

BROKEN DREAMS AND HOLLOW LIVES IN MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S PARTY**Dr. Syed Zahir Abbas¹ and Dr. Mohammed Ahmeduddin²**^{1,2}Professor in English, Sir Sayyed College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Chh. Sambhajinagar

Mahesh Elkunchwar is an Indian dramatist. He wrote more than fifteen plays in Marathi. Most of his plays have been translated into Indian and Western languages like English, French and German. Sultan, Holi and Party are his famous plays. He won many national and international awards like "Sahitya Akademy Award", "Saraswati Samman", and "Birmingham Fellowship". 'His name is now synonymous with the great tradition of playwriting in Marathi. It is often invoked in the same breath as that of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Satish Alekar.'

(1)

Mahesh Elkunchwar's play *Party* exposed Urban Intellectual section of the society. Mahesh Elkunchwar reveals emptiness and pretensions of urban class. The drama discloses the inner lives of the characters who give the impressions to be successful but they were highly unsatisfied and emotionally disturbed. Their world appears to be fragmented and hollow. Mahesh Elkunchwar's party was first staged in 1975 under the direction of Amol Palekar. It portrays the bunch of creative persons from Mumbai. The dramatist admits that he has tried to present **"the false gaiety and constantly the underlying violence and ruthlessness of the people, with wide smiles, who said nice things to your face and exploited you ruthlessly otherwise."** (2) The drama commences with Damayanti, a rich middle aged woman and the host of the party. Right in the beginning, she feels that they shouldn't have had the party that night but she has reluctantly organized it because as she says, "one has to do these things." (3) The party is arranged in honour of Diwakar Barve. He is a well-known celebrity and has recently received a prestigious award for his creative writings. Instead of appreciating his creative achievement, Damayanti's happiness lies in the fact that for the first time a Marathi writer has received this prominent award. Another quality that makes Barve a great writer is that he has a sense of moral obligation, as a friend Damayanti reiterates his virtuous views:

He (Barve) keeps saying it's the duty of the well-to-do to help those less fortunate than them. (p.4)

When the play begins Damayanti and her friend who is mentioned as doctor in the play are making preparations for the party and having discussion on various topics. Doctor asks about Damayanti's daughter, Sona. The reference of Sona makes us to meditate and apprehend the evils of modern metropolitan culture and a different persona and facet of Damayanti's personality is revealed. Sona is twenty five year old. She loved a man called Sahani who later betrayed her. The most intriguing thing is that Sahani is a playboy and Damayanti, who knew everything about him, had herself introduced him to Sona. Sona has a baby from him. Sona is fully aware of her mother's attitude is very cold and has no emotional attachment with her. She just pretends to show off that she cares for her. Sona doesn't want to come to the party and Damayanti's retort very aptly sums up her attitude and their relation:

She (Sona) makes me feel guilty. She's become soso ascetic that even our normal life seems like an indulgence. And this party.... This isn't indulgence. One has one's obligations. (p.6)

So, the upheaval in the daughter's life is not a big deal to grieve and bemoan about but throwing a party for the pretentious lot is an 'obligation' and having utmost significance. Instead of being a moral support and relieving grief of Sona, Damayanti optimizes Sona's distress by pressuring her to consider the proposal of Agashe. Agashe works in commercial theatre. Damayanti's father is a Cabinet Minister. Agashe wants to marry Sona not because he loves her but due to the advantage he will get in being associated with an influential family like hers. Yet again Damayanti's heartlessness becomes visible in forcing Sona to marry Agashe who is immoral and filthy, her own words reveal it:

Agashe can be a nuisance (at the party). If not Sona, he will get after Mohini. (p.8)

The party, which is supposed to be informal gathering, it begins with the arrival of Barve, Mohini and Bharat. Barve and Mohini are in live-in relationship of nearly seven years. Mohini is thirty year old, remarkably beautiful but with an indignant facial expression. While entering Damayanti's house, she cautions Barve to get home early, not to drink too much and stay with her all the time during the party. With these short sentences, the dramatist reveals her sense of feminine insecurity clear to the audience. But Barve and Damayanti make fun of her.

BARVE - This party's for Mohini, isn't it?**DAMAYANTI - Yes. But she'd never come without you. So it's for you too. (p.11)**

As the events unfold, Mohini's anxiety and feelings of insecurity become more obvious. She drinks a lot and starts behaving like a child. When she returns to her senses, she opens up to Sona to express out her feminine anxiety and fear of losing beauty and consequently her male partner Barve would abandon her, as she states:

I hate parties... Diwakar gets lost with people. He forgets me... you know, he snores all night, and I lie wide awake... I want to snuggle deep into his arms but then I get scared he'll wake up and get angry... I'll lose my looks one day, and that'll be the end... I've lost my sense of taste. I keep thinking I'm badly dressed and people are laughing at me.(p.22-23)

The other person who comes with Barve and Mohini is Bharat. He is a young struggling writer. He is from the village. He is twenty four year old. He is sensitive but awkward. The established and recognize senior writers ill treat him. He longs for recognition and a word of praise, yet all he receives is only insults and ridicule. He is made to fetch Mohini's purse from the car and cigarettes for Barve. Damayanti teases him,

Come on, kid, have some respect for your seniors. You have to do all this. (p.10)

Vrinda, a communist, is more bitter while commenting on Bharat's manners. She thinks that he can never become a part of this sophisticated and fashionable world of glamour. When Bharat is angry at this, she attacks him saying:

Speak Marathi, pal. Your English is rotten. And your grammar gets more erotic when you're angry.... You still make fake pretenses to sophistication. (p. 14-15)

The hypocrisy of this society is fully evident when a few moments later, the same vicious lady starts praising Bharat, for being simple and original, guiding him for his professional and personal life and even tried to seduce him.

Among the minor characters we have Agashe, the man from commercial theatre who measures every relationship in terms of profit and loss. His marriage proposal for Sona is one of such instances. The people with sense of morality and ethics, such as Doctor, abhorred him for his money centered attitude. Vrinda who is a "disillusioned" communist condemns him for his only interest in luxurious things like "cars and air conditioners". She urges Sona to consider his proposal. She also flirts with Bharat, when he hesitates and avoids her company, she turns her attention towards Agashe and makes bold physical advances. Thus, she too is as hypocritical as Agashe. In other words, she can be interpreted as a female counterpart of Agashe.

Meanwhile the dramatist introduces us to Malavika who appears to be unwanted and uninvited guest at the party. She comes to the party with her husband Narendra. Narendra has no interested in parties, he would love to sleep. He does so throughout the drama. The cheerful atmosphere of the drama slightly turns to grave with the arrival of Jogdand, a reporter. He fetches the news that Amrit who is a young writer fighting for the cause of Adivasis has been arrested. But the reactions of everyone manifests that nobody has any curiosity, sense of attachment or empathy towards the man or the cause for which he is fighting. The journalist also has visited the place just to get some sensational stuff for the 'breaking news'.

Malavika is ignorant of the hardship and adversities faced by the tribal communities. She only perceives them through the lenses of their exotic tribal dances. Barve, who is supposed to donate the award amount for lepers, but tries to avoid the topic each time saying that he does not know anything because he was out of station for the last one month. Amrit's work to uplift the life of tribal and his consequent arrest fail to evoke any sympathy or gratitude from other characters. Rather they hope for worst outcome and criticize negatively his initiatives. For Agashe, Amrit's arrest is not a big deal as he had thought it would be worse than that. For Vrinda, Amrit's peaceful demonstrations are meaningless and arguing that such nonviolent agitations cannot bring about any revolutions. Amrit is alone in his fight to enhance life of tribal. Instead of being a support to him, Bharat opines 'we're always alone in our battles.'(p.31) with this comments he shrugs of his obligation, commitment and the responsibility towards marginalized. It's a group of so-called creative individuals who are responsible for inspiring and shaping lives. Amrit's story just provides them a good stuff to write some story or a drama. Apart from this, they are not involved in it and bear no responsibility.

Meanwhile Damayanti and Sona had serious conversation. Damayanti takes out topic of Aghashe's proposal which Sona detest discussing but she (Damayanti) tries to pressurize her to reconsider it. This irritating and frustrating subject angers Sona. Sona, her rage she exposes Damayanti and her motive for marrying her father. She claims that she did not marry her (Sona's) father for love but for his money. Damayanti gets offended with this remark but Sona does not stop there, she further asserts:

Papa was like a lion. He was wonderful but he was simple. You gave him a complex, with all your so-called intellectual behaviour.... You are a parasite. You feed on other people's glamour and you think it's yours. You wanted Papa's money. And you want these people's glamour. You've got both. (p.34-35)

In another scene, Damayanti and Barve enter into a discussion over life and art. Damayanti expresses her creative barrenness. She admits that although she can read and appreciate any work but unable to express herself. Barve also confesses a fact that for the last twenty years he has been "creating the illusions of having discovered the truth." He admires Amrit that he understood the limitations of art and had courage to turn towards real work. The dramatist is very careful indicates that most characters belonging to this pompous society are unhappy. Damayanti and Barve too struggle with discontentment in their personal lives. It seems they can be a support for each other.

In the living room, the other characters discuss the various aspects of art and its utility to society. Suddenly the phone rings and Jogdand gets the news that Amrit has been murdered. Again the dramatist enlists the responses of all the characters to "show how the people try to find escape from the harsh realities of life"(4) bringing drama to close. Malavika describes the incident as tragic and unfortunate. Mohini who is not in her senses asks if it is the time to sing and begins singing softly. Barve stops her. Damayanti enquires about the details for the incident. Jogdand responds, he will go and find more news and 'sensation' for everyone. Sona breaks down in grief. Jogdand asks Bharat to accompany him but Bharat is busy with rehearsals of his new play. Vrinda expresses her sorrow for being away from Amrit but then leaves with Agashe in 'his car'. Barve suggests helping Amrit's old mother and his family. Damayanti announces that a condolence meeting will be held the next day. The most severe remark comes from Narendra who was still half asleep says, "Forget it. What's that got to do with us anyway? Let's go. I've to wake up early tomorrow."(p.48)

Thus, the drama presents a tragedy of unfulfilled desires. Every character appears to be a failure on both personal and social level. Just see examples of Damayanti and Barve. Damayanti who hosts parties, manages the "literary business" fails to enjoy a fulfilling family life. Although She tries to appear 'social' by nature but unable to earn respect from her own daughter, Sona. What worsen her situation is her lack of creativity and emotional expressions. Barve is portrayed as an established writer with certain reputation but his personal life with Mohini is fragile like a 'tattered coat upon a stick' to use Yeats' term. Even the art that he creates is nothing but just an illusion. So, we have to agree with Sandhya Amrute when she says:

'In Party Elkunchwar has presented life as it is without making the drama melodramatic.'(5)

The dramatist effectively depicted the heartrending condition of individuals confined in the world of delusion and triviality. Regardless of their intellectual quests and social pretensions, the characters continue to be detached from honest emotions and meaningful relationships. Their frustrated dreams and desires lead to emotional disillusionment, hypocrisy and creative barrenness. Elkunchwar meticulously uncovers the hollowness of such society which paints distressing study of broken dreams and hollow lives.

REFERENCES:

- http://www.mumbai theatreguide.com/dramas/interviews/mahesh_elkunchwar.asp as on 12.09.2010
- Elkunchwar, Mahesh, Speaking at the Natya Shodh Sansthan, Calcutta on 24 Feb. 1988 (from the recording in the Sansthan's archives)
- Elkunchwar, Mahesh, Party, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1989, p. 1.
- Shinde, Vishwanath, Mahesh Elkunchwar Yanchi Natke, Pratishtan, Jan.-Feb. 1995, P. 51.
- Amrute Sandhya, Elkunchwaranchi Natyasrushti, Vijay Prakashan, Nagpur, 1995, P. 70-71.