

A Dialogue between Body and Soul: Depiction of Disguised Human Reality in *As One Discardeth Old Clothes...*

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Abstract—*As One Discardeth Old Clothes* (1996) is written by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The play has the impact of *The Bhagwadgita* focusing on the relation between soul and body. The head of the family Baba about 60-ish is about to die, but his soul is waiting for Raghu- Lord Krishna, to take out the soul of his body. It is about him and his family. Major happening occurs in the mind of the protagonist Baba who is half dead half alive. During this short period of death and life, every family member has surrounded near him and confesses about their emotion and life-long matters that were hidden inside each member. They one by one confess the issues that were remained unresolved during their lifetime. The soul replies the questions asked by the family members and also reveals the incidents that Baba had buried in his heart. All these confessions are unheard by the other family members. Finally, he gets tired, and the soul leaves the body. This is about “how people try to reach out to another but at the same time they hide themselves behind so many facades and mask- there is not just one mask, there are 20” (Katyal, 24). This play focuses on the family bonding, emotions, beginning of spiritual journey and dialogue between self and soul. The play truly reflects the gist of the Shloka of the second chapter of *The Bhagwadgita*, “*Waasaansi jeernani yathaa vihaaya/ Nawaani Grinhaati naroparaani/ Tathaa shareeraani vihay jeerna-/ Nyanaani sanyaati Nawaani dehi*”. This Shloka was explained by Lord Krishna to Arjun about the eternity of the soul. The present paper will try to analyze the human reality concerning the characters of the play and how human being covers their faces by various kinds of masks to show them as a good person. It will also try to explore the ideas of an unsuccessful relationship of marriage through the dominant characters of the play.

1. INTRODUCTION

As One Discardeth Old Clothes... was originally written in Marathi language by the title *Waasaansi Jeernaani...* It was published in 1996 in the Diwali issue of *Mauj* and was first performed and produced by Samanvay, at Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune on 15 March 2000 under the direction of Sandesh Kulkarni. Mahesh Elkunchwar has dealt with an entirely new theme in this play. A man who is on his deathbed almost died, lost his senses remembering Lord Krishna to take out his soul from this mortal body and want to leave all the

deadly relations related to the mortal body. The whole play is inspired by the shloka from the second chapter of *The Bhagwadgita*. The sloka is ‘*Waasaansi jeernani yathaa vihaaya/ Nawaani grinhaati naroparaani/ Tathaa shareerani vihaay jeerna-/ Nyanyaani sanyani nawaani dehi*’. “Even as a man casts off his worn-out clothes/ and then clothes himself in others which are new/ so the embodied casts off worn-out bodies/ and then enters into others which are new. [2] The subject matter of the play focuses that all the relations, assets in this world are mortal; only one thing that is immortal is the soul. Therefore one should not be puffed up with pride for having luxuries and other materialistic life styles.

The play principally shows the revelation of truth, unexpressed emotions and unresolved matters that are buried in the core of the heart of the characters. It also focuses on the disguised relationship of marriage. The protagonist of the play is the patriarch of the family-Baba, who is about 60ish lying on the death bed, surrounded by his family members. His soul is about to leave the body and wants to meet the eternity; the God- Lord Krishna whom he calls Raghu. He is impatiently waiting for Lord Krishna, so that he come and takes him with himself from this destructible world. But the unresolved and untold matters of the family members have stopped the soul and make an obstacle in departing the soul. During this moment time his daughter Sanjeevani, sons Bal and Mukund, wife Aai and sister in law Kaku, expresses their life time matters, grievances, emotions, etc.

The kind of communication gap is present between the family members make them detached to each other. None of them uses to talk to one another with great enthusiasm; instead, they just pass few words. It shows the pseudo behavioural characteristic of modern man. Baba and the relationships that are connected with Baba have some unspoken matters but they buried them in their heart. The question arises why people do not speak what is hidden in their hearts. What is the fear behind it? Is it the fear of breakdown of relations or the loss of faith that will occur

between people, due to the issues that are buried inside people? Although the problem of lack communication was present in the earlier century as well, but in this century, it took its more complicated shape and brought many new challenges with itself.

Disguise is one of the main characteristics of Elkunchwar's plays. The disguised human reality has been used as a theme in this play. His characters often present the different appearance from their reality. The main intention of disguise identity is to explore the differences between inner self and outer reality. "Disguise is defined as the substitution, over laying or metamorphosis of dramatic identity, whereby one character sustains two roles. Involving deliberate or involuntary masquerade, mistaken or concealed identity, madness or possession. Disguise ranges from the simple fun of the quick change artist" (qtd in Balagam). [1]

2. DISGUISED RELATIONSHIP: MARRIAGE.

Marriage is a very delicate bond, at the same time the strongest as well. It depends upon love, care, faith, mutual understanding. This is not just a physical bond but a bond of souls. That is why it is being called as a relationship of seven lifetimes. The relationship of marriage has been shown by the playwright in this play. The characters of this play are the victim of post-modern sensibility where no one bothers what is happening in the life of others. Even the institution of marriage has lost its sanctity and become more and more complicated. Elkunchwar has talked about this complicated relationship in this play and his other plays as well like *Flower of Blood* and *Autobiography*. The primary example is the relationship of Baba and Aai who shares forty years long relationship. The other examples are Bal-Rekha and Sanjeevani-Ramesh. They covered the outer part of their body with the mask of genuineness, but their hearts are a box of mysteries in which they have concealed several secrets from the people of their surroundings. The play offers a significant example of modern Indian marriage cult that serves around the limitations of exploration of love and faith in this relationship.

2.1 Relationship of Baba and Aai.

Baba is the central character having many flaws. He hides his real self from his wife and also cheated her and doubted on her chastity as well. As a result, he rejected to accept Bal as his child and showed to everyone that he loves him more than anyone. His spiritual spirit admits that he never gave such intimacy and love to Aai which she should deserve. She always was being neglected from his side. He fulfilled her every desire, demand, need but still Aai had multiple questionnaires regarding Baba's behaviour towards her. She satirises and comments on marriage relationship by saying "A third person never knows what happens between a husband and wife.[2] This is what happened between them. They were hiding the truth of their relationship.

Aai poured out her heart near the death bed and tells Baba about her lifelong grievances, because of his behaviour towards her. Baba never called her by any pet name that usually couples call to each other, never tried to understand her feelings and emotions. She loved him more than anything but she yearned for him lifelong. Although he provided her whatever she wished, desired, gave respect and credit for everything in the community. Everything happened according to her will but there was a lack of something which she noticed every time. He had not shown any possessiveness, any demand, never did quarrel nor exchanged words except few. There was coldness in their relationship. The warmth of love, tease, and sweet arguments which should present between the couples, was missing since their marriage. It makes the relationship lively and makes it refreshed. Hence the life they spent was mechanical. Manorama says that even the children born without love. To show the world their relationship was perfect but they wore the mask of perfect husband wife and therefore their real self was apart from each other. This is a common characteristic that humans of the twenty-first century are victim of. And that is the reason why she became lonely and secluded from inside. She wanted love, care, of which she was entitled to. Therefore this lack forces her, to find solace on someone else's shoulder. She reveals and confesses this biggest secret of her life.

AAI: ... Once I did try to seek my happiness elsewhere. (Pause.) Are you listening? You are listening, aren't you? I can't bear this on my life anymore. Listen carefully. Sanju is not your's. (Pause.) I sought your mind. When I couldn't find it, I sought solace elsewhere. Just once. Found nothing there either. My spirit was scorched. And when I returned to you with blisters on my soul, Sanju was in my womb. [2]

The above confession of Manorama shows that she yearned for Baba's love but when she have not got it from Baba she tried to find solace elsewhere. Although this is cheating in this pious relationship but she had no choice left to find the love that she wanted. Unfortunately she had not found that kind of love, there as well which she wanted. Therefore she repented on what she had done and this mistake of hers scorched her spirit very badly. But she cannot do anything because Sanju came in her womb. At one level she took revenge from Baba, a silent revenge which hurt her more than Baba. It is because she had doubted from last forty years that although Baba married to her, it is Kaku who lived in her mind and heart as well. She complains to Baba's body why he had done this to her, why he avoided her and without asking filled Kaku's world with unsaid love. In what measures she was less in comparison to Kaku so he did this. Even Manorama's children did not remain hers because Baba gave them to Kaku so that she can make herself busy.

Aai: They were mine but they never became mine. At times I would feel, are they really mine? Did I really give them birth? [2]

Baba's spirit answers about her queries related to Kaku by accepting his feelings towards Kaku. The biggest irony is that on the one hand he doubted Manorama's chastity and rejected to take Bal as his son but on the other, he was once being cheated by Manorama and the result of this deceit was not Bal but Sanjeevani, for whom Baba poured his heart with so much love and affection. Also, Baba cheated Aai by keeping Kaku at his home after her husband's death, so that she could live near him because he had love for her in his heart. Manorama was a perfect wife in her social role but she has nothing to do what society thinks about her. Her inner self was broken, sad, therefore she chose to spend her life without asking questions. But she can't stop her without raising questions on the deathbed of Baba as hers was only chance to confess her deeds and about her husband's cold behaviour.

Baba's confession about Manorama and his relationship suggests that she does not deserve that special place in his life as Kaku that is why he has not spoken much about her. But admits that whatever he did with her was not fair. He also admits that he took her children from her to give solace to Kaku and also because he had a doubt in his mind about the chastity of Manorama. That is why he had not given that love, support and care to Bal, that a child needs from his father. He took children from her and Baba, the one who was already not hers. He admits it by saying, "Your children were never yours. I never was yours." He not only failed in providing the respect, love and care but also he took her children from her and made her a lonely woman. Their relationship was nothing but a compromise that moved on baseless.

2.2. Relationship of Baba and Kaku.

The relationship of Baba and Kaku was extra ordinary. They never admitted to their relationship, neither publicly nor personally. Surprisingly Baba's spirit reveals this secret that was hidden in his heart. He admits that he loved Kaku more than his wife Manorama and this love got germinated since when he saw her very first time and repented that why they met so late. He never tried to know what's in her, mind but he always deeply yearned for her. They both admit their love towards each other:

BABA: Why did I meet her so late?

KAKU: Why couldn't we meet before?

BABA: Who knows what's in her mind. But I
always pined for

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BABA: I had made up my mind to have her by any mean. (Pause.) After Madhu had died on the second day of his marriage ... shall I reveal the truth? I was happy. (Pause.) It's true I brought her here then, but always kept her at a distance. [2]

There was an unsaid relationship between them. A mutual understanding was present between them like husband wife. It seems that their relationship was not physical but it was eternal, beyond the limitation of marriage. They never touched

each other; even they never tried to saw each other directly and maintained a distance from each other. Manorama and Kaku, both praise this tender feeling of Baba. For Aai, this quality of his created doubt on her doubt that she had about Kaku and Baba's relationship, and for Kaku, it is a love that she sensed it without being touched or seen by him. The life of these three characters Manorama, Kaku and Baba is interlinked with each other and made each other's life complicated. None of these characters showed the real self to anyone. They wore a mask of sophistication till their life and tried to unmask in front of Baba's death bed.

3. DISGUISED RELATIONSHIP OF FATHER AND SON.

Unlike the disguised marital relationship, the other relationship that has many facets in this play is the relationship between father and son, i.e. Baba and Bal. The theme of disguise reality has been shown by the character of Baba towards Bal and Bal towards Baba as well. Baba never accepted Bal as his son in his life. A strange doubt had created a firm place in his mind that Bal is not his son and this doubt snatches all the fatherly affection from Baba towards Bal. Baba never told about his doubt to anybody therefore with the passing of time it became stronger. Elkunchwar portrayed these characters with disguised reality to add the complexity in the play which shows the disguised nature of human. Baba in his whole life maintained a distance from Bal and that distance was psychological which ruined Bal's life.

Bal is a young man and eldest son of Baba and Manorama. He yearned for fatherly touch and affection not only from his father but mother as well. He has many grievances from his father. He has not found any sign of love towards him from Baba. He felt discriminated among his siblings. During the last moments of Baba, he bursts out whatever he buried in his heart for such an extended period. He never permitted him to do anything, never cared his likes and dislikes. That is why he never wanted to go home. His father always neglected Bal but still Bal had respect for his father. He always wanted to become like him but could not become a scholar and not be famous as his father. He was his hero. He cries and confesses his inner most feelings for his father in the following poignant words:

BAL: I could never be a scholar like you. Could not be famous. Is that why? I wanted to be like you. Honestly. How I admired you. Still do. How is it that you never understood? You were my hero. Still are. How proud I was of you. You used to sit reading or writing. And I would show you to everyone peeping from behind the curtain... My father. My father. Did you know how often I boasted of 'my father'? [2]

Bal respected his father and loved him too but, only one thing that made him away from his father was that why did his father not gave his affection to him. Why did he discriminated against him. He always appeared as a gentle boy by hiding the multiple questions in his mind and heart as well regarding

Baba's behaviour. He had not courage to ask questions from him when he was alive. But this is the biggest issue that raises doubt on his identity. Therefore tried to ask when Baba is on the deathbed by thinking as if Baba could tell him why he was so cold towards him. He eagerly wants to know therefore asks again and again and says it would be his first last question. Baba's spirit is confused whether he should reveal tell about his strange behaviour. Finally, all the answers of Bal that were hidden comes out to the fore. The whole process of hatred was based on just a single sentence. But unfortunately it is unheard by Bal therefore he is still unaware of those reasons of being disliked by Baba. Baba's spirit says:

BABA: Can you bear it? Bal Please tell me.

BABA: Listen then.

BAL: Did I ever ask you anything? This would be the first and the last. (Pause.)

BABA: I had a suspicion then. I still do. (Pause.)
That you are not mine.

BAL: Am I nothing to you?

BABA: It's true that your mother never strayed. But once the doubt entered my heart, it never quite left me. [2]

Baba reveals that it is the doubt that created a distance that can never be filled, between father and son. This doubt made Baba man of disguised reality. His appearance lost over actual identity. He tried to overcome this shame from *Geetanjali* by reading and teaching its shlokas to Bal and walking in the moonlight, singing songs, holding Bal in his arms. But it was just an attempt of repent and regret. Nothing could remove the tangle of their relationship. And Baba left the body to meet his Raghu, the Almighty Lord Krishna who

is his birth companion, left family members in the same mortal mundane.

4. CONCLUSION

There are various themes in this play but the dominant one is the human instinct of pseudo behaviour. Humans do not have one face but they are a multifaceted creature. They use to present themselves according to the situation and hide the true self from the cosmos. Human used to wear various kinds of masks to hide their reality and present themselves with a particular mask at a given time. Even they use this trick with their family members as well. It seems that they forget what their real self is and therefore they are suffering from a kind of fear that if they show the true self, the relations can be broken. Therefore to save their relationships a kind of mask has been used to save the relations, to represent as a genuine person. Appearance took the place of reality and it became a primary characteristic of human behaviour. *As One Discardeth Old Clothes...* is a diligent attempt by the playwright to show the disguised human reality by using the philosophy of death.

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