Week 3: Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad

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Lecture 8

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- Kanyadaan describes the marriage between Jyoti, the daughter of an upper caste Gandhian couple Nath Devalikar and Seva, a feminist activist, and Arun Athavale, a young Dalit poet and writer who belongs to a family of manual scavengers. The marriage is initially intended by the father and daughter to be an experiment to transcend and dismantle caste differences
- Seva and her son Jayaprakash are against the marriage because of Arun's unrefined and violent ways. He beats Jyoti whenever he is drunk and because he is unemployed. There is a clear social class difference between Jyoti and Arun, which by the end of the play has not been transcended.
- Jyoti is unable to renounce her choice to remain married to Arun partly because she feels responsible and hopeful that Arun will change and partly because she has internalized her father's injunctions to never give up on the social project of reformation and forgiveness, a Christian vision as it were, of seeing only the potential good in all people and transforming their evil propensities. She realizes she has to accept Arun for all that he is and cannot separate his goodness from his violence, which Arun claims is an expression of the historical injustice and indignities perpetrated by upper-caste people on Dalits. Arun loves her and regrets beating her but is still unable to resist.
- She resents her father by the end of the play for raising her with such righteous ideals that are insensitive to the social realities of inequality and structural oppression.
- Nath is unable to reconcile his salutary perception of Arun's poetic sensibilities and his autobiographical novel which is a sensitive portrayal of his community's collective sufferings and his personal violence. He wishes to understand and embrace Arun through

his own paternalistic benevolence and this comes through in his hypocritical statement during a function where Arun's novel has been awarded the Sahitya Akademi, where Nath has been chair the meeting.

- ❖ But Seva is unable to accept Arun for beating Jyoti. She is determined to bring her daughter back but Jyoti refuses to return as she decides to suffer her marriage to disavow the Gandhian ideals on which she was raised.
- ❖ Arun refuses all responsibility for his behaviour and believes it is Jyoti's choice and responsibility to stay in the marriage.
- ❖ By the end, Nath asks his son to reject his own liberal humanism, and realizes his own hypocrisy when he is asked to speak about the book and ends up praising it when he doesn't mean it.

Lecture 9

- ❖ Girish Karnad (b.1938), born in Matheran, Bombay Presidency, belongs to the first generation of post-Independence playwrights, along with Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, that had to negotiate with the legacy of colonial era drama and draw from local folk and performance traditions to produce a articulation of postcolonial Indian drama.
- ❖ His plays that he wrote in both Kannada and English were translated by directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B.V Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Satyadev Dubey and so on. He also acted in regional cinemas and Hindi cinemas.
- ❖ Many of his plays including *Yayati* and *Tughlaq* drew from puranic materials as well as historical figures and imagined them as allegories of individual moral dilemmas, existentialist unease and disillusionment with the postcolonial state and corruption.
- ❖ *Tughlaq* was first performed in Kannada in 1965 and then in various other languages including Urdu, Marathi, English, Bengali and Gujarati. It closely follows the historical life of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, the sultan of Delhi, who was known to be an intelligent and acute ruler but ultimately a failure as an idealistic administrator.
- ❖ Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* is another rendition of the tale of the transposed heads in the *Katha Sarit Sagara* and is closely related to Thomas Mann's own version of the tale in his novel *Transposed Heads.* The play describes the dominance of the mind over the body in the main plot of the play, which is the love affair between Padmini, the daughter of a merchant, and two men, Devadutta, a talented Brahmin, and his close friend Kapila, the strong and athletic son of a blacksmith.

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- The outer frame of the play is about Hayavadana, the hybrid son of a mortal woman and a stallion. He has the head of a horse but the body of a man and longs to be completely transformed into a horse.

- The play is about the human desire for completion and perfection, which is symbolized through Hayavadana's desire to have the body and mind of the horse and Padmini, who longs for an ideal man who is the perfect combination of a sensitive and aesthetic mind and an athletic body. Even Ganesha, to whom the initial invocatory verse is dedicated, has the head of an elephant and the body of a man. He is the god who removes obstacles and ensures the completion of a task and yet seems incomplete with his broken tusk.

- Hayavadana finally loses his human voice as he turns into a horse with Kali's blessings. But before he loses his voice, he is condemned to sing the national anthem, where his voice already seems to have been suppressed. He stands for the hybridity of the postcolonial subject who is divided between colonial legacies of thought and being and nationalist fervour.
- Padmini first desires and marries Devadutta because he is Brahmin and because of his fine poetic mind.
- Later when the two men behead themselves, first Devadutta when he discovers to his jealousy that Padmini desires Kapila and next, Kapila when he sees his friend dead and fears he will be accused of desiring his friend's wife, Padmini 'accidentally' exchanges the heads. When Kali brings the men back to life they have each other's heads and Padmini chooses the man with Devadutta's head and Kapila's body. But over the years, the mind dominates over the body; Devadutta loses his athletic physique while Kapila has grown strong and sturdy. The question of who is the father to Padmini's son also becomes a debate between the mind and the body.
- Padmini finds herself losing interest in Devadutta and again being drawn to Kapila. Her inner desires are dramatized through the dolls. Kapila is unable to erase his bodily memories of Padmini's touch.
- The men are unable to live with each sharing a part of the other's body and they end up killing each other in a duel, while Padmini commits sati for both of them, thus undermining the wifely chastity that is associated with sati.

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Lecture 10

- There are many sides to Tughlaq's character. He initially wants to be perceived as a secular humanist who wants to ensure Hindu-Muslim unity by lifting the jiziya tax that is levied upon non-Muslims and shifting the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, a Hindu majoritarian city.
- The move ends in a nightmare of starvation, illness, disease and death for the people. Aziz, a lowly Muslim washer man, is the one who benefits from and subverts Tughlaq's attempts to create a utopian state where there are no social differences.
- The move from Delhi to Daulatabad alienates the Muslim nobles in his court who plan to assassinate him when he is praying just as the way Tughlaq assassinated his father and brother during prayer for an ideal.
- Tughlaq is constantly trying to retain for power against his incestuous stepmother, his nobles, the court historian Zia-ud-din Barani whose historiographical account of the Delhi sultanate forms the structure of the play, and the Sheikh Imam-ud-din who is his staunchest critic and resembles him. It is this resemblance that suggests the uneasy intimacy between religion and politics. The Sheikh is finally killed in the battle between the Sultan and Ain-ul-mulk, the Sultan's governor who seeks to avenge himself against the sultan for being transferred from Agra to the Deccan and reinstated after the war ends.
- But the real double of Tughlaq is Aziz who manages to subvert every one of his plans to create a secular and wealthy state– Aziz impersonates the Brahmin Vishnu Prasad whose lands the sultan seizes and returns and on whom the tax is lifted and is promised an official position in the court, Aziz buys the Brahmin's land in a backdated contract and takes advantage of the subsidies that the court gives to farmers, he robs the poor people as they are relocating from Delhi to Daulatabad, he counterfeits the copper currency that the sultan decides to produce as imperial currency,
- And he murders and disguises himself as Ghiyas-ud-din, the Baghdadi calif that the sultan invites to bless and purify his new capital. Finally, the sultan is so impressed by Aziz's cleverness and ambition to want more than he possesses, a quality he sees in himself, that he confers him a position in court.
- Although Tughlaq tries to separate religion from politics in the hope of creating an egalitarian ideal, his subjects including the Sheikh, and his Muslim nobles remain divided by communalism and hatred. Tughlaq is in fact, only interested in being an exemplary ruler to his Hindu majority and not every community.

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- Tughlaq's character has resonances with the postcolonial situation in India where one sees the secular humanism of Gandhi, the idealism of Nehru and the brutal authoritarianism of someone like Indira Gandhi, or more recently Sikh and Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists all rolled into the figure of Tughlaq.

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