi plays called Tamasha, performed in streets and in front of the house with dance and music. The modern Marathi plays were written as scripts and performed in the well build theatre house by the trained artists. Vishnu Das Bhawe is known as pioneer of Marathi theatre who gave a new dimension to the Marathi theatre. His plays Raja Gopichanda and Sita Swayamvar were enacted in the Marathi theatre with the new stage production technique of scenery. In Maharashtra and its surrounding region the tradition of drama and theatre has gained well popularity. In the colonial period, plays were used as a tool to convey the patriotism and emerge the people to fight for freedom. The Marathi theatre has beholder the changes in the society, politics and the culture. The eminent Marathi play writers Vinayak Janardhan Keertane, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Prabhodhankar Thackeray, S. N. Navare, Satish Alekar, G. P. Deshpande, Datta Bhagat, Ram Ganesh Gadkari were developed the Marathi theatre through their use of theatre techniques, simple language, depicting everyday problems of the ordinary people, scenery, music and dance.

Vijay Tendulkar is the most influential and the best playwright of the Marathi theatre as well as in Indian theatre. His plays were written in Marathi and translated into English and also translated into the many other Indian regional languages to enact in respected regional states. Vijay Tendulkar was the responsible of bringing forth the new wave in the Indian theatre. In the early age he is interested in attending social welfare discussions. In his teenage, he participated in the Quit India movement. In his twenties he worked as a news reporter and an editor. All through his life, he was actively involved in the welfare of the society. He is a keen observer and a forthright critic of the post colonial India. His plays were of the reflections of the Indian society of his period. Vijay has the basic urge (to write) has always been in him to let out his concerns vis-à-vis his reality, the human condition as he perceived it. His plays boldly show light into the exact life and problems of the middle class people. His idea of the play kamala was taken from the real incident exposed in The New Indian Express by the Journalist, Ashwin Sarin. Ashwin actually brought a girl from a flesh market and presented her at a press conference in 1980's reality was the soul platform to the play, Kamala. Vijay told the truth about his plays in an interview as follows,

"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 me, as 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."(Interview with Sumit Sexena: 2006)

The Encounter in Umbugland is a Political Allegory of Indira Gandhi's ministry in India. This play is completely different from Vijay Tendulkar's other plays. His usual women protagonists are the victims of their society, life and family such as Leela in Silence! The Court is in Session, Kamala in Kamala, Rama in The Vultures and Lakshmi in Sakharam the Binder. But in Encounter in Umbugland, Vijaya is a woman protagonist who is completely contracting to his other women protagonists. And in the way Vijaya portrayed as a symbol of willpower of the women. Vichitravirya is an unfit king with five ministers ruling the island called Umbugland. Vijaya is his daughter who is mischievous and disrespectful to him and his ministers. Often she ridicules the ministers and her father. The play opens in the king's sixtieth coronation anniversary celebration. Though king wish long life but he died immediately after the artist completed his portrait. After his death each minister plays a cunning role to occupy the king's position. But the consequence made Vijaya, the Queen. The ministers are using Vijaya as a puppet to run the government. When Vijaya was self awaken and stand firm on to her own role. When Vijaya showed her real intellect and power over the ministers and people, the total plan of the ministers was collapsed. Finally the Queen made her own throne. All the ministers and people were completely surrendered to her and she takes control over the throne by her individual will power. In the 1964 after his father's dead, Indira



Gandhi first takes over into direct Indian politics. Till then she was in the backdrop of the Indian National Congress in where every member of her family were serving a chief role. Apart from Nehru's daughter, she has a constant interest and involvement in social welfare of the people. That made her to be determined political leader. In the play, Vijay has come to the throne after his father but she has her own strong principles to nourish the people.

The two 'pen-bearers' comes in every scene to give an account of the message represented the sensational news reporters or news bearers who played a major role in spreading news and creating an eagerness among the people about Vijaya (Indira). During the seventies and eighties india, the newspapers(media) has just emerged and the people believed the media as the true source of the facts. What an media reports are considered to be hundred percent true. They played with their literary tricks to increase the curiosity of the readers to promote their sales. Like the famous saying, Pen is mightier than the knife, the big pen in the hands of the two pen bearers was a symbol of the media's big responsibility and its big influence in the society. The third person narrative style of the play in between the conversation was set by the character Pranarayan. The objectivity of the play maintained through these both the two pen-bearers and the Pranarayan.

There was a drastic transformation of Indira Gandhi from a normal childish daughter into comanding political leader. The self transformation of Indira Gandhi of her personality before his father's dead and after she become the Prime Minister and the major operations in the country were symbolically described in this play. Vijay Tendulkar portrayed Indira Gandhi as Vijaya and Nehru as Vichitravirya in Encounter in Umbugland. The political skullduggery of Indira during the emergency period, the operation blue star, Bangladesh civil war, cold war among the senior political leaders of India, the senior cunning minister's of her cabinet were the main setting of the play.

Allegory is employed as a narrative strategy in literary works to embellish the work of art and decline the seriousness of the subject. This prominent literary device was employed in various genre of literature like poetry, prose, fiction and play. There are two distinguished types in allegory one is historical or political allegory and another one is the allegory of ideas. The simple story "the tortoise and the hare" is the best example for the allegory. The intended abstract meaning of the slow and steady wins the game implied upon the tortoise and the over confidence definitely leads to loss implied upon the hare. The historical allegory contains of the historical incidents and figures. George Eliot's Animal Farm is the best example for political allegory in where the communism and Russian revolution is the main historical incidents were the main plot. In Indian English drama, the prominent regional writers were concentrated on the social and historical issues. For instance the Kannada playwright Girish Karnard's Tughlaq is political allegory set in the historical events of the Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Allegory was defined in a glossary of literary terms as follows,

An "allegory" is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal", or primary, level of signification and at the same time to communicate a second, correlated order of signification.(P 8).

Dambadwipcha Mukabala is the original Marathi name of the play Encounter in Umbugland. Dambadwip is the old name of Bharatham or India. In that way Vijay relate the play to the historical context of India. The Island Umbugland is the symbol of India. India is the largest democratic country in the world. Here the administration of the country functions in the basis of the parliament. The people directly elect the candidates of the parliament by voting system. Sarcastically Vijay Tendulkar used the Autocracy to indicate the dictatorship of the government in the emergency situations to balance the peace in the country. Indira Gandhi declared 'the emergency' to 21 months of period from 1975 to 1977 in India. Although the President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed officially issued the emergency under the article 352 of the Indian constitution on the grounds of the unfavorable prevailing internal disturbance. In that period the rights secured by constitution was ignored and her political opponents were jailed and much of the human rights were violated. This emergency period is the most controversial incident of the independent India's history. The democracy was deeply affected and ignore to the opponents. In contrast, the



economical status of the people and education were notably sustained. The green revolution leads the development of the agriculture and it gave the solution to the poverty and provided enough food. As Indian constitution mentioned, “we, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic”(P 1). Democratic country function through the Parliament is the union of ministers but in Umbugland, the ministers of the cabinet have vengeance over one another to get the power. They have no unity between them and have used traps to catch the power and fully corrupted like the Indira Gandhi’s period in India. In contrast to the democracy, the autocracy is a system of government ran by Vijaya (Indira), one person with absolute power. Indira took the absolute power over the country and take decisions individually at what made her cabinet ministers disappointment on her. The reality of Indian democracy symbolized through this Umbugland’s autocracy government.

The plan for rehabilitation of Kadamba tribe is the highlight of the Queen Vijaya’s earnest transformation from her naughty girl into the majestic Queen. Vijaya comes to know the truth behind the oppression on Kadamba tribe through Bhagadanda who is from Kadamba tribe and one among the ministers. Like in the Bangladesh war, Indira Gandhi has made a serious and honest helping hand for the people. And she is the one who got them independence and help them create the new country from the Pakistan. Here Kadamba tribe and the riot to get their land is the historical significance of the Bangladesh war. Indira took the decision and gave the complete assistance to Bangladesh People against each hurdle from the Pakistan government and the Indian cabinet Ministers. Above all she successfully did this Bangladesh a new state of independence. The problem of minority and majority was the ever ending battle in every country. The aboriginals or minority inhabitants were suffering to secure their rights. The Indian constitutional guarantee of ‘special care’ in Article 46 in the form of reservation is ensured at the level of implementation largely because of this political importance of the minorities. Indira Gandhi has proved that she was the savior guard of the people without the differences they have of their religion, language, culture and caste. Even if she was warned to remove the Sikh bodyguards from her security force, she refused to do. Her love for unity of India is more important than her own life.

Vijaya (Indira) goes out and talk to the crowd people when they threatened her to burn the palace and kill her. The ministers cunningly arranged the protest and the violence against Vijaya. They insisted their members to attack the palace and the Queen Vijaya. But the strong willed and well molded Indira Gandhi was guessed the ministers skullduggery traps and she arranged the alternative plan beforehand. She boldly comes out from the palace and addressed the public who are fiercely involved on protest and wrongly scrutinized by the ministers. The ministers planned to defeat Vijaya instead Vijaya’s plan succeed. She used her intelligence and charismatic speech to get good support to herself and directed the people’s anger towards the ministers as she said those ministers who are found guilty will be severely punished. She announced the abolition of tax as a token of love to the public and attracted the whole crowd to her side. Indira Gandhi’s people welfare schemes were the great magnetic source to attract the public like the five years plan, green revolution, anti-poverty movement, women welfare and education. Indira Gandhi’s braveness to solve the problems and dealing the critical situations are greatly of the kind beyond gender bias, her upbringing and education. After the operation blue star she was threatened to death and the secret intelligence agency warned her to ignore the Sikh security guards from the personal guards in order to prevent her assassination. She ignored her wellness to secure the secularity of the country. To that extend, it is very apt to call Indira, the Iron Lady of India.

Vijay Tendulkar’s Encounter in Umbugland is a political allegory on Indira Gandhi and her reign in India. The events portrayed here of the Kadamba tribal riot, public protest, minister’s political skullduggery and bold Autocratic actions were similar to the Indira Gandhi’s political life. To contrast to the other plays Vijay Tendulkar portrayed his character Vijaya (Indira) a bold, independent, intelligent and powerful personality. He advocated the idea of woman as a powerful personality and proved wrong of the second gender custom. Vijay (Indira) has proved the world of her uncompromising determination and incomparable ability to lead the country in the right path. He praised Indira Gandhi’s administration as well as contemned her father’s incombability, her corrupted and cunning ministers and the totalitarian government. As consider all points discussed above Encounter in Umbugland gives the clear insight into Political Allegory on the historical and political significance of Indira Gandhi’s reign.



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