

Subjugation of Women in Mahesh Elkunchwar's Garbo

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Abstract

This research paper examines the actual condition and situation of women as depicted in Mahesh Elkunchwar's Garbo. Elkunchwar is a well-known playwright not just in the Marathi theatrical community, but he is recognized as a very respectable playwright in the field of modern theatre history. The theatrical skills of Mahesh Elkunchwar position him as one of the pioneering playwrights in effectively exploring the issues of women and the psychological dilemmas of women's world. His plays explore the conflict between family relationships and social relationships with realism and emotional force. In the patriarchal culture, he concentrates on the pains, anxiety, misery, and tragedies of both men and Women. This paper primarily focuses on Elkunchwar's Garbo, while also considering the plight of women in contemporary society, both traditional and modern. He also portrays the challenges faced by modern women and the issues they encounter related to their identity and subjectivity.

Indian English drama of the pre-independent era is remarkable for a large variety of themes and techniques, yet it is not primarily constituted for the stage performance. Stage performance is the most distinguished feature of drama; it was only after independence that certain dramatists marked this phenomenon. At present, Indian English drama has become quite prominent, thanks to young, talented playwrights who have made dramatic writing lively and forceful, focusing on the vital issues of society. Contemporary Indian English drama is innovative and experimental regarding technical and thematic qualities. Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar, and Vijay Tendulkar developed a cumulative theatrical tradition that laid the groundwork for contemporary Indian English theatre.

One of the most notable playwrights of Indian soil is Mahesh Elkunchwar, born on October 9, 1939, a prominent figure in Marathi literature who has made a bold attempt to portray the conditions of women in a patriarchal society. In the contemporary era, he is hailed as one of the most influential and progressive playwrights, along with Satish Alekar and Vijay Tendulkar. Elkunchwar came into literary prominence with the publication of his one-act plays. He has written more than twenty plays in the Marathi language. Like Rudraravsha (1966), Sultan (1967), Zumbur (1967), Kaifiyat (1967), Eka Mhatarachya Khoon (1968), Ek Osad Gaon (1969), Yatanaghar (1970), Garbo (1973), Desire in the Rocks (1974), Party (1976), Raktapushp (1980), Old Stone Mansion (1985), Reflection (1987), Autobiography (1988), The Pond (1991), The End of an Age, Tattered Clothes (1995), Godson (1998), Sonata (2002), and An Actor Exits (2005). Most of his plays are translated into various languages, including Hindi, English, German, and French. He has been honoured in India with Homi Bhabha Fellowship (1976- 78), The Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards for Yuganta, National Academy of the Performing Arts 1989, Nindika 1989, Maharashtra Gaurav (1990), The Maharashtra Foundation Award (1997), The Sahitya Academy Award

(2002), The Saraswati Samman, one of India's highest literary awards in 2003. Internationally, too, he was bestowed the Brittingham Fellowship in 2005. The prestigious Janasthan Puraskar was awarded to him for his service to the theatre.

Mahesh Elkunchwar got recognition on the Indian drama canvas. The plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar focus on the thoughts rather than emotions. His experimentation, dramaturgy, and human life are interconnected. The thematic concern of his plays is different from that of his contemporary playwrights. His experimentation in Marathi theatre gained popularity for the Marathi dramas at a global level. This international recognition of the Marathi drama is a notable achievement by Mahesh Elkunchwar. Dr. Sandhya Amrate rightly comments in this regard as:

The dramatic journey of Mahesh Elkunchwar begins from affection to compassion, from local to global pains and sufferings, human relationship from unconcern to continuous concern, from darkness to light, from uproar to peace, introspection to enlightenment and ... self-realization. (trans.) (Amrate, Sandhya: 1995: 3-4)

This paper aims to explore the unique treatment of social and cultural themes in the play *Garbo* by Mahesh Elkunchwar. Mahesh Elkunchwar wrote *Garbo* in 1973, and it was first performed in its original Marathi version in Mumbai on August 25, 1973, under the direction of Shreeram Lagoo. *Garbo* is one of his famous plays translated into English by Shanta Gokhale. It was written in the early 1970s. *Garbo* beautifully describes the hollowness in the lives of young people. How sexuality becomes the primary concern and involves them in it, how they discriminate against a young woman for their use, is the theme of this play. Elkunchwar wrote *Garbo* when he wanted to rebel from the conventional drama.

Sandhya Amrate writes in *Elkunchwar's theatre* that "Elkunchwar's plays have a pronounced and mature impact of the 'theatre of cruelty' on them" and about *Garbo* that "the primitive human instincts related to cruelty and sexuality got a fiery, incisive, bitter, surreal theatrical expression" shown in the play. She further adds that there is a Western inspiration behind that play. Therefore, "it is the creation of the plays like these that is the inevitable essence of obliterating the claustrophobia of the traditional stagnancy of Marathi theatre". She criticizes as well as praises by saying that:

. . . even though Elkunchwar carried this process forwarding an ascending order, as intensely, surrealistically, fervently, piercingly, and capably with plays like *Rudravarsha*, *Garbo*, and *Vasanakand*, it has to be said that it was still a path much trodden upon; but that does not diminish the value of his plays. Because Elkunchwar does not stop at violence, cruelty, or sexuality. He has also tried to explore the impulses of the creative process, the tension that exists within human relationships as well as reinterpret concepts of sin through his plays. (qtd in Sathe 798)

Garbo is about four people of different age groups who belong to various backgrounds and have different thoughts and views. For these characters, life is a burden that they have to carry anyhow. These characteristics of the young generation do not know the importance of freedom and how to utilise time, and hence sexuality becomes the central topic of their life. The drama shows the unethical, immoral, and insignificant life spent by four youngsters, Shrimant, Intuc, Pansy, and Garbo. Shrimant is a small businessman, Intuc is a college professor, and Pansy is an art school dropout. They are all connected with one single thread, Garbo- a petty actress of B-grade movies and a prostitute. They are tied up with each other for physical passion. In this play, Garbo is the protagonist. Intuc and Pansy share Shrimant's place to stay, and it is the place where the whole drama has been dramatized. Shrimant, Intuc, and Pansy symbolize wealth, intelligence, and effete man. *Garbo*, an actor, is their friend, a symbol of fertility, and a source of new life. Among these, Shrimant is the earthiest. Nothing is creative and adventurous for them,

and they are habitual of living filthy life. They have been spending their life as purposeless, meaningless, and worthless.

Garbo is the only medium that connects them. She is the female protagonist of the play, whose body attracts them towards her; she is the only means through which they are connected. Samik Bandopadhyay has written in the introduction of *Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar* "Garbo is a dramatic construct who is at the same time a petty actress in B grade movies, fast losing her glamour, and a larger than life sex goddess for the three men cooped up in their sitting room" (xii). For Garbo, maybe it is the physical passion that connects her with them, but she is also searching for love that comforts her soul. For each of them, Garbo has a different image.

For Shrimant, she is only a sex machine whose duty is to fulfil the needs of their body. All three of these men use her to satisfy their sexual desires. She faces a very harsh tone, mental pain, and harassment, especially from Shrimant. When Pansy calls Garbo a great woman, Shrimant immediately reacts and says: SHRIMANT: ... In what way is Garbo great? Her only business in life has been jumping from bed to bed. She's nothing but a sex- machine (*Pleased with the phrase.*), a sex-machine. Yeah boy! A sex-machine. (Elkunchwar Vol I, 16)

SHRIMANT: (*shrieking in glee*). A sex- machine. She's a sex machine.

That's a damn good idea. Just get on top of this machine, one machine on top of another, and presto! Printing begins. (16)

For Shrimant, there is no identity of Garbo other than a prostitute whose duty is to satisfy men. He did not find anything wrong with him, who was involved with two women, Babi and Shirin, other than Garbo. He also shows a gay tendency because he has a relationship with Pansy. Here, Shrimant is connected with many women, and due to this, he has lost himself. He continuously discriminated against Garbo. He uses her body continuously, not only that, but he also makes sarcastic remarks on her character. It is fine that she is a prostitute, a slut; whose duty is to serve men but men have no right to pass such disgusting remarks on her like this:

SHRIMANT. Three of us? Only three of us? What kind of fool world are you living in? There's a queue, a regular queue outside her house. At the head stand film producers, then the directors, then the cameraman. The queen of whores receiving everybody into her enigmatic embrace. Wonderful! (19)

Pansy is the third man in Garbo's life, a seventeen-year-old boy. He is an art school dropout and also claims that he loves Garbo. For Pansy, she is a mother figure on whose lap he forgets everything and finds an emotional solace that gives him peace. He is also involved with Garbo sexually. But here the kind of sexual relationship between them is not mature, but it is a kind of "emotional sexuality". Garbo used Pansy for her sexual pleasure because he was a young lad. When Pansy wants to live with him as a husband, she can't marry him because he is a young boy of eighteen years. He is not earning anything, has no place to live, and is also younger than her. Hence, she can't marry him because it is unacceptable in society, and it is tradition that girls must be younger than boys for marriage.

Intuc, as the name suggests, is the most intelligent among all. He is an unsuccessful scholar living in a state of great nihilism and despair. He is a Marathi writer and college professor. Intuc is unsatisfied with his job and the duality of the modern world. Intuc represents the reality of the world. As far as the relationship between Garbo and Intuc is concerned, for Intuc, Garbo is different, physically and morally. She is a challenge, a puzzle. He wants to win her soul rather than her body. Intuc is the character with whom she is emotionally and spiritually connected. They are physically associated with each other, and there is something more to it.

To some extent, it can be said that Intuc loves Garbo, and Garbo also has feelings for him. Intuc has also discriminated against her, and she has faced disappointment many times from Intuc's side. One noticeable thing is that she never expected anything from Intuc. Even though when she got pregnant with her child, she did not even inform him that the father of the child is he. Because she knew he did not want to take responsibility for it, the biggest question is what society would say if he accepted that child. He does not dare to accept a woman whose life is filled with sorrow and scorned by society. Instead of giving love and support, Intuc taunts her from time to time, harasses her verbally, and warps her.

All three of these men have a strong desire for Garbo. For all these male characters, Garbo has a different image. For Shrimant, she is a sex-machine, while for Intuc she is a 'challenge', a living work of art, who grows old but never stale. . . . "even after fulfilling the needs of all three of us a part of her still remains untouched" (Elkunchwar 19). For them, her only business is to understand and satisfy their physical need in any way. They do not care what she thinks or what she wants. This attitude of theirs shows the patriarchal chains that bind women in the shackles of the duty to serve men. Even in the play's last act, Shrimant murdered Garbo, they justify that as there was no other option left. For them, she snatched the only medium of redemption.

Garbo is an actress and a middle-aged woman. Hence, there is no strong and leading role for her as her glamour and beauty are fading. She wants to do some leading roles, but that is impossible because there is a demand for glamorous movie roles. That is why there is a high demand for young ladies. Patriarchy and capitalism are rooted firmly in this industry; therefore, it is the stem of gender discrimination that oppresses and suppresses women. One more thing that is noticeable. A male actor never gets old, whereas a female actress, after crossing thirty, loses her glamour and popularity. Thirdly, it does not matter whether the top male actor is married or not, but in the case of a female actress, it matters a lot. Hence, women become the reason behind the discrimination against women. She suffered her whole life physically because she became a machine to fulfill the sexual desires of men. Garbo's unborn child and her unstable work in movies became a source of tension for her, and she suffered a mental trauma. Hence, she suffered psychologically also. And in this psychic tension, she decides to kill her unborn child. She is aware of her failure in life, but wants to live her life on her terms and does not need any support from anyone. That is why she rejects everyone's offer.

GARBO: Don't slobber over me like a dog. And don't call me Garbo again either. I don't want any of you to do that. Are you trying to merely flaunt my failure before me? I'm aware of my failure, perhaps better than you. And I'm trying to come to terms with it. I don't claw at people, draw blood, and then dance with demonic joy the way you do. (27)

Whether it is social life, personal life, or professional life, she is at the slope of age and getting rejected everywhere. Women are being discriminated against in various ways, and surprisingly, they do not know about it. Unfortunately, they have accepted the men-ordained rules. They have come to the idea that she must give birth, nurture the child, and perform household activities. Although they are showing their talents in various fields, it is still a bitter truth that our patriarchy views a woman as less efficient and weaker.

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