

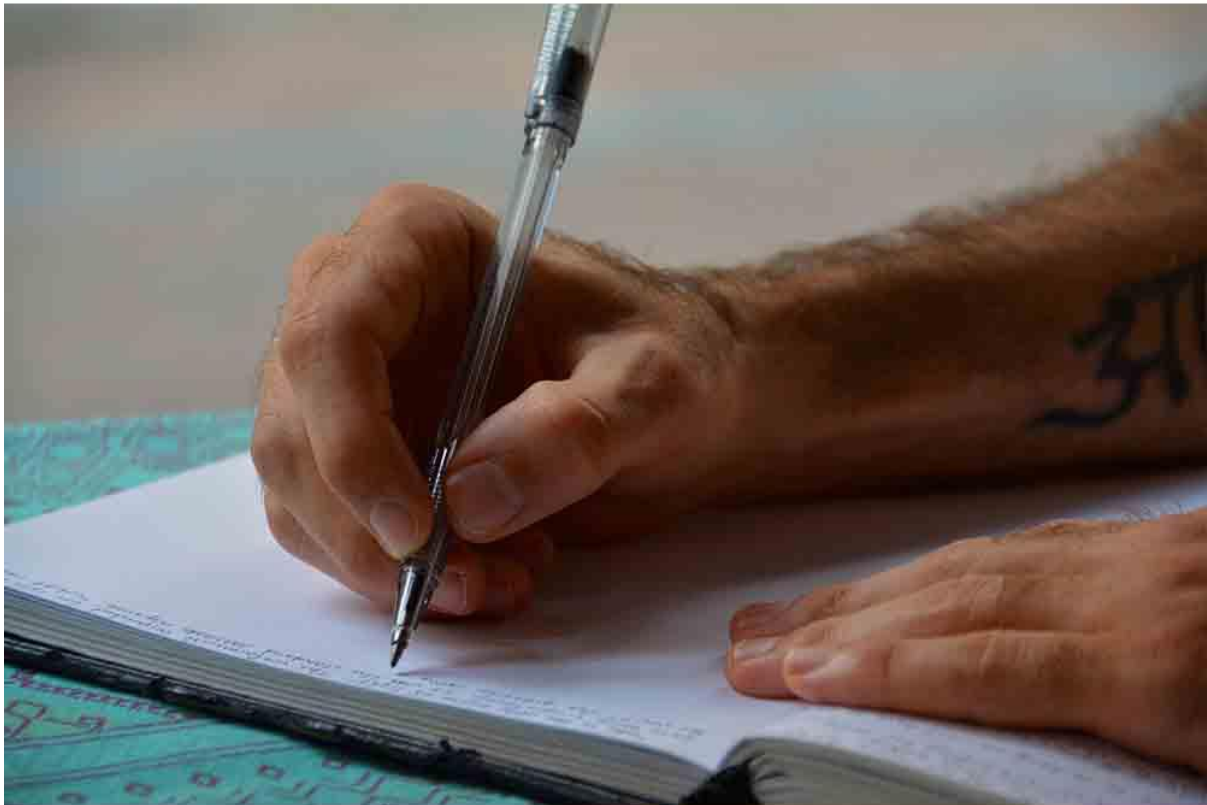
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Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* a unique portrayal of
women

Abstract

The play *Encounter in Umbugland* (1974) portrays the status of women from the unique perspective of one who is in power not just of the domestic but the State. It is seen as a manifestation of the political drama of not just the household but the nation. Tendulkar employs the nationalist vein to shed light on the domestic arena. Tendulkar borrows sources for the structure and the development of the thought of the play

–The first source is the legacy of the British which is that of the tree of administration prevalent in England. The democracy of England is a new hope of Indians after independence. The second source is from the contemporary politics in India.

KEY WORDS: Status of a woman, Nationalist, Domestic, juxtaposition of the third sex.

Vijay Tendulkar deploys his talent in mixing the parody with the classical in the structure of his plays. His concern is not specific about his own cult but it is to touch upon the diverse cultures of the diverse communities in India. In his plays, the playwright is a nationalist, a democrat and a philanthropist. He is unbiased, exposing the infirmities in the various areas of life – whether political or cultural. The play *Encounter in Ubugland* (1974) appears a political parody at the outset. It appears that he deliberately creates an imaginary island called Ubugland in which there is a ruler Vichitravirya, who has been ruling the island for the last sixty years. He is not to be debated, not be questioned but only to be obeyed. There are five cabinet members in his court to make the administration smooth. There is only one character who is the daughter of Vichitravirya, the king, her name is Vijaya. She is guided by Prannarayan. There is one more servant who responds to the claps. The play involves eight characters in all. There is only one female character to represent femininity in the state or in the island - another character that of Prannarayan is a eunuch neither male nor

female. The play opens with him and ends with his remark. He is the beginner and he is also the character who brings an abrupt end to the play.

There are some sources that the dramatist borrows for the structure and development of the thought of the play. The first source is the legacy of the British which is that of the tree of administration prevalent in England. The democracy of England is a new hope of Indians after independence. The second source is from the contemporary politics in India. During 1970s grounds were prepared for the declaration of emergency by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. She is reduced to a character by name Vijaya. In the play, both the sources are from classical world. The character Prannarayan is compared to the classical Greek play Oedipus which introduces the character of Tiresias as an individual who can see the past, present and the future. He can also live along with the time.

The Indian social structure especially that of the Deccan part of India becomes the saga or the play where the ignorant barbaric illiterate people are shown with the name Kadambaits. The Kadambaits make the larger population of the island, who are to be ruled by His Majesty with the help of his cabinet.

The title of the play appears absurd, which doesn't give any sense. Umbugland is an imaginary island something like India. The name is the distorted version of England which has been made independent recently. It takes the local name Umbu (Danbad), it does not have the sense all by itself, but it is newly merged into a democratic nation in

which there are the encounters. The play focuses only on one internal encounter, for enforcing an emergency in the nation. The title suggests that the legacy of the previous rule is not forgotten but many of the things of the earlier rule are retained even after its freedom. But these legacies are blindly imitated without being aware of its consequences. In fact when a nation is freed from the colonial power all at once a complete decolonization of it, is an impossibility. There is the combination of the local and the colonial, in the truncation of the new pronoun Umbugland. The question arises in view of the encounter. It is the question related to, on one hand the pride and on the other to prejudice. It appears the cabinet members with the help of the mass encounter the dictatorial attitude of the new ruler of the island. The stubborn dictatorship in the name of democracy is crueler than colonial violence. The encounter is also related to the tradition by modernity. The freedom to the people encounters the orthodox structure of the society itself. There is also the confrontation between the educated and the illiterate, the civilized and the uncivilized, the urban and the rural. The women are not shown separately in the crowd of the common Kadambaits who make the mass of the society. The title in its own distorted structure suggests all these forces of the confrontation which India had experienced in the first three decades of its independence.

The play opens with Prannarayan who addresses the audience, introducing the occasion of the play, the situation in action, the centre of the dramatic action to the gathering. The dramatist is shrewd in weaving the character of Prannarayan. He announces the beginning of

the dramatic action. In his function he can be compared with the classical character that Tiresias is giving an unbiased judgment on both the men and the women. Sometimes Prannarayan can also be called a mouthpiece of the playwright. The author is present only in the author function performing it through the body of a character such as Prannarayan. Tiresias narrates the story of man, man of all periods and of all seasons. In the same way Prannarayan does not belong to the compo sanity only but he represents the Indian history and the historical consciousness, wearing the body of a Eunuch. He represents India of the pre Mughal period, The Mughal rule, the colonial rule of the British and after. Hence he appears to be a man of wisdom like the fool in the Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Prannarayan appears on the stage to welcome the audience and to intimate to them the purpose of the dramatic action and the main cause for calling the gathering at a particular hall which can also be a religious speech. The texture of the play consists of a farcical imitation of an imaginary king of an imaginary island and a king to rule it with its own cabinet is the folk element in the play. It is fictitious. The intellectual ability of the writer can be noticed in technically combining diverse aspects of the theatre. The realism is not only social but it can also be psychological through which the private desires of the people are exposed. Prannarayan is a diplomat who wears the garb of both male and female.

The purpose of the gathering is to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of King's coronation in Umbugland. The spectators are also

introduced to the main action of the play, that of an encounter in the dynasty. It is not only a political encounter of the cabinet against the ruler, His Majesty Vichitravirya of Her Majesty Vijaya, but it can also be the encounter within one's own self. Because a body politic is always divided of the self-encounters the other part, making the self to introspect for realizing the truth of the situation. The dramatic action becomes both objective and subjective.

Two persons came upon the stage announcing victory. The dramatist keeps the term victory in suspense making the audience to question whether it is the victory of the king on himself or the victory of the people on the deceptive politics or the victory of unknown power over the pride of man. They merely announce congratulating the king on the sixtieth coronation celebration. To commemorate the royal arrangement has been made inviting sixty from the various sections of the society. The word victory does not get any sense at the outset. It appears as an emotional expression of the mob on the special occasion. In fact it is the key word that is related to the encounter in the title of the play. Prannarayan introduces his position in the kingdom, while speaking about the women the problem of the third sex has become another issue to be addressed. Prannarayan is the representative of the third sex. It is neglected section in the cultural history of the nation, but in this world of drama it is given a significant position to be in the middle of both men and women. He is an individual who has made to live in the harem, a specific quarter in the palace of the queens and princesses. He says about himself.

I am of the third sex of man. People such as I are appointed attendants in the harem. (Vijay Tendulkar, *Encounter in Umbugland* in *The Collected plays in Translation*, Act I 2003:270) Note: Further textual citations are made from this edition)

He is given a job of taking care of the princess Vijaya, who is the only daughter of the King. There is a meaningful dialogue between Vijaya and Prannarayan. It begins with Vijaya appearing lively on the stage with a beautiful white pigeon. It is the sixtieth pigeon perhaps, which is released as the token of the sixtieth ceremony - the play with the numbers. Vijaya innocently asks Prannarayan all about the previous fifty-nine years. They must have been buried into the past. Prannarayan philosophizes the life with time saying that human race has been advancing towards the greater achievements, exploring the land and the sky. The adventure of a man can be compared with the flight of bird. The bird can fly far off, but it has to come back to the same place where it has begun its journey. The avant-garde spirit of the modern age has no end. It craves every moment for a new thing but the ultimate end of human life is to return to the native the place where the journey has begun, in the end. This is the theatrical philosophy enacted as the psalm of life. During the modernist period, especially after the First World War, he introduces the paradox of life keeping it between pigeon holes and freedom. Pigeonhole is an imprisonment and freedom is a political release from the bondage. The white bird is the symbol of freedom for all the individuals. Vijaya does not understand the philosophic tone of

Prannarayan. She becomes witty asking so many meaningless but mysterious questions.

There is also the paradox in social sphere between the royal life and the ordinary. During the rule of Vichitravirya it is thought that the people live happily, but it is merely an illusion. In fact the palace and the people who are in the palace experience the luxury without bothering even to think. He comments on the behavior of the cabinet who are worried about their own private life without thinking about the life of the ordinary people who are neglected by the government of the King. The whole nation in this way is divided between the privileged and the unprivileged. The dramatist calls the unprivileged with the name Kadambaitis. It is noticed that Prannarayan gradually makes Vijaya to think about others instead of thinking of 'questions' herself. He sows the seeds of questions in the mind of Vijaya, with the hope that they can have a better yield in future. Vijaya in this regard remarks:

“You put questions in my way and when it comes to answering them, you escape with just saying something lively and hard to understand.” (Act I, 2003:71)

He asks her to be ready for wishing her father on his sixtieth anniversary of the coronation, but she is reluctant and stubborn. Her obstinate nature of encountering any opposition is shown in her inborn quality. Later it is deployed to encounter the cabinet and the riot of the common people while implementing her democratic play for the welfare of the state in general. It demonstrates that it is not the man, the protagonist of the play but a young woman. She has been trained

gradually by an insignificant character Prannarayan. The diplomacy really is not found among the cabinet members, but it can be the innate quality of a man like Prannarayan.

A curious humor is created when she asks him to bathe her for preparing herself to meet her father. She has been growing inattentive of her sex because she can fit herself to become the ruler of the public facing the power of the men. It is the traditional in Indian history that an efficient ruler had been trained by someone who could not hold one's own family like a Kautilya training a Chandragupta Maurya. Vijaya does not unsex herself asking Prannarayan to interfere in her private arrangements. She can be not a 'brat' but a brilliant adventurer. Towards the end of the play one can notice in the character of Vijaya. The spirit of Joan of Arc (French drama Bernard Shaw's *St Joan* (1923), in which Indira Gandhi enacted this character).

The informal relationship between Prannarayan and Vijaya is not only like the relationship between a servant and the princess but also as the relationship between the tutor and the taught. He guides her in all the situations when she is made the ruler of the island.

In conclusion the Status of women through Vijaya's character is depicted before the coronation to the throne.

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