



Natsamrat : Shakespearean Way of Staging

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Keywords :

V. V. Shirwadkar is one of the renowned poets and dramatist in the domain of Marathi literature. He began his literary career from 1946 and he contributed the following works viz. 'Durche Dive', 'Dusara Peshva', 'Anand', 'Authelo', 'Ek Hoti Vaghin', 'Koutaiya', 'Chandra Jitha Ugvalt Nahi', 'Beckht', 'Mukhyman-ti', 'Vajjayanthi', 'Rajmukut', 'Vidushak', 'Natsamrat'.

Natsamrat is considered to be a classic in the world of Marathi Drama. The significant thing about the work is that it is not translated nor it is adapted. In fact the work is based on King Lear. Moreover, it is an independent work inspired by the Shakespearean tragedy. Many scholars in Marathi have compared the play with King Lear using different criteria like the tragic vision, the role of fate in the lives of protagonist, etc. But the comparison between King Lear and Natsamrat seems to have been made with certain limitations. Both of them are the Kings of their respective domain and lived a very glorious and central stature in personal and domestic life. At the outset it can be obviously noticed that Natsamrat is a tragedy of a veteran actor who enjoyed a very vital importance in his life but who becomes the victim of old age alienation and estrangement. Natsamrat reveals an intensely tragic fate of an actor who becomes victim of fate and fortune in old age, which is similar to the fate of Lear. Natsamrat suffers the pangs of old age and dishonor inflicted on him by his own children. It is a tragedy of great humanist and actor who succumbs to the ill fate and destiny.

In fact, Natsamrat is a story of Ganpatrao Belwalkar, who withstands great suffering after his retirement from stage acting. He moderately boasts to have spent his initial life in acting with great dignity and vigour and also lived in the web world of glamour and versatility. Now he is trapped and torn between two worlds. Through the character of Natsamrat V. V. Shirwadkar has portrayed the complexity of human behaviour, unlike Shakespeare's Lear, Shirwadkar tries to bring forth the complexities of human traits and obviously shows that man is a mere puppet in the hands of destiny. He has made use of the human conduct and circumstances. For the possibility and plausibility of human tragedy. There is a possibility of comparison between the soliloquies in Lear and Natsamrat.

In Maharashtra in 1960's the professional plays had a great success. They attracted a large number of audience. They gained money. They gained popularity. They dealt with the worldly themes in which the audience lived their day to day life. They looked up drama as a means of entertainment. And the professional plays responded to this expectation of the audience. For them drama was a means of escaping from the worldly life for cheap entertainment for three hours. The characters were not important for them. Only their actions rightly staged that satisfied their dream worlds. And these actions were rarely possible in the real world. And if they were possible in the real world they created stereotypes, which the audience imitated and which gave them temporary satisfaction. In this situation the artistic play called 'Natsamrat' came on the

stage. It was written on 27th 1962 by a playwright called V. V. Shirwadkar. He said, 'He found drama in an individual, in the nature of man and the environment surrounding man.' This play is free from the entanglement of events. The plot is woven around the mind of a great character of Appa Belwalkar. In his youth he rose to the highest status of an actor. He was awarded with large prize money. He distributed his money with the members of his family - his son and daughter. But in his old age he became helpless. No one supported him. The only person who supported him was his wife. After her death he became utterly helpless. The story is Shirwadkar's own. But the staging of the play is modelled on Shakespeare's drama 'King Lear.'

The success of the play was due to its effective staging. The dialogues of Appasaheb were delivered on the middle part of the stage. Other characters with whom he conversed stood beside him. Appa was left alone after his dialogues are over. This is an important technique of stage craft. In Shakespeare's play King Lear sat on the throne. This technique helped Appa to create his own image as a proud old man. In one of his dialogues he said that the audience did not give their love or affection and that he had won their love by forty years of dedicated acting.

Similarly, Appa's soliloquy is staged at the centre. He sits on the chair tired. He seems to imitate King Lear. He tells his own story. He refers directly to other characters even in his soliloquy. His soliloquy is used as chorus. It predicts the next action. As a result other characters who participate in the actions seem like puppets.

The background music is used effectively. It reflects the mood of Appa. It is not concerned with the movements of other characters or their actions. But it highlights Appa's reactions to them. It is supplemented by the light effect. In fact, the light effect is used to highlight the meanings of dialogues. The scene of the well furnished room has full light. The scene opens with blue light. When Appa speaks the light fades out and finally there is darkness. And the location of the scene changes either to the down-stage or to the upstage. The scene of railway station opens slowly as the light is thrown slowly. And the scene of waiting room in the railway station occurs while the light fades out. This suggests the directionless of the fate of Appa. The focus of light is on Appa, the central character in the play. The technique of the light effect is used minutely. It is used as fade in and fades out to suggest the forward movement of the plot.

The following extracts show that the play 'Natsamrat' was modelled on 'King Lear'. V. V. Shirwadkar confesses in the thanks giving for his play 'Natsamrat', that he modelled his play on 'King Lear'. He says, 'I received the plan of transforming 'King Lear' for certain a great actor of Marathi theatre. In the place of the King, the great, I visualized in my mind an age-old great actor. And he alone possessed my mind. I present that picture to the readers and spectators.'

Through the writing of the play 'Natsamrat' and staging it, the playwright had the picture of King Lear in the image of the age old great actor of Marathi theatre.

In the first Act, Belwalkar's soliloquy is in the style of Lear. There is another direct reference to Lear in the first soliloquy. Belwalkar says, "I spoke to our Vasudeorao Kelkar, Vasudeorao is very proud of Shakespeare and very studious – "Professorsaheb, your Shakespeare is not a dramatis, only a Satan, sowing sorrow while presenting Lear on the stage. I saw the faces of old, the faces and I saw their gloomy (desolate) faces. They were not weeping, the young men wept. But these old men broke unmoving as if under stone grinder. And the web of fear that came from their broken faces came on the stage and tried to enter my body. I was entering in thousands and thousands were entering into me. This is not Satan's dexterity, not God's but dramatists."

Belwalkar is certainly the embodiment of Lear. In the play "Natsamrat" V. V. Shirwadkar brought on the stage, the broken but proud Lear in the form of Belwalkar.

In the last speech, Belwalkar imagines himself to be 'Julius Caesar' and later 'Hamlet' when his ones are entreating him to have their shelter. And he acts the role of 'Julius Caesar' who dies proudly when 'Brutus' stabs him. Belwalkar falls on the stage like Julius Caesar and acts dead. The play ends with his speech, "This is the way of Drama, Raja."

Belwalkar started as Lear but ends as Julius Caesar. Lear is the victim of natural forces and Julius Caesar is the victim of deceit in the form of 'Brutus'.

However, Belwalkar poses as Julius Caesar to express his tragic end due to the behaviour of the relations.

To sum up we can say that the play 'Natsamrat' is modelled on 'King Lear' in content. The central theme is faithlessness of the children. But its stagecraft is the contribution of the playwright. The use of the various parts of the stage the background music and the light effect makes not only the movement of the plot natural but also interprets (and not describes) the dialogues and actions. The tragedy of Appa seems convincing to the audience.

In conclusion, it can be said that both the plays share similar vein about intense tragic vision, the downfall of the protagonist the complexity of behavioural patterns and traits of human being. The use of soliloquies and above all the pangs of human life sufferings and destructions in human relationships could be reviewed with similar vein. It is on the basis of psychological and behavioural traits we can find evidences of Shakespearian tragic vision and dramatic motive deeply reflected in the thematic configuration of Natsamrat.