



PRESENTING HUMAN PREDICAMENT IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE WITH REFERENCE TO SELECTED PLAYS OF ASIF CURRIMBHOY AND MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR

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ABSTRACT

The theatre culture in India dates back to the era it started with the writing of stories which were based on Epics. This later on changed to mixing to the Indian culture with the Western culture. This Eastern and Western culture gave the new face to the writing and the writers which in turn influenced many issues of the country. Were on one time it was only written for the rich and kingly class audience with the development in writing and dealing with developed themes the concept of looking at the theatre completely changed. This theatre art now started playing a role in the discussion of the issues which were never discussed openly. The writers like Asif Currimbhoy and Mahesh Elkunchwar started writing with the very basic idea but, gradual the plays presented by the two created a new voice in theatre world. Asif Currimbhoy presented the human suffering and agony on the street with his Hungry Ones and Mahesh Elkunchwar presented the same through silence with the four walls of the house. Though the plot created by both the writers seems to be different yet the common feature in both the writers is presenting the degradation of the human and in turn the degradation of the country.

Key Words: Theatre, Eastern Culture, Western culture, Asif Currimbhoy, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Agony, degradation.

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Theatre Culture in India

Reading a play does not fulfill all the emotions of the human. A play is meant to show the human feeling and their nature in the daily routine. This is done by the play writer by using his/her skills in the dialogue, with characters, and with presenting it in front of the people. Therefore, for presenting any human predicament in front of people only writing of a particular form is not enough. This needs a different form of art which represents the issues of the general people in front of the general audience giving it a voice for the change, and development. Indian drama was not always

acknowledged as compared to poetry and fiction. This art form slowly developed and can be found with different writers such as Sri Aurobindo, T.P. Kailasam, Tagore, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Lakhan Deb, A.S.P. Ayyar, Lobo-Prabhu, Asif Currimbhoy, Nissim Ezekiel, Partap Sharma, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahasweta Devi, Gurcharan Das, Manohar Malgonkar, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan, Uma Parameswaran, Mahesh Elkunchwar and many more. During the post-independence all the regions were playing a role in development of ideas for the freedom and the

education but, especially Bengal and Maharashtra was the hub for the theatrical activity which generated zeal of writers writing for the social issues of the country. The writers of India had started writing the play with the issues which attracted the general audience a lot. This issued handled by the writers were based on the epic stories of *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the Upanishads. These epics were the inspiring part for the audience. Later, on this was coupled with the western ideas which were to give exposure to the western culture with that of Indian culture. This mixing of Indian and western culture in the dramatic art can be found in the writings of contemporary writers, especially Asif Currimbhoy (Bengali Theatre) during and after Independence and Mahesh Elkunchwar (Marathi theater) during post-colonial period. Currimbhoy was having the knowledge of *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* and the Upanishads which he used in his writing, brought about a synthesis of the Eastern and the Western cultures in his writings. Asif Currimbhoy is considered as the First authentic voice of theatre art, and he has been credited with around 29 plays to his name. He has a great interest in producing the dramas especially for the theatre. Observing his plays means inclusion of drama, dance, songs, music, which triggers the emotions of the audience. Also, he is found to be writing his plays based on the true incidence. In fact he himself comments that: 'There is a sense of trigger – I think the trigger was life itself, of what I saw around, of how I reacted to it, in other words an emotional reaction'. He shows the human predicament through writing on the social, political, religious, romantic, psychological issues. Currimbhoy presents the conflict of human life on theater and in theatre, giving it a voice for change. The other voice which heated the theater art through his writing is Mahesh Elkunchwar. Mahesh Elkunchwar holds an honorable place in the Marathi theatre painting the postmodern social cultural existence. This brought a development in the Marathi theatre dealing with the conflicts of Marxism and Socialism which was gusting all over the nation. This Marathi theatre started in 1843 with the stage technique which was completely western. Early around 1594 plays were written in Marathi by Tanjore king Raja Shahji Bhosle

but, these plays were never performed on stage and never had a voice in front of the open audience. Later, on with development of education the theatre received its voice and many renowned writers came forward with their writings. To mention few of them we have Vinayak Kirti, Balwant Pandurang, Appasaheb Kirloskar and many more. This writing today reached its peak and we have few of imminent contemporary writers like Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar and Mahesh Elkunchwar. The paper is an attempt to study the two different theatrical writers and their contemporary issues with a comparative study. These issues can be either social, political, feministic etc... The paper attempts to compare the writing of two different eras presenting that even though the era/ period may change yet the writings and the issues maybe common.

Asif Currimbhoy: Exploring Human Agony through "Hungry Ones"-

Asif Currimbhoy explores the human predicament which is quite universal and deal with the real life situations. This real life situation which he tried to write was based on the fact what he saw around him during and after the independence period. These were the writings which were inspired during the freedom struggle of Bangladesh and major part was during the Indo-Pak war. His writing can be clubbed into different categories such as social plays, political plays, and romantic plays. Even though this plays are written on the specified category but, his plays always finds its difference in situation creating a flux in the minds of audience and mixing the categories together.

His play "Hungry Ones" is a social issue which can be generally found on the streets of the India. The "Hungry Ones" deal with the poverty and the misery the people on the streets of India. These are the people who for the survival for a day are found to do various activities which help them to survive. This play is based on the visit of two American, who are on the tour to study the true nature of India. They by observing India and Indian culture develop a new philosophy about the country. The two are shown to be getting involved in the activities of the street performer and trying to understand their situations but, many a times even though trying hard the success is not to the level.

Currimbhoy through his writing has tried to bring out the misery through the eyes of Two American beatnik-poet Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, in a satirical and humored manner. The man and women shown the play as husband and wife are street performers finding their source of living. The two are found to be acting and performing for little money to settle down their hunger. In the play the social issue of the poor and drastic condition of the people living in the country is dealt very openly and trying to tell the people the factual condition, which cannot be discussed openly. The action of husband and wife for earning few money and food is so drastic that they are seen to be performing like the monkey. This can be found with the monkey act in the play where the man is performing like monkey and always trying to show that he is hungry by beating on his stomach. This whole of action is shown to be observed by the two American poets and trying to understand it. The two beatnik poets try to impress the audience and divert them from the actions of street performers, and even they try to divert the two performers. But, a very factual truth is that even though American's trying to impress and diverting the audience and the performers, they were not successful. The audience on the street were very which interested in looking at the pain and suffering of the street performers. The scenes presented are very symbolic in nature which shows that the two Americans trying to resolve the human conditions in the country actually could not even understand it. They in fact get more confused with the situations they come through. They also try to understand the voice of women which tell them or invite them by saying-

"So you want to become
one of us, stranger
a hungry one...?
then learn: stranger, learn...."

Through this play we see that Currimbhoy has tried to present the unsolved and unidentified misery of the people. Currimbhoy like G.B.Shaw emphasized on the fact that theater is an ideal entertainment giving making one understand the theatre art as an essential form and making one understand the role of man in this art form. The hungry Ones is a brilliant presentation of the social issues which shows that

the change economic condition of the country changes the human to animal and makes the one to earn his living by performing unnatural acts. These acts may even harm the character but, for little food grain this is also acceptable by man.

Mahesh Elkunchwar: Presenting Life of Social Binded Characters in "Wada Chirebandi"-

Mahesh Elkunchwar one of the eminent play writers of the country and a renowned name in the theater art gave to us the plays which are notable creations in the theatre art. His plays paint a grim picture of postmodern socio-cultural contemporary society, especially the way of writing deals with the urban India. Elkunchwar has risen with his bold and experimental writing. Elkunchwar has challenged the middle class theme and has commented on the serious issues of the society. We find a very deep similarity in the writings of Mahesh Elkunchwar and Vijay Tendulkar expect the fact that Tendulkar has presented the violence on the stage openly and Elkunchwar has done the same with silence. There is a particular type of silence in his writing which speaks a lot and his actors give justices to this silence. The space provided by him during the dialogues and actions are extra ordinary and creates a zeal for understanding the human nature and character. His play "Wada Chirebandi" is one such play which has created and given new voice to the human sufferings. This play written by Elkunchwar is created as the best creation of Elkunchwar depicting the social cultural binding of the characters. This play can be analyzed of the universal truth and the human conditions. He wrote this play after a brief space of his writing career. For Girish Karnad the play is a modern classic of Indian theatre. He mentions it as:

"What is a classic? How do we recognize one?...The ultimate test is that a classic declares itself instantly. You see the play and you know you have seen something that 'has broken open new grounds', 'will stand the test of time', 'ranks with the best' or whatever your test is. By and large, Indian plays with contemporary themes are largely influenced by Ibsen, which deal with social problems or paint family melodramas with some secret guilt tucked away waiting for a last-minute release. "Wada Chirebandi" deals with a whole age;

showing gently if firmly the slow decline in the fortunes of a traditional Hindu family, as it comes to terms with the demands of modernity. The pain is muted and therefore searing.”

The play represents the social and cultural fall in the family which in turn represents the fall of the norms of the society. There is a gradual decline and fall in the tradition which the society follows. Elkunchwar tactfully represented the rural and urban conflict with the family. Even though of one blood the characters in the urban and rural area try to place their higher authority in front of the audience. Elkunchwar has presented the fall of the cultural norms which keeps the family binded together. This is shown symbolically through the falling of dust from the roof. This falling of the roof and the holes in the wall of the house symbolically represents the degradation in the family and also in the society. Also, in the family the women characters are presented as the leading character with men trying to show the typical dominant role. This can be found to be same to the feature what we find in our society but, as always never try to speak on it. Every individual created in the play is an individual of self-identity, and these individuals have created an aura around themselves which is very typical for the character. Elkunchwar through this play has also tried to show the women suffering and their role in the society. In one of the scene of the play we find that the jewelry of the family which is the considered to be the tradition of the family and a culture which bind everyone in the family is seen to be missing. This destiny and honor of the family is lost in the gradual time period. Mahesh Elkunchwar as said silently speaks the truth that with the growing society and the culture area the tradition slowly degrades which also in turn degrades the society. Women holding the marginalized position and family being practical in nature are the truth of today's society. This truth though cannot be faced by us very openly but, Elkunchwar has tried to show it and bring the fact that change in the economic condition within the family and society can change the whole of the conditions, whether it is family.

Conclusion

Both the writers though belonging to the different era and conditions but, the writing which both of them tried is to present the contemporary issues of the society. Both the writers have tried to show that the issues which cannot be discussed openly can be presented and yet discussed in front of the audience by using their specific skills. Though the way of presenting the human dilemma is different for both the writers yet, the basic idea behind presenting this play is to show directly or indirectly the human suffering and pain in the society. This can be directly presented like in the play of Asif Curriombhoy's "*Hungry Ones*" or indirectly in Mahesh Elkunchwar's "*Wada Chirebandi*". The theme and the technique created and used by both the writers hold a unique place which is cherished in contemporary era. The *Hungry Ones* were on one side represents the suffering directly which of course involves the harsh and painful suffering of the characters for food, while on the other part *Wada Chirebandi* presents the suffering of women and family through symbolic presentation, which also shows the falling of the country into dark area.

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