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GAME OF POWER POLITICS TRANSFORMING A PETRIFIED PRINCESS INTO AN
UNDOMITABLE STRONG POLITICAL LEADER IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
"ENCOUNTER IN UMBUGLAND"

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ABSTRACT

When we hear the word power politics many related words strike our mind that together form its foundation. These words are treachery, diplomacy and hypocrisy which are the guiding principles in politics and act as a vehicle for a politician towards great success and achievements. Political leaders increase their power through manipulating peoples mind and emotions for their own benefits. The present paper highlights the same fact by presenting the journey of transformation of an innocent childish princess Vijaya into a strong and sensible political leader in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Encounter in Umbugland*.

Keywords: power politics, manipulating minds , treachery, hipocrisy, powerful dictator, allegory, self willed princess, diplomacy.



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"The political machine triumphs because it is a united minority acting against a divided majority." (Will Durant, 2016)

A famous quote by Will Durant rightly presents the fact that is behind every success in the game of power politics. Politicians very cunningly manipulate mindless public emotions in their own favour by dividing them on different grounds to gain more and more power to fulfil their selfish motives. Beena Agrawal aptly comments, "Politics is corrupting the society because its soil is being irrigated by the evil passions of selfish ministers." (Agrawal Beena, 2012 p.139).

This burning social issue of power politics is presented by Vijay Tendulkar a social playwright, the angry young man of Marathi theatre, in his famous play *Encounter in Umbugland*, through the story of transformation of a petrified princess Vijaya into a strong and sensible dictator. Beena Agrawal observes, "Tendulkar in the play *Encounter in Umbugland* accepts that all the social problems are the result of rotten conventions and customs that require radical transformation". (Agrawal Beena, 2012 p.133)

The play is a political satire full of realism in which human craving for power politics is presented beautifully. *Encounter in Umbugland* is translated into English by Priya Adarkar. Indian political state of late sixties and early seventies is highlighted in the play through the story of a self-willed, inexperienced and

petrified princess Vijaya who gets transformed into a victorious and intelligent ruler under the training from Prannarayan, an eunuch. Innocent Vijaya loves to play youthful game of hopscotch and does not have any interest in lavish life of the palace. Her lack of interest in palace life can be seen in these lines :

VIJAYA: If I had wings, I would have left them (the palace precincts) ages ago- gone so far, I wouldn't know how to return! (271)

A meek spoilt princess under Prannarayan's guidance soon learns to make her own diplomatic strategies to control the scheming cabinet ministers at various situations. Beena Agrawal rightly says about Tendulkar, "In the greed and wickedness of ministers, he projects his own awareness for the growing moral bankruptcy of politicians." (Agrawal, Beena, 2012 p.135) It is a journey presenting the transformation of a young pampered princess into an intelligent indomitable ruler of Ubugland. The play presents the harsh reality and corrupt practices of hypocritical and treacherous politicians in the sordid and futile power game.

After the death of king Vichitravirya, his daughter Vijaya was coronated as the ruler of the state by the ministers of the cabinet. These ministers who were seasoned politicians like Vratyasom, Aranyaketu, Pishtakeshi, Karkashirsha and Bhagadanta have a selfish motive behind crowning princess Vijaya. They thought that they could misguide Queen Vijaya and fulfil their selfish purpose as she is ignorant about political matters. The selfishness and disloyalty of the ministers is visible through what Vratyasom and Pishtakeshi speak about honesty in politics.

VRATYASOM: Let us not open our mouths too wide about principles and honesty. To observe these two virtues in politics is as inappropriate and stupid as celibacy after marriage. (273)

PISHTAKESHI : In politics one should have the hide of a rhinoceros, like Bhagadanta here. Say what you will, do what you will, it's impossible to guess his reaction. (273)

VRATYASOM: In short, politics itself is a treachery. Treachery to the king, the country, the people.....A true politician can be loyal only to himself. (288)

This play is a political allegory presenting the situation in the play same as the political situation of India in late sixties and early seventies and the characters of the play as historical personages. In the play the chorus raises the question:

THE TWO IN BLACK : After Vichitravirya, who ? (284)

It reminds us of the political scenario of India of 1960 that 'After Nehru, Who?'

M. Sarat Babu rightly remarks:

"Ubugland intensifies the idea of hypocrisy. Princess Vijaya stands for the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi....The play draws parallels between the rule of Vijaya and that of Indira." (Babu Sarat, 2003, p109)

After the death of Pandit Nehru senior leaders of congress party choosed Nehru ji's daughter Indira Gandhi as a compromise candidate thinking that she would be no more than their rubber stamp as she is inexperienced in political affairs. But things went opposite and Indira Gandhi emerged as an able leader establishing her control over the cabinet. Same is the case of princess Vijaya in the play. Princess Vijaya who initially had no interest in political matters, under the guidance of her friend and a philosopher Prannarayan emerges out as Queen Vijaya, a cunning and resolute politician.

In the beginning Vijaya finds it difficult to manage the affairs of the state and has no interest in them. Moreover she misses her playful activities because after being coronated she is expected to behave in royal sophisticated manner which she dislikes the most.

VIJAYA: I don't think I can manage it. I feel like dancing, laughing and singing. I feel like playing and running about ! Sometimes, Prannarayan, I even feel likes shouting loudly without any reason. (298)

VIJAYA: It's too late. If I'd known this before I wouldn't have become queen. Prannarayan, I shall play hopscotch or jacks. And you shall keep me company. (298)

Prannarayan who is a philosopher and loyal friend of Vijaya belongs to the third sex, who guides Vijaya in her journey of transformation from a meek princess to a strong queen. Prannarayan teaches Vijaya many cunning tactics of political power game.

PRANNARAYAN : Politics means sweetly smiling enmity and experience of sacrifice. A show of sacrifice is always profitable in politics. (306)

From here begins the journey of strategical political attacks and counter attacks for political supremacy between Queen Vijaya and her cabinet of ministers. When the cabinet visits Vijaya and break the protocol of court by omitting to bow before queen Vijaya, she bluntly denies to speak to the cabinet.

VIJAYA : The Cabinet has broken the protocol of court by omitting to bow to us. We are the queen of this island. (301)

When Queen Vijaya decides the upliftment of Kadamba tribe and asks for Cabinet to support her decision but the ministers deny just to prove that Queen cannot achieve anything without help of Cabinet. This is clearly seen in the attitude of ministers .

PISHTAKESHI : When she's understood that she can't achieve a single thing by putting off the Cabinet, our work is done. (313)

Though Cabinet is not supporting Queen in her decision yet she has full faith in her success. Beena Agrawal remarks rightly, " For Vijaya the vision of the emancipation of Kadamba tribe becomes a manifestation of her own independent identity." (Agrawal, Beena, 2012 p.133). She expresses her confidence by saying :

VIJAYA : This plan will raise my stature on the island. I will get the credit for achieving what has never been achieved before. This plan will make everyone understand that I am not just my father's daughter, nor a puppet ruler. From now I plan to rule in earnest.

PRANNARAYAN: From now means a voyage into the mysterious unknown. Who can tell with assurance what will be there.

VIJAYA: My confidence, my mind gives me assurance. (317)

Here we see the calculative and crafty thinking of Queen Vijaya. M.Sarat Babu aptly says:

Queen Vijaya introduces welfare schemes to strengthen her power. So there is more advertisement about the schemes than it is necessary.(Sarat Babu, 2003, p 110).

Vijaya wants her Kadamba rehabilitation plan to be approved by her ministers and declares it a challenge to her honour if plan is not accepted by Cabinet.

VIJAYA : If it is not accepted, I – I will consider it a challenge to my honour. (324)

Here the Kadamba rehabilitation plan of Vijaya resembles the twenty-point economic programme of Indira Gandhi. Her slogan 'Garibi Hatao!(Eradicate Poverty!) made her famous which helped her to come to power in general elections of 1972.

Shailaja Wadikar rightly remarks, " The incident of the encounter in the play is reminiscent of the one in Indira Gandhi's regime in 1971 and the characters resemble those who have been the ministers in Indira Gandhi's cabinet." (Wadikar, 2000, p.48)

As Indira Gandhi wished V.V. Giri to get elected as the President which was against the wish of her Cabinet. Similar is the case of Vijaya, where she wants the upliftment of Kadamba tribe against the wishes of her ministers. Vijaya thus declares an emergency and takes the power in her hands. The chorus announces:

GRAVE EMERGENCY!

SERIOUS PREDICAMENT!

ENCOUNTER NOW BEGINS BETWEEN

HER MAJESTY AND THE CABINET! (327)

The play is a powerful satire on power politics which highlights the fact that in political field nothing is real. Success and treachery go hand in hand. Queen ignored her ministers and as a result they became furious and decide to take revenge of their insult and regain power by fighting and plotting against queen. N.S. Dharan comments rightly: "By means of the ministers' conspiracy against Queen Vijaya, Tendulkar offers us an insight into the dirty games that politicians play to capture power."(Dharan, 1999, p83)

VRATYASOM : We must cut short our lamentation and get ready for the battle. There is no time for sorrow! That little brat has given us blow after blow. Now the only answer is a still stronger blow..... we must get rid of the situation before it spreads. It wouldn't be in our interests to let her stay on the throne after this. We must

gather a mob! We must incite the people! We must loose upon her the tidal wave of an infuriated mob..... we'll force her to surrender! We'll make her submit! (333-334)

Vratyasom speaks the bitter truth about politics where politicians use mob to fulfil their selfish motive. They don't care about death, loss of lives of innocent people and bloodshed. They just want their purpose to get fulfilled.

VRATYASOM: Like any other goods that are available wholesale, the people too, have their agents. They will sell any stupid idea to the mob. In return, they ask for its anger. Of course, when using this anger for political purposes, statesmen haveto give these agents some payment. (334)

ARANYAKETU : But the destruction of innocent lives and valuable property-

VRATYASOM : For an experienced politician, you use embaressing terminology. Destruction brings change. Anyone who cannot watch even the greatest destruction dispassionately is in my opinion no politician at all. (335)

KARKASHIRSHA : Principles are even more important than human lives ! (335)

The queen uses Bhagadanta as her pawn. Bhagadanta is a Kadamba who informs the queen about the plot of the ministers and thus she plans a counter attack on the ministers. Shailaja Wadikar rightly observes : *"Encounter in Umbugland* projects how falsehood has become an inevitable part of the politician's life, the ultimate result of which is hypocritical behavior". (Wadikar,2000, p 136)

She gets the prisoners released to help her counter the ministers revolt. Moreover she deploys spies as servants in the house of ministers to know every move of the opponent. When queen faces angry mob the ministers think that she will be killed by the furious mob but queen addresses the mob to be silent and announces the abolition of taxes promising the mob to punish the guilty ministers.

VIJAYA : We shall institute a public enquiry into the private property of our ministers who have gone today against the interests of the people. ... those ministers who are found guilty will be severely punished. (353)

Vijaya here very cunningly turns the whole game against the ministers by manipulating the mob in her favour. She from a childish free willed girl gets gradually transformed into a diplomatic ruler. Here we see how political leaders manipulate innocent people to gain power. M. Sarat Babu observes rightly: " The play thus shows how leaders make people mindless and how mindless people allow their leaders to be hypocritical." (Babu M Sarat,p 115).

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