

The Return of the Ghost of Mother in Muktabai Dikshit's play *Gamble (Jugar)*

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: Written within the Marathi male-dominated theatrical tradition, Muktabai Dikshit's play *Jugar*, translated in English as *Gamble*, projects the themes of bigamy, resistance to bigamy and simultaneously, the suffering of the women trapped in such relationships. The play overtly points out how bigamy becomes an unquestionable privilege and monopoly of men and how the wives suffer humiliation and subjugation. My focus in this paper will revolve around the issue of motherhood, which, as Dikshit represents, resides in a dead and silenced zone and then suddenly returns with a zest, like a ghost.

The purpose of my paper is to highlight that the prohibition to bigamy not only comes from the Bigamy prohibition act or movement, but from the ghostly return of the dead, or from the reappearance of the past as a dangerous outbreak of the uncanny. This appearance of the dead –a technique that Dikshit very effectively uses in the play – creates a language of the mother which does not attempt to replace the language of the father, but points out the ghostly presence of the suppressed mother or the language of the mother that challenges the power of the father.

Methodology: This paper follows the methodology of Interpretive research that tends to read a text with reference to certain theories of literature. It follows the theories of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and the French feminist Luce Irigaray. Apart from this, my paper also follows the method of Discourse analysis – a process of analysing the language of a text.

Findings: My paper hopes to find the answers to certain questions: What happens when the daughter, instead of bearing the lineage of the father, represents the ghost of the dead mother? How does the ghost of the mother re-signify the father-daughter relationship and how the text, apart from being a criticism of Bigamy, turns out to be a rediscovery of the language of the silenced mother that , like a ghost, haunts the privileged position of the bigamous men?

Value: The relevance or value of the paper lies in the prospect that it questions certain hegemonic and patriarchal conviction about lineage. This paper tries to raise question against the patrilineal model of traditional family.

Keywords: Bigamy, Patriarchy, Motherhood, Ghost, Memory.

Introduction

Whereas marriage itself is a hegemonic-cum-colonial practice, bigamy, (the act of marrying one person while legally married to another or, a second marriage by a person during the subsistence of the first marriage) or polygamy (having more than two spouses at a time) is a system that accelerates the ascendancy of men to a more privileged position. It has always been an oppressive social custom that ignores the individuality of women and denies their respectability. It systematically silences the voice of women. Muktabai Dikshit's play *Gamble* was written during the 1950s, particularly when the protest against bigamy was swelling up among some religious communities and it started questioning the immemorial tradition of rejecting the first wife any time and thereby humiliating and insulting the second wife. The Bigamy Prevention movement rigorously put forward the issues of subjugation and suffering of women under the shackles of bigamy and strategically promoted and glorified monogamy. Sushmitharamkumar in an online article "Bigamy As An Offense In India" writes,

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, taking its inspiration and thought from the Manusmriti, makes monogamy the rule for all Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs. If a Hindu man marries another woman when his first wife exists, it shall attract Section 494[11], as per the Act, in order to determine the punishment.

Despite the fact that the playwright belongs to the Maratha (Hindu) community and the legal prevention to bigamy were actually associated with some specific religious groups of India, the practice of marrying more than once by men does always intensify the suffering of women no matter what religious community they belong to.

Dikshit attempts to present the suffering of both the first wife and the second wife in *Gamble*. The play begins with the event where the character named Kishori has come from her in-law's house to her father's house on account of a conjugal problem. As the plot proceeds, we come to know that her husband Vasantryao has planned to re-marry a girl called Usha. Unknown to both Kishori and her sister Baby, their father Babasaheb, a successful

government officer, is bigamous. He married Indirabai for the second time since he thought that his first wife Sharada Joshi was unable to produce child. Contrary to Babasaheb's assumption, Sharada, who left his house angrily to live with her brother in Burma, conceived and gave birth to Usha six or seven months afterwards.

What Dikshit repeatedly endorses in the play is that any form of marriage is like a gamble where happiness is never ensured. Babasaheb's daughter Baby raises her voice against bigamy. She attends all meetings and delivers speeches in favour of the Prohibition of Bigamy Act and always speaks against the plight of women even though she finds no problem in monogamy. Baby's cousin Shrikant also disapproves of the sacrifice of women's happiness in marriage but his opinions are highly charged with male point of view. Usha also supports the independent opinions of girls though she is prepared to entangle herself into a bigamous relationship. In this way, the play reveals the hegemonic mindset of all the characters even though they pose to be protesting against patriarchy. What remains suppressed under the paraphernalia of the discussions on marriage is the existence of the deadmother that complicates the easy-going, simplified reading of the text.

Methodology

To focus on the dead mother, we need to concentrate on Usha's position in the text. The special aspect that Usha brings into the text is that she doesn't know anything about her father and she uses the surname of her mother's forebears. On account of her conversation with Shrikant, she comes to know that Babasaheb is her father and she is going to marry the husband of her stepsister Kishori. Here the remarkable point is the use of mother's genealogy that goes contrary to the rule of the father. In this relation, Luce Irigaray's ideas become pertinent. In the essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother", Irigaray writes:

Given our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. (420)

By supporting this (ignored and suppressed) women's genealogy, Irigaray actually seeks to establish an identity of women. Irigaray proposes to search for the "genealogy of the women within our family: on our mothers' side we have mothers, grand-mothers, great-grandmothers, and daughters." (420) This idea is palpable when Usha says that her mother advised her not to use the father's surname. She identifies herself by the surname Patankar,

her mother's maiden name. Usha even argues that she cannot love her father because she has never seen him and her father is not aware of her existence. The fact that both the daughter and the father are unaware of each other makes the mother's genealogy being carried over to the daughter. Usha makes, to say in terms of Irigaray, a "bodily encounter with the mother" that the father forbids. Usha's use of the mother's surname makes the mother's generative power visible. The superimposition of the language of the father apparently seems to be neutralized.

But Irigaray's idea is only partially supported here. The surname Patankar, for Usha, does not come from the lineage of grandmothers; rather it comes from the paternal line of the grandfathers, again invoking another patriarchal line. Therefore, this existence of mother's genealogy is not untouched by patriarchal order. On the other hand, though Usha uses the surname of her maternal home, her mother Sharada identified herself by her husband's family name.

If the intrusion of the father's line becomes irresistible, then how can the encounter with the mother be possible? How can justice be done to the wife, or the mother, who was completely denied, rejected and almost persecuted? Usha, in support of her mother's standpoint interrogates, "Why should a wife use the name of the husband who deserted her?" (336) How are we to find out the voice of the mother (or the wife) who was wiped out from her husband's life and whose existence was forgotten as if she were dead?

The only way to find an answer to the questions is to feel the presence of the ghost of the dead mother or the dead wife. The suppressed voice can be audible when the dead mother or the dead wife looms upon the life of the living ones. It is only through a connection with the dead that we can make them, to use Irigaray's words, "emerge from silence and subjugation" (420).

This return of the dead invites the hauntological discourse, especially those of Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. In his discussion on genealogy, Derrida writes,

No justice . . . seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are . . . already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (xviii)

In Derrida's discussion, a close affinity with the ghost is repeatedly asserted. Here, the ghost of Usha's mother is the victim of bigamy, hence, a "justice" must be thought of. In his debate on filiation, however, Derrida emphasises the line from father to the son and brings the reference to Hamlet and his confrontation with his dead father. Derrida argues: "It vibrates like an arrow in the course of an irreversible and asymmetrical address, the one that goes most often from father to son, master to disciple, or master to slave..." (xvi). What he seems to overlook is the presence of the ghost of the mother and its disruptive nature. Therefore, the ghost of the mother is not only the victim of patriarchal extermination (here Bigamy) but also an object of a strategic termination from hauntological discourse. Hence, the "justice" in terms of making her existence meaningful, is indispensable. However, Irigaray's proposal of the discovery of mother's genealogy and Derrida's idea of the presence of the specter of the dead together can bring forth a fresh discussion of the questions raised above.

In Act 3 of Dikshit's play Usha goes inside her room just before Babasaheb and Indira come to meet her, to prepare for something. When she returns, both Babasaheb and Shrikant are stunned. She looks exactly like her mother who died years ago. Seeing her, Babasaheb comments:

And this is Usha tai, isn't she? I had such a strange illusion! I suspect I must have seen her before.... Well, there are many people who look alike.... (346)

The resemblance with the dead mother creates "illusion" in his mind. It means that when the specter of the dead mother intrudes upon the realm of the living through the daughter, it distracts the mind and creates a beguiling effect. When she goes inside, her dressing becomes an act of borrowing from the mother to be presentable to the father who is unaware of this father-daughter relationship. Usha acts with the ghost within herself; or rather, the ghost projects itself into the scene where Usha acts and speaks. Now we need to question what does she borrow? It is definitely not only the look, but also the language of the mother. This borrowing is not purposeless. She attempts to borrow the language of mother as if to draw justice from the father's unscrupulous behaviour in the past. This act of seeking justice accuses the father and subjects the father to self-scrutiny. When Usha speaks in the language of the mother, the father is forced to analyse his past activities, even though with a touch of egotistic self-justification.

The ghost of Usha's mother also haunts the life of Indira, the second wife of Babasaheb. In Act 4, Indirabai says to Usha: "Your mother's shadow fell on all the twenty-five years of my

married life. Everything in my home carried the stamp of her touch.” (354) The woman who is invisible in the play, haunts the events and the lives with immense pressure. Her memory becomes unavoidable and irrefutable. It is after her re-visit from the realm of death that the ensuing bigamy (Vasanta's second marriage to Usha) stumbles.

Conclusion

Therefore, the specter of the dead and suppressed woman makes everything “out of joint” as Derrida points out in *Specters of Marx*. This specter vivifies that the present is always haunted by the past. Babasaheb feels agitated and disturbed when Usha speaks from her mother's point of view and demands justice. The specter of the dead wife also disturbed the whole married life of Indira. Thus, the suppressed and annihilated woman speaks and always disrupts the patriarchal ‘normalcy’.

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