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ENCOUNTER IN UMBUGLAND: AN AMPLIFICATION OF THE IDEA OF HYPOCRISY

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbagland (dambhadwipchamukabla)*, was written and produced in Marathi in 1968. It is a political allegory portraying the political scenario in India of the sixties. India is traditionally called "Jambudwip" in Sanskrit and Vijay Tendulkar deliberately uses the word "Dambadwip". The rhyme in these two words amplifies the idea of hypocrisy. The English translation "Umbugland" which rhymes with "Humbug" conveys the same idea effectively. Umbugland is the kingdom of an autocratic ruler Vichitravirya and his daughter princess Vijaya is an unbeatable character who emerges as an iron-lady in taking over the reign in her own hands and in giving a severe defeat to her enemies. She is portrayed as an intelligent but impulsive ruler who devises her own method of dealing with her opponents. Vijaya reminds us of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It is not merely a topical play; it unveils the essential nature of the game of politics and the craving for power in human nature. The powerful satire by Tendulkar exposes the intricate political intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the corruption involved in holding on to them. This play portrays how innocent masses are fooled in power games of the ministers, how the most cunning person wins the game of power and how the Press/media plays its role in fooling the masses.

Keywords: Satire, politics, allegory, hypocrisy

Encounter in Umbugland expresses Tendulkar's impression about the politicians and their politics with poignant sarcasm. It reveals that the very life of politics is falsehood and hypocrisy and that the political language is a completely dishonest one. As in India, in the play also, Democracy has become a synonym for autocracy or dictatorship. The play clarifies that one should not be true to oneself in politics. One has to become dehumanized. It is an exemplary piece of falsehood. Everyone in the play tells lies to one another so as to escape safely. It shows how the desire of rising higher and higher makes people suppress their humaneness. In their scramble for power they lose their peace and happiness. The play allegorically

reflects the political encounter of syndicate group of the Indian National Congress with Indira Gandhi in 1971.

King Vichitravirya, the all-powerful monarch of Umbagland is decrepit and old. The play opens with the sixtieth coronation. His cabinet ministers are disunited and all wish to rule the country individually after the death of the king; a totally corrupt ministry. The king has a daughter, Vijaya, a playful girl. Soon the king dies and the problem of succession arises. The ministers take Vijaya as their compromise with a policy that "she'll be the rule and they'll be the rulers". But their hopes of ruling the country behind a puppet queen gets shattered, because the queen comes up as a

determined, mature and ambitious lady. The ministers oppose her plan of the rehabilitation of the Kadamba tribe. They all gather a mob and incite people against her. They decide to make her submit. When the mob gets out of control Vijaya goes out herself to control the situation. She promises the people of Ubugland to dismiss the ministers who have gone against their interests. With a promise of handling the corrupt ministers to the crowd she returns back. Realizing the seriousness of the situation the ministers beg the queen to save them. The queen, finally, with a sense of victory, provides them disguises to escape unhurt. The play comes to an end.

Tendulkar has portrayed the character of Vijaya with utmost care. There is a definite evolution of Princess Vijaya from a self-willed, garrulous, headstrong, mischievous, playful and politically inexperienced young princess to an intelligent and ambitious dictator who devises her own successful methods of vanquishing her enemies.

Prannarayan's function in the play is that of a sutradhar (NARRATOR). It is he who introduces the play and acts as the neutral and patient commentator and a philosopher as well. In the light of his natural wisdom, the reader/audience becomes aware of the ugliness and futility of the power games. It is through his eyes that the dramatist uncovers the central concern of the play: all power corrupts.

It is a three-act play with a multiple scene structure. Tendulkar here has used an interesting device, which also jibes against media. The theatrical function of this device is to create interludes where information regarding the political disputes is provided and apparently objective observations are made on the recent developments in the political situations of Dambadwip. Tendulkar uses two masked actors, armed with large pens, who arrive at regular intervals making hackneyed remarks set in free verse. In their observations, one can hear the echo of cynical tone of the headlines published in our newspapers- ultimately meaningless statements that resolve nothing but worsen the existing problems.

King Vichitravirya treats his ministers Vratyasom, Bhagdanta, Karkashirsha, Pishtakeshiand

Aranyaketu with scant respect. Though they resent this dictatorial attitude of the king, they just cannot do anything against him. For, firstly the king enjoys the whole-hearted support of the populace. Secondly, there's no unity among the ministers. Moreover they all are selfishly corrupt and the king is well aware of it.

Tendulkar presents an inside view of the story through the dialogue between Karkashirsha and Vratyasom. According to Karkashirsha, Vratyasom has been involved in thirteen acts of official dishonesty. Vratyasom gets emotional and reveals the truth of politics:

Let's not open our mouths too wide about principle and honesty. To observe these two virtues in politics is as inappropriate and stupid as celibacy after marriage. You and I are politicians... it means we are partners in the most profitable game of skullduggery. (EU 273)

King Vichitravirya intuitively knows the ambition of his ministers to capture the throne after him. He says:

...Discussions are held. Secret conclaves meet. Astrologers are consulted about our life expectancy. What is more, bribes are offered to our royal physician through the hands of others. The intention being, that if we contracted any disease, the happy tiding should be given to you at once...We receive the most detailed intelligence. (EU278)

He advises his ministers to serve the people selflessly and to let him rule the country. As he speaks, he poses for the painter to paint his portrait. Soon he dies in that pose as the painter finishes his painting. All are shocked by the sudden death of the king.

The problem of succession to the deceased king arises. There are five ministers in the cabinet. Each wants to occupy the throne and brings some people to support him. The ministers hold a discussion but fail to reach a conclusion unanimously. The political crisis feeds the press with sensational news. Tendulkar at this point, has a dig at the newspapers by making two pen-bearers announce to the audience a day-to-day account of

the development caused by the political vacuum created by the sudden demise of the king and which is sensationally reported in the newspapers of Ubugland. The playwright, himself a journalist, does not spare the press reporters who ensure greater circulation of their papers by means of spicy reporting. Finally the crisis is resolved when all Ministers chose Vijaya to be the Queen, the heiress of Vichitravirya. They all plan to rule the country in her name.

In act II we see Princess Vijaya as the Queen of Ubugland. Prannarayan takes pains to train Vijaya in ruling the country. He instructs her to be diplomatic in her relations with the ministers. He teaches her political diplomacy. He tells her:

One should take stock of the situation give some advantages, and get some. Politic means sweet-smiling enmity and the experience of the sacrifice is always profitable in Politics. (EU306)

Princess Vijaya's transformation begins gradually. She learns enjoying power and succeeds in suppressing the humanity in her.

Queen Vijaya's visit to the Kadamba region infuriates the ministers who have thought that she would never go out of the framework. Vijaya mingles with the tribal people and launches a plan to uplift them. This infuriates the cabinet and everybody decides to depose her. They unanimously resent Vijaya's independent functioning without consulting the cabinet and they plan to give her a blistering idea of their strength:

Queen Vijaya successfully completes her first year in office. In scene V of act II she tells Prannarayan that she has given final shape to her plan for the rehabilitation of the Kadamba tribe, the original tribe of Ubugland. Her words reveal her confidence and determination. However, the ministers object her plan telling her that the Kadamba is a gang of traitors and hence they deserve no help. Finally Queen declares emergency and implants her plan to uplift the poor because the ministers have not approved them and thus ensues the confrontation between her majesty and her ministers. The two pen-bearers report the incidents and discuss the future encounter between the Queen and the cabinet in Ubugland.

Realizing that she will not get the approval of her cabinet, the Queen, unilaterally, announces an order to implement her plan. This act of hers enrages the ministers and they call her 'insolent', 'a bitch', 'a born dictator'. Here Tendulkar has highlighted the dirty games that politicians play so as to capture power. Vratyasom chalks out the plan: We must gather a mob. We must incite the people. We must loose upon her the tidal wave of the infuriated mob. That's what'll rock her! She's still raw. She's an inexperienced child...We'll force her to surrender! We'll make her submit! (EU333-334)

The palace is besieged by a mob. However, the queen coolly orders her soldiers to disperse the mob. The ministers, except Aranyaketu and Bhagdanta, watch the mob, glue fully from the palace. They are happy about their arrangements and a fierce fight goes on between the people and the soldiers. But soon Vijaya comes from behind. The ministers pretend to be angry at the mob's behaviour. She asks the ministers to go out and know the people's demands. They say they know the demands. She doesn't believe them and sends Bhagdanta out into the midst of the mob. And the sight of his man handling terrifies the ministers. Soon on being informed that the mob is about to set fire to the palace she herself goes out to face the crowd. Vratyasom, Karkashirsha and Pishtakeshi think that the furious crowd will kill her. But the blessing of noise creates confusion in them. The people throw stones and a few soldiers are injured. Queen addresses them boldly and orders them to be quiet. Having gained confidence she announces that she will abolish taxation. This cheers the people. She shouts:

"Down with the cabinet down with the plan- and the Ministers who made it". (EU 354)

Then the people shout,

"Death to each minister." (EU 354)

While the crowd was shouting their names she promised to hand them over to the crowd. The three ministers are shocked and they finally beg the Queen to save them. Queen Vijaya, happy that she has turned the table against her cabinet accepts their surrender and saves them tactically. The play ends up with the queen successful control over her

ministry that is described in the newspapers as a 'Miracle'.

Encounter in Umbagland is a political satire set out to unveil the nature of the game of politics. It reveals the mechanizations of power at various levels and the dehumanization in the contemporary political system. Tendulkar has tried to create an awareness of the ugliness and futility of this foul play of which, corruption and violence have become integral parts.

The play barbs the government, skilled in the art of haranguing the masses. It shows how the political leaders manipulate the mindless to sustain their rule and position. The politicians indulge in public welfare so as to strengthen their power. It's all just a false show. The welfare schemes are highly publicized with advertisements, making people get excited about them, but actually they fool the common people, as they don't get a sniff of their welfare in it. The allegory brings out an incisive explanation of how the all-embracing power operates i.e. who's allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with that power and how. How this power affects people and their relationships, and how it brutalizes those who participate in it.

Thus, *Encounter in Umbagland* is a topical play, satirizing the corrupted political setup that needs a strict overhauling. It exposes the intricate political intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the treachery involved in holding on to them. Having a questioning and probing spirit, Tendulkar has adopted a radical attitude towards the never-ending labyrinthine game of power.

REFERENCE

1. Vijay Tendulkar, *Five Plays* (Delhi: O.U.P, 1995), p.269. The subsequent references from this play have been cited from this edition and page number has been given within the body of the paper itself.