

Changing face of performing art: A special reference to the changing role of woman in Mahesh

Elkunchwar's "Sonata"

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Abstract

Indian performance art is full of cultural values and social norms, they always represents the ethics community followed. When it comes to presenting the art form in front of the audience we have adapted different form like dance, music, drama, songs etc. The presentation of the real life situations in front of the people may be either in the form of stage art or the road act (early). This performance act gave the new life to presenting the socio-cultural difference. The performance acts early were prepared on the basis of epic stories. With the development in the social and cultural values and education some of the contemporary writers tried to present the problems in a new face. Mahesh Elkunchwar has tried to present the problems of women were clearly through his plays. The issues handled though appear to be new but, actually the issues were age old, only were never handled. His Sonata presents how a woman is binded in the bonds created by the society and how desperately she tries to free herself from it. On the other hand we can say that the characters are represented to be running away from the situations around them and pretend to be happy which is not the fact.

Keywords: performing art, vedic period, *natayashtra*, contemporary period, mahesh elkunchwar

Introduction

When it starts with the music, we just run into the crowd to see it, feel it. A dhol continuously beating in the area makes one to move. This movement of body which is created because of some reasons are called as performing art.

“Every act you have ever performed since the day you were born was performed because you wanted something”
 - Andrew Carnegie

This form of art is common in all the countries and they are linked to centuries back with a cultural background. Early the performing art carried only music and dance which was performed on various occasions. This was performed for the purpose of fertility. The fertility not just related to human and animals but, also related to land. Since, from the very start of the civilization, the art form such as dance, music, drama was very common, for representing human feelings. These performances were also given to pass on the cultural tradition from one generation to another generation. We can find its traces from the ancient Vedic period to the modern contemporary period.

The term got it's actually start when it came to performing in front of large audience in 1960s. It was used to describe any live artistic, event that included poetry, music, films, theatre, drama, dance etc.. By 1970s, performance art was a global term, and its definition a bit more specific. "Performance Art" meant that it was live, and it was art. Also, it meant that it was not a commodity to be bought, sold or traded. Performance artist saw the movement as a means of taking their art directly in front of the audience. These performances were given in front of the people with the very idea of entertainment, which slowly changed its face from entrainment to making the general audience acquainted with the things going on around with the

people within the society. This change in the face of performance art brought a change in the writing skill and presentation skills with use of mechanical devices which later on came forward for the development and advancement with centuries. Keeping India as a centre point if we move around for performance art and its history we find a great history to be embedded within which gave birth to this art form and made this art form popular in the country. The history to the performance art can be seen to be inscribed in the different facets. India being a land of rich culture and heritage performed this as a festive. This performance art is all pervading bringing colour and joy. It reframed the faith of people in its culture, values and heritage by different ways. The presentation of the tribal life to today's highly social and cultural life in the form of folk art, colour paintings, sculptures and even ornaments created within the class and culture a zeal and enthusiasm to understand India. This culture started with developing society of human tradition, and included the carving, paintings, and sculptures in the caves. This skill artisans developed and encouraged for the particular kind of specialization when it comes to the age of kings and rulers. The art form reached its peak with the powers of the kingly kingdom and with rivals of kings and Nawabs this face changed its way of representation. India was on its zeal in the 2 C.E; onwards under the Gupta Empire, which canons of perfection were laid down in detailed treatise. Though this art form changed its face with the changing culture but, it did not change its roots. With Indian philosophy and myth changed the way of presenting a particular part in front of the people, but the very act of performance was never divorced. The art forms maintained its roots and were properly transferred from one generation to another generation. The folk music now was changed from the community celebrating for agriculture in different communities according to the daily routine, seasons, region, religion the particular society

followed. They were now known by different names for a single culture, which we find by the names as- Giddha, Ghoomar, Dandiya Ras, Garbha, Lavani, Nautanki, Bhavai, Jatra, Tamasha, Yakshagana, Theyyam, Kalaripayattu, Chhau dance etc. We can see that these dance forms later on took the shape of major classical forms which includes- Bharatnatyam, Manipuri, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Satriya. As differentiated into different forms yet the roots of all the performing art can be traced back in “*Natayashtra*”, a text ascribed by Bharata.

***Natayashtra* as a self-described art**

Natayashtra the age old detailed treatise and handbook on the dramatic art dealt with the classical aspects of performing art. It is alternatively pronounced as Bharata’s *Natayashtra*. The book is a conceptual work which is based on the theory which explains as to how the dramatic art is started and how different groups are brought together to form a new grand art. Also, it is written on the belief that this performance act was prepared according to the locution of Lord Bharata. The text of *Natayashtra* is believed to be prepared around 1st century BCE-3rd Century CE, by Brahmin priest Bharata Muni. The book describes the formation of grand art form called as theatre with inclusion of different art forms. According to the text the purpose of its creation was for the entertainment of Gods, which was found with the combination of music, dance, theatre, poetics, gestures and many more allied art forms. The text describes that Lord Bharata collected all the art forms, from the Veda’s in the form of nectar and created this new form of performing art. The plot was then said to be taken from Rigveda, music from Samveda, acting from Yajurveda and sentiments from Atharvaveda. The division of the text is done into 36 chapters and it gives us the details regarding the *Natyaveda*. Also, it gives an account of the making of the theatre- as being divided into three main classes depending on the class of the person. It describes today also the skills of acting called as “*Abhinayas*” which meant expression through body, linguistic, theatrical representation. Bharat Muni’s *Natayashtra* explains that-

“Theatre is life; there is no art, no life, no craft, no learning, and no action which cannot be seen in it”.

Sanskrit drama art was further considered as an established notion and being considered as the conventional form of art. The literature and form of art in Sanskrit was divided into forms as- *Drishya*, *Sravya*. Further, it included the elements like *Vastu*, *Neta*, *Rasa*, and many more. The main purpose of Sanskrit theatre was now to perform in front of the audience and show them the real face of the society. But, actually the Sanskrit art form did not truly come to its point of representing the issues as it was only limited to a particular class of people, which included the kings and the audience of higher class. But, when it came to general class of audience they were completely banned as considering being low in class. Hence, the performances which were shown were on the epic stories, classic stories or either on the praise of the king and their courtly matters. The issues of general and low class audience were never performed on the stage in front of higher authority. Here also with the higher and kingly class a differentiation was made and actually, the role of women was completely denied. So, we can say that two form of classes were formed- the lower class

people which include all the working class people under higher authority and the other class as women, which was the separate class. This difference was not only in the written but, also in the performance act. Later, new form developed which did not separate the lower and the higher class. This form was the *Parkrit* writing form, which developed during the Jainism and the Buddhism period. Yet, the complete change over in the performance was yet to be developed as the women’s were now also not given the free space. During this era also the women were considered the secondary in many forms with few exceptions to it. The theme, plot, techniques, actors, acting skills, social aspects and way of representing it all changed except the role of women and presenting the female character, with their social binding. They were studied and presented as one character which was only an element meant for the leading character (*Nayak*). She was presented in the performance and in the real life as a beautiful women, full of motherly character, excellent daughter, wife, mother and what not roles. But, the real nature and the perspective of women were never shown in front of audience, which continued for ages and women remained the same a poor and ignorant piece in the society.

Contemporary Period Show casing the Inner face of Women

The women till the medieval period was full of feelings according to the relations she carried, but, was always presented as the poor, lonely and ignorant character striving hard with her own conditions. She was always kept binded in one or the other relations, performing her role, in short an ideal character having no individuality. She was always kept in a particular frame work without her own concern, yet as a person she was always a perfect for the story and for the performance on the stage. These performance acts were so much limited that the idea of becoming free from the binding of all relationship could, create her image of vamp in the society. As a result these characters never dared to break their binding neither in the real life nor in the reel life. During the Independence era a new challenging issue was handled by few of the writers. They actually show cased the true story of women in front of the society and gave a new voice to woman. This can be found in both the literatures and performances but, the art could not exist for a long as there was great disapproval in society and was considered against the so cultured society. Also, during the British era emphasis was given the literature and performance meant from the point of view of freedom fight, which denied the issues of women and considered as secondary. This dark phase continued for a longer period.

The woman now we find presented during the Vedic period to medieval period to colonial era to post-colonial era have changed completely. Through writing and performing art the real nature is reflected, women presented as poor now changed to an independent and self-character, presenting the society as a whole within themselves. This character now turned on to be much clear in its presentation. Now the female characters were written from the point of view that they are moving outside the house, breaking the bonds, planning life in completely new way. They were the one who were not now binded in the chains of society, culture, religion, region, customs, and also relations. During the postcolonial and especially during the 19th century the women were showing their true inner nature to the society, now creating their own identity against all barriers. This also affected the performance art, the women now shown was much

bolder with reference to character, role, clothing and also their nature. This theatre culture which only presented the stories of the epics, turned on much bold and were related to human emotions which included sorrow, anger, joy, faith disappointment etc. Now the roles were performed by women themselves, also many women writers emerged. Much ado these were criticized by the society, but the fact was that the suffering and pain the women could easily be put forward by a woman herself, through the plays in front of the society. To a much interesting phase we find that the women through such a kind of role were made more popular creating an individual identity for them. To give reference to such plays were the female protagonist in the of Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, Shobha De, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar, and many more to the list.

We find a very typical nature of women being presented in some of the plays while few have made a bold attempt to cross the boundaries and show the ugly face of a woman. But, the fact which each and every contemporary writer has tried to present through writing the way she was binded. In short what we find as the social- cultural norm of the society was actually the shattered face of the society.

Inner and Outer Face of women in Mahesh Elkunchwar's play

Mahesh Elkunchwar an eminent and prolific writer emerged with a new form of theme through his plays. With more than 15 plays to his name born on 9th October, 1939, in a Telugu family in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. He belonged to the contemporary period and hailed the most progressive and influential topics similar to that Satish Alekar and Vijay Tendulkar. He came to lime light with his publication of "Sultan". His other plays include *Holi*, *Party*, *Sonata*, *God Son*, *Atmakatha* and many more. He has own National and International awards like Sahitya Akademi Award, Saraswati Samman and The Birmingham Fellowship.

Sonata: Inner Voice of Women:

The play *Sonata* written by Mahesh Elkunchwar turned on to be a classic play on the theatre. This play has its uniqueness amongst all his creations in terms of theme, dialogue, and presentation of women characters in the play. The play when studied gives us a multiple thought of ideas from different perspectives of the characters presented within the plays. The play presents and revolves around the three main leading characters. But, as said Mahesh Elkunchwar has tried to his best to create the leading characters with female as the central point and story revolving around them and their problems. The female characters presented in the play are the kind of women what we find in each and every country women with characters- Dolon, Shubhada and Shubadhra, and few male characters. Elkunchwar has created and to his best and maintained a gap of gender what actually our society follows while presenting each and every character in the play. The women though is shown to be the leading character but, is not that bold and open and neither completely independent. The play shows the inner and outer face of women which she manages by presenting it in the form of a false face. They presented to be a fulfilled and satisfied creature which actually does not turns out to be true in the real sense.

The play completely is an interaction within the three leading characters. The characters of Dolon, Shubhada and Shubadhra

though are mature characters in the play yet we find that few times they show their child like nature in few of the scenes. The play itself opens with the interaction between the two characters Dolon and Shubhada. The two are shown to be discussing about the difference in the culture they follow. Both the characters though not only share difference in the cultures but, actually there is a varied difference in their nature, character, behaviour and even attitude. The characters represented and the dialogues between the two are very non-linear, blurred, purposeless, and sometimes found to be repetitive, yet what we find common with both these characters to the general audience is that they both appear similar to us. The two characters very truly appear to us what the general women in the society faces. The four walls which are very symbolic in the play are also very common in the play. The two have a dialogue conversation with each other which discuss the trap in which both of them are captured. Actually, the characters display in front of us the real nature of a common woman who is also trapped in the bindings of the society yet presents to be happy. Like all the women's do the two characters in the play survive within the four walls with their dreams and hopes. Dolon and Shubhada dream always to be escaping out of the routine, rotten life style they follow. This is similar to what a women always things of, to get away from the monotonous life. A very different yet very intersecting symbol is presented in the play, the window. Dolon is shown to look outside the window in the open sky, which represents that they want to get free, but at the same time this sight is removed with the emergence of the sky scrapers, which also shows that that the two are binded in the development plan of urbanization. Dolon is always shown to be drinking which creates an environment around us that we live in the artificial society which is full of glamour. Also, Dolon is many a times found to be smelling a bottle of scent, which reminds us of the psychological nature what Blanche DuBois followed in *Street car Named Desire*. This again reminds us that the women outer nature might be simple and cultured but, actually inner force of women tells her to be uncultured. Because of this only Dolon is found to be smoking, drinking and smelling particular scent. While on the other hand the world of Shubhada though living with Dolon is different. She is shown to be entangled within her traditions, believes and professionalism. She is shown to be following the metro Politian culture and representing to us the life of a women what we usually see and live. Another character which we feel too close to us is Shubadhra. She represents a typical postmodern woman. Shubadhra is a friend of Dolon and Shubhada, but does not stay with them. She lives separately with her lover Sangram. Sangram, a violent male character what we find in our society. But, like all the usual women in the society she also accepts the violent relationship with Sangram. Even though Dolon and Shubhada denies to such a kind of violent relation but, Shubadhra is shown to accept it very happily as she finds the sweet flowers of love in this fight. Dolon and Shubadhra are typical postmodern characters and are shown to fight against the accepted social- cultural values and ethics.

Characters of Dolon, Shubhada and Shubadhra also can be a representation of id, ego and superego. The characters of what all women have in her. But, more important in this play is that Shubadhra is shown to be independent in nature and frees herself from the four walls created around them. This is aforementioned that the women always tried and is now also trying to free her from the bonds of society. The conclusion of

the play is almost similar to the start of the play, like it started for Dolon and Shubhada in the four walls it ends up again in the four walls and for Shubadhra which starts with the violence it again ends with the person who started with this violence. This reveals that we ultimately whatever it might be always are inescapable from our situations of human civilization and culture.

Conclusion

Mahesh Elkunchwar's plays are free from the clutches of the traditional plays. His contemporary way of handling the situations and the social issues gives a new life to the characters. His play gives the different socio-cultural aspects. Elkunchwar never followed the strict rules of the theatrical play which were orthodox and typical in nature. His plays created a unique standard and position with different theme which were ignored till date especially when it comes to presenting a women. Through the characters of Dolon, Shubhada and Shubadhra Elkunchwar has tried to show the psychological nature of the characters which off course cannot be accepted easily by the society.

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