

THE PLAY PARTY BY MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR AS COMEDY OF MANNERS

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Abstract

Comedy of manners is a form of dramatic comedy that depicts the manners and affections of a contemporary society. This genre refers to English comedies written and performed in the Restoration period. The French playwright Moliere is the best known playwright for this form. In English literature this was made popular by William Wycherly in The Country wife, William Congreve's The way of the world, R.B. Sheridan's The school for Scandal. This form was apparently rejuvenated in the Indian English literature by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The play titled Party which carries the features of comedy of manners is written by Mahesh Elkunchwar and was first performed by Aniket in its Marathi version on 26 August 1976. Mahesh Elkunchwar has also focussed on the major features of this form. Features like marriage, love, adultery, fortune hunting, false pretentions, and materialistic nature reflect in the play.

Keywords: Comedy of manners, English literature, Indian English drama, contemporary society, Restoration period

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Critical analysis of the play:

The play was originally written in Marathi language by Mahesh Elkunchwar (born on 09 Oct. 1939) and was later translated into English by Ashish Rajadhyaksha. The play is set in Mumbai which is better known as a commercial hub at the international arena. In such metropolitan city Mumbai, a party is hosted by Mrs. Damayanti Rane who loves spending time in the glittering world. Plays with the theme of comedy of manners have a woman protagonist. Here Mrs Damayanti Rane holds the centre of all the actions taking place in the play. She is from a well-to-do family as her father was a cabinet minister and her husband was a lawyer cum politician. Her husband being dead finds emotional support in other males like doctor (whose name is not mentioned in the play) and Barve. She is torn from inside as she has never got any mental satisfaction not from her husband and daughter Sona.

She expresses her mental anguish in private conversation with Barve:

Damayanti: I feel funny these days. I wake up at nights and can't sleep. Then I stare into the dark at empty, blind alleys that loom up everywhere, empty windows, and lights with nobody there. I can't bear it. I want to shout, to scream. (P-68-69)

She tries to fill up her psychological hollowness by seeking emotional support from Barve. Her own daughter hates her mother throughout the play also stands in contrast to her. There is a war of words between the mother and the daughter over the behaviour of Damayanti's husband. Damayanti blames her husband because of his drinking and physical lust. But Sona supports her father's behaviour while blaming her mother in the following words:

Sona: You made him miserable and now you want to make me miserable. You were ashamed of papa and you are ashamed of me. I have no looks; I don't have the delicate manners of your friends. I am not accomplished like they are.....(P-61)

This mother and daughter conversation highlights the decreasing moral values of the modern culture. Readers cannot judge easily about who is responsible for all this. It is a party in the name only because the gentry who have gathered there have nothing to do with each other's feelings; they've come together with physical appearances only but they are alienated from one another on the emotional grounds. This fact becomes apparent when Vrinda, one of the party goers, declares while interacting with Bharat that "How can you get involved with these people? They are nothing but a bunch of show-offs" (P- 47) she even refers to all the party goers as '*a bunch of pseudo-sophisticates*'. She alerts Bharat to be aware of such party and partygoers:

You are simpleton. Barve? They're all into this. Professional jealousy, it's called. No writer, however great, is free from this. They will dangle you around the edge of their glamour world, and then it'll be too late for anything. I've seen this happen even in our party. (P- 49)

The dramatist through Vrinda satirises the clique. In reality in such parties people come together only to gossip or to find faults in one another. They drink, smoke, share their sorrows and happiness, they think about their future plans , they pretend to be taking care of each other but everything seems to be hypocritical. The hypocrisy of Barve is seen when he appreciates Mohini and says that he has equally fallen in her love but the reality is that he doesn't love her. He himself confesses to Damayanti that: "I don't love her any more" (P-72)

The title of the play *Party* is very appropriate because the play ends where it had begun. The people who join the party are all leading writers but with hollowness in their writing as they declare themselves. Damayanti belongs to a rich class since her father was a cabinet minister and her husband was a leading lawyer and a national politician. All the party goers come one by one with their partners. In the party they only boast of their talents, status but inwardly they know that they do not possess genuine qualities.

In the party most of the characters are women, the dramatist also have delineated their image in depth. Their behaviour itself points out that they all belong to the upper class. Women like Damayanti, Malavika, Vrinda and Mohini have been delineated by the writer in detail. Among all these female characters, Mohini's behaviour with her drink addiction symbolises the party of the elite class. Mohini,

30, who used to be a singer, is a woman with beautiful physique. She is very excessive about her beauty and quality of being a good singer but later regrets over the loss of her beauty. Her drinking wine in the party forms an integral part of the play which allows the writer throw light on the life of women living in the metropolitan cities. In the play she is very much obsessed with Diwakar Barve. Her drinking, smoking and extra marital affair with Barve blots her personality. She is projected as a care-free lady or a woman standing for restoration comedy. Another lady character in the play is Vrinda who is involved in flirtational actions. She tries to flirt with Bharat, a simple villager. In the name of dance Vrinda tries to embrace him but he runs away in embarrassment. She even advises him to marry a rich and welconnected girl so that he can travel and concentrate on his writings. Among the elite class, only Bharat represents the lower class. He is considered by other intellectuals (including Barve, Damayanti, Mohini and Vrinda) as a simpleton in terms of his nature, writing skills or living standard. He himself is aware of this fact when he says:

Bharat: Sometimes I lose my confidence. I keep thinking people find me only ridiculous.

Vrinda: Forget people. And forget popularity.

Bharat: But I write to be popular (P-49)

Like other writers like Agashe and Barve, he is also a fortune hunter though he lacks writing skills. At the end of the play the dramatist questions about the originality of literature through the mouth of Bharat: "Well, in Marathi literature, originality means intelligent plagiarism" (P-75) Thus the dramatis exposes the feign intellectuals.

The play is full of love affairs which is again a major feature of comedy of manners. There are many love affairs such as love affair between Damayanti Rane and doctor, Sahani and Sona, Agashe and Sona, Mohini and Barve. But none of these couple is happy with their temporarily made relations. Damayanti has feeling of affection towards Barve. She wants to seek support of Barve since she feels alone having lost her husband and neglected by her daughter Sona. She implores Barve saying 'Barve, I need someone. I need you....' (P-69) she is shown a very helpless lady in the play. Another character Sona, the daughter of Damayanti Rane, has many love affairs. Sona has a newly born child. The child is born from the extra marital affairs with Sahani who doesn't appear in the play. Then Sona had love affairs with Agashe too. But now in the play she hates him; still Agashe shows interest in Sona for

marriage. Another lady character is Mohini who has deeply fallen in love with Barve; they have lived together for seven years without marriage. Damayanti herself declares the live in relationship of Mohini and Barve in their presence:

Once Mohini bolts the door from within she forgets the rest of the world. And then it's just Barve and herself. Right? (P- 28)

Mohini seeks mental and physical satisfaction from Barve. Her frustration can be noticed when she shares her feelings with Sona in the following words:

Mohini: I hate parties. I do.(pause) Diwakar gets lost with people. He forgets me. And when he drinks....(Pause) I used to hate drinking once, but I drink now. You know, he snores all night, and I lie wide awake. Even when I'm drunk, I can't sleep. I only feel dizzy. I want to snuggle deep into his arms but then I get scared he'll wake up and get angry...I lie down then, still and wide awake as my head spins with fatigue. (Pause) I'm telling you all this private stuff.....(P-45)

Love is here more a matter of intellect than of impulse, more of external consideration than of internal feelings. As the restoration comedy of manners has a certain amount of immorality and vulgarity, the Indian comedy of manners carries the same trend in this play too. In this way the play focuses on various kinds of relations like a mother and a daughter, mother and her male friends, daughter and her male friends, husband and wife or men and women in live in relationship. Through all these relations, the dramatist gives satirical and true portrayal of the behaviour of the upper class society.

Reference:

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