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Yet another Macbeth: A rich contribution to Kannada theatre

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Abstract

Shakespeare has been kept alive on the stage and also in the writings of the various writers. Whenever a play is transmitted, it is born again with new dimensions and meanings added on to it. This rejuvenation is a valuable contribution to the movement of theatre. H.S. Shivaprakash experiments with Shakespeare's play Macbeth in his Kannada play called 'Nattirulata' which translates as midnight game. This paper is an attempt to peruse the novelty with which H.S. Shivaprakash has treated Shakespeare's Macbeth.

Keywords: Playwrights, reciting, scenes

Introduction

The Post-Colonial development in India Theatre, the changing vision and a paradigm shift have result in a plethora of avant - garde experimentation with a wide ranging issues and concerns. The India playwrights have addressed post independent India's concerns in number of creative ways. Some of them have resorted to mythologies, some of them to folk-forms and historical revivals. Transformed versions of Shakespeare have been one of the noteworthy experimentation. The pre-Independent India was enamored by Shakespeare's plays staged by the British authorities with white actors in order to promote English culture. Very soon Shakespeare became a part of academics where reciting lines from his plays and acting scenes from his plays was considered a fashion among the Bengali students. The growth in appreciation for Shakespeare from fashion and passion to the recent contextualization has been quite an exciting one the journey does not seem to end at this as our native playwrights with their creative abilities are keeping the bard 'alive and well' in India. It is indeed very hearting to note that Shakespeare is not frozen in just imitation and mimicry but continues to haunt the native minds and coaxes them not only to adapt him and associate him with the cultural roots, but also interrogate and re-search to create new Shakespeare in the native context.

Post-Independent debates and discussions insisted on the need for a theatre to address native issue, and consequently the 'Roots movement began in the theater' But India could not easily wipe-away its colonial leanings and memories. A playwright like Girish Karnad who works through myths and folk forms asserts that

Even to arrive at the heart of one's mythology the writer has to follow signposts planted by the west and negotiate the tension between cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of western modes of thought and our own traditional, and finally between the various version of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved.

In the light of this view if Shakespeare has been enacted and is being re-written and continues to be performed, it is not due to lingering subordination to colonial cultural manifestations but indicative of a significant movement-a powerful movement which is capable of not only transcribing Shakespeare but extending or stretching the scope of his plays to suit the changes in the society. The colonial efforts to naturalism the native to English culture through Shakespeare's plays has borne fruits in a form which is quite contrary to their expectation. Whenever Shakespeare is enacted in regional theatres it has emerged both as an imitation and difference. If is this 'difference' which needs to be celebrated as it testifies the talents of the native playwrights and renders them unique.

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It is a well-known cliché that the theatre speaks its own language which transcends barriers of nationalities and cultures. When the playwrights and the directors work through this belief, significant changes can occur on the stage enriching theatre culture in general. Here, I would not like to use the term regional theatre as every regional theatre represents India culture and is uniquely India. Whenever a play is transplanted into another culture it is born again in a different audience's mind with new dimension and meanings added on to it. Whatever may be the origin of the play the transcribed play should be able to sever its umbilical cord and grow independently a new creation.

Writing a new play is a talent which has been staged innumerable times and lived through the test of time and rejuvenating it to such an extent that it can thrill audience much more than the older versions is a commendable act by itself and a valuable contribution to the movement of theatre. Such experiments should be foregrounded as they create a new idiom of theatre.

H.S. Shivaprakash's latest tryst with Macbeth- 'Nattirulata' a play in Kannada which translates as the midnight play/game highlight the game played by the evil and seals with the birth of evil in such a novel manner that Shakespeare or Macbeth become just a pretext which is almost forgotten by the end of the play as it focuses more on the human nature and behaviour through the characters and their action. There have been many regional revivals of Shakespeare in order to reach his works to people. If in Calcutta Utpal Dutt tried to immerse Macbeth in the vigorous folk theatre of Bengal, Urdu adaptations were melodramatic rendering of the original. Marathi and Gujarati productions were also very popular in Bombay theater.

These productions acquired a distinct touch by the addition of a number of songs and extra subplots. B.V. Karnth used Yakshagana for his version of Shakespeare's Macbeth. This synthesis of western texts and native socio-cultural root has always been intriguing. Amidst all these experiments Shivaprakash's 'Nattirulata', even though written for a particular actress on request, strikes the readers as a play with new perspectives. As I said earlier more than the similarities it is the differences which need to be taken note of. This is a one act play which once again signifies the role of Lady Macbeth Who continues to remain the spirit behind Macbeth's disastrous end.

Theatre is a co-ordination of plot, event, and character. In other words many events constitute the plot and all the events are physicalized on the stage through the character's actions. Dr. Shivaprakash in his play has attempted to pick the events which are actually the main ingredients of the original text that can alter the direction of the play. He picks the scenes where Lady Macbeth's maneuvering schemes are highlighted and turns his play into a totally women centered play where the hero Macbeth is just a shadow of Lady Macbeth's evil spirited mind. As childbirth is associated with a woman's body, the playwright makes thoughtful use of the character of Lady Macbeth when she gives birth to evil in the form of a mute dead child.

In fact 'Nattirulata' begins with the witches, a group of witches not just 3 witches as in the play Macbeth, preparing their brew to spread evil all over the earth. The evil doers or the evil makers that is witches seem to be celebrating evil and enjoying what they are doing. The significant deviation in the play is the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth also belongs

to the group of witches as it is the 2 of the witches who don the role of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Their incarnations in Kannada appeal to the Kannada audience as they are descriptive and explanatory and they quite succeed in arousing an eerie atmosphere. Act I scene V of Shakespeare's Macbeth acquires a new dimension in the art of Shivaprakash. He portrays Lady Macbeth as one Who is pregnant with evil. Pregnant for either months. she calls it her son and she cannot contain the secret pangs of joyful pain and is eager to disclose it to her husband.

I quote from the text which is a translated version.

"A huge swirling mountain in my womb

Is heralding your arrival

Or a snake is curling in the dark cloud

In whom shall I confide

The joy and pain that you give me?

Why are you so delayed today

The pain is unbearable

oh ! Son, do not twirl and Pierce my womb with your sharp needles

Do not end my life before it bears fruits

The evil in the play originates from the womb of Lady Macbeth and the whole concept of the beginning of evil and its consequences has been associated with her character. There is an attempt to personify evil. And through her character the action of evil taking its form has been physicalized and made visible. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth contrives through her mind, but here her body is also combined with her mind to give it a better effect. The act of murdering Duncan is referred to as the son whom she is going to beget. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth instigates Macbeth with lot of heartrending examples which can weaken anybody's resolution. But in Nattirulata, her words are not just examples but reality. She tempts Macbeth with their unborn son and invites him to pluck the baby out of her womb.

You coward,

If you cannot accomplish this task

Come and rip my womb apart

And throw the fetus out

The imaginary situation in Shakespeare's play turn into real situation here and Macbeth is tempted to enter into Duncan's chamber with his Dragon. Macbeth's suggestion that Lady Macbeth with her strong mettle can give birth to only male children is carried further by Shivaprakash who portrays her women pregnant with the progeny which stands for evil. In fact has been portrayed as more evil than the witches. With the murder of Duncan is born evil. Lady Macbeth is seen lying with a child an epitome of birth and death. I quote the inactions of the witches which are translated.

"Can't you stop crying child, Lo! Your father is coming to inundate your beautiful body with the blood of the old man". The deliberate juxtaposition of the birth of the baby and evil action alters the perception of the audience. Soon after the birth of the dead child there is a play within the play where in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth face each other and contemplate over going back in time and re-treading their steps. Just before this conversation a song which places birth and death together suggests that both are similar- meaning

to say if one wants to live the other has to die or there is no life without death.

What is born into this world?
 Life or death? Life or death?
 Both are same, both are same
 what did we find on the stage
 Flower or thorn? Flower or throne?
 Both are same, both are same
 What did they adorn in our play
 Bier or the throne? Bier or the throne?
 Both are same, both are same
 Where did they sit in our play
 In the tomb or on the pedestal?
 Both are same, both are same

Lady Macbeth is addressed by the witches as 'ಮೃತ್ಯುವಿನ ಮಾತೆ' that is the mother of death. The instigating role of Lady Macbeth has been re-emphasized with a new angle which grips the interest of the audience inspires of the familiar plot. Lady Macbeth suffers from hallucinations. It is not Macbeth Who sees the ghosts in the Banquet seen but it is Lady Macbeth; May be this is done on the premise that the creator of evil should also equally suffer as the evil doer. Towards the end of the play Shivaprakash adopts Brechtian technique where he segregates the audience from their involvement in the action and sets them thinking about the birth of evil and its dire consequences finally the play is neither about Macbeth or Lady Macbeth But it is about evil game played by the evil creators that is the witches during mid-night. He has also brought in the elements of darkness and light and light brings revelation with it.

On the whole the new technique of making the action speak for itself severs the play from the playwright of the past as well as the present and occupies a timeless permanent space. Here is a regional theatre which heralds reworking of classics to render new parameters which can keep theater alive to be watched with never ending new perspectives.

References

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