



SEXUALITY VERSUS PSYCHOLOGY: A STUDY OF MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S *GARBO AND DESIRE IN THE ROCKS*

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ABSTRACT

The private pains and subjective aches of individuals assume pivot importance in postmodernist psycho-social study. The traumatic inner bubbling and suppressed soliloquies of self find clear manifestations in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Garbo* and *Desire in the Rocks*. In the so-called pious Indian social structure the word 'sexuality' remains a disguised term and physical passion takes a black covering. The paper thrives to study the purely private feelings of individuals and the impact of unfulfilled desires on them.

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"I was called a decadent hedonist, a self-indulgent Narcissus, a reactionary of the deepest dye, and a whole list of other adjectives was used to instil a feeling of guilt in me, just because I decided to write about the private aches and pains of individuals" ("Notes on Theatre" 330).

The private pains and aches of individuals is hardly a topic which is ever noticed or considered worthwhile for discussion. However it is also true that among several large issues of social idealism, the internal issues of mind are also important and needs to have a better understanding than the existing ones.

One such private issue is the often prohibited term in the Indian context- sexuality or in other words physical passion which every individual faces in various stages of life. This can be explained as, "The ways in which individuals think, feel, and express themselves as sexual beings may shift as young people leave their parents' home and transition to life as a college student" (Lemer 104). This passion receives different attention by the individuals in different varying situations depending upon the various factors which are responsible for the same. Elkunchwar in his plays has dealt in detail with these various aspects of individual responses towards each other which get manifested with physical passion.

Elkunchwar's plays *Garbo* and *Desire in the Rocks* talk about varying individuals who suffer frustration and psychological stress and in turn affect others. The physical passion which they exert, works in the form of control for some and in the form of explosion of frustration for others. These individuals ultimately face self-destruction. This self-destruction becomes the common thread of theme in both the plays *Garbo* and *Desire in the Rocks*, "One can see a natural extension from *Garbo* to *Desire in the Rocks*, in the same acknowledgement of raw expression gathering an all-encompassing force to overpower and control another being to the point of mutual self-destruction" (Banyopadhyay xv).

Raw passion is used by individuals to exercise control over the other being. The ability to express or exercise raw passion gives the individual a confidence which is just the same as when an individual controls the other through any other means. One instance is Intuc in *Garbo* who with the help of his poems and beautiful words tries to impress Garbo. Intuc reminds Garbo about their past relationship of love and joy at a moment of sorrow as an attempt to gain a control over her heart and desire. They talk as if they are lost in past memories. He says:

INTUC: Do you remember I once read you my new poems?

GARBO: Oh yes!

INTUC: How fresh and untainted they seemed then.

GARBO: Those days were like that too. (*Garbo* 55)

Intuc's attempt, although seems to be of genuine affection, aims at the control of Garbo. He does not worry about the wish of Garbo and attempts to establish control physically as well as mentally as he says, "If the body is the only truth, then let's stick to it and make life beautiful" (*Garbo* 61). The desire of Intuc is to control the soul and when he realizes that there is no soul left to be controlled, he attempts to control even Garbo's body. While talking about control and power, ". . . for Intuc it was Garbo's soul that he was hoping to master and elevate to the point where it would take the place of his lost and frustrated aspirations . . ." (Bandyopadhyay xv). Accordingly Intuc faces lots of failures in his life. His career as a professor is at stake and even his fame as a writer fades away. His last collection of poems, "Moharram Tiger" (*Garbo* 60) is rejected and he is left with no choice but to silently mingle with the crowd. Intuc tries to cover up this loss, frustrations and failures with the control he gains over Garbo. He wishes to gain a satisfaction that at least in his love he has some achievement. His



aspirations towards Garbo are justified as compensation to his past failures.

Hemakant in *Desire in the Rocks* is also another form of an individual who longs to gain control over the other individual. However here he does not desire to control through soul and then the body as Intuc in *Garbo*, but proceeds directly to control the body. Hemakant desires to achieve success and become famous as a sculptor. However, in his childhood his desire was not understood by anyone. He complains, "No. There was no way he could have understood my obsession. (Pause.) Lali, nobody can understand the passion that stones inspire in my hands. Nobody. That's why it doesn't upset me. My world is different from yours. It's world that is mine alone" (*Desire in the Rocks* 74). Hemakant's dream of the peak of success is disliked by his parents from his childhood. This forces him to leave the house. He struggles for fifteen years through various "alien lands" (*Desire in the Rocks* 74).

When Hemakant sees a perfect model for his statues in Lalitha, his sister, he is filled with the desire to control her for his passion in sculpting. In order to create beautiful statues he uses Lalitha's passions and emotions. He develops a physical relationship with his sister against the concern of the villagers who consider it a sinful act. He rouses her to the highest passion and then he leaves her to carve that moment in stone. As he says, "Wait. Stay as you are. You look like a self-willed palash tree flaming with red blossoms. This mood. One more mood. I'll catch it in my sculpture. You're trembling. How you tremble. This trembling will tremble again in my stones. Lali you are beautiful" (*Desire in the Rocks* 90). Hemakant uses Lalitha's physic to his benefit and remains objective during all his physical encounters with her. For the moods he needs to sculpt on his rocks, he abuses her body and passions. This is analysed as, "for Hemakant it is Lalitha's body that he would like to recast in stone so that it holds perpetually the passion that he draws out of her, with all the intensity of the forbidden and the defiance that is part of it", "it" being the "all-

encompassing force to overpower and control another being . . ." (Bandyopadhyay xv).

Intuc and Hemakant are on two platforms of control by raw passion. Intuc uses words and his attempt to control Garbo with raw passion is not fulfilled whereas, Hemakant entirely uses raw passion to control Lalitha and to change her into a living statue from which he copies on his rocks. Similarly Shrimant from *Garbo* is another individual who exercises raw passion in order to achieve control and ultimately satisfaction. His control over Pansy's body comes from his frustration which he justifies saying, "Pansy, you are the only one who can give me back my body. Women are no use to me now . . ." (*Garbo* 53). Shrimant is an officer who is rich from his youth. However his rich life leads him to immoral living and he chooses drugs as a resource to gain happiness in life. He substitutes raw passion to happiness in life. This bears him sweet fruits at first but later gives him bitter results as he loses his physical body and its strength. It is this frustration which he drops on Pansy. He keeps all tricks to keep Pansy with him. He spends all his time, money and forces him to stay when each time Pansy decides to go back to his parents. He believes and hopes that this physical adjustment with Pansy instead of a woman will compensate for the sterility in his body. However, this creates a stagnant sterility in his life thereby making his incapability more pronounced and loud. The frustration in his life due to his body becomes more pronounced as Pansy rebels and announces to his friends, Shrimant's dirty tricks. Shrimant in turn shouts in frustration:

SHRIMANT: Where can I go? If you leave me I'll kill myself. There's no other way. (Pause.) Garbo are you angry with me? But this is how it is. Why? Why? Tell them if you like. Tell them. (Pause.) What's the point of hiding anything now? I stand naked before you. Tell them everything. (Silence. Shouts.) I'm a flop in her bed these days. D'you know that? Flop, flop, utter flop. (Pause.) You know it now. Now let me have it. Your scorn. Your ridicule. Oh God. (*Garbo* 52)



Thus, Shrimant's life begins in frustration and even after several attempts ends in frustration. Garbo too is an individual like Shrimant who attempts to conceal her frustration but ultimately ends in futile. Garbo, an actress in B grade movies faces turmoil in her life as her body and entire appearance start ageing. Her wish to become a famous actress seems to be disappearing and, "In her case the tragedy is more pronounced since she is fast losing her glamour because of the inevitable process called ageing" (Jayaseelan 71). She confesses her condition unlike Shrimant who tries hiding it. She says, "I'm on the wrong side of thirty-five, and prepared to go to bed with anybody who'll give me a role" (Garbo 38).

Garbo faces frustrations even from her friends as they bestow her with unacceptable titles. Shrimant terms her, "The greatest sex-machine on earth" (Garbo 20). She is forced to a life which can be summarized as, "Garbo has no choice but to live up to her image of the "sex goddess"" (Jayaseelan 71). This frustration pushes her to search for some solace. She achieves this with Pansy who worships her as a guardian deity and looks up to her as a mother image. Garbo uses Pansy's young physic to ease her frustrations. Her false image as a mother tricks and fools Pansy, who regards her as a mother figure while it is actually Garbo's explosion of passions on Pansy, because of her life's tensions. Questions of doubt as, "She is able to look at the boy with whom she has shared her bed as her son. The relationship is unquestionably oedipal in nature. Is it because a woman will never miss an opportunity to play the role of a mother" (Jayaseelan 73) arise. This relationship also leads to frustrations in turn as Pansy grows more dependent on her. She is unable to keep or throw away the idea of motherhood which is frustrating for her.

Sexuality works in these individuals as a mode of manifesting their inner condition whether it is frustration or a desire to control. The idea of sexuality is continuously evolving into various complex meanings. One such is E Munck's idea in his *Ethics of Sexuality - Ethics of Sexology*, "Today,

sexuality is no longer governed by rigid religious rules and taboos but has become a very personal matter for the individual" (qtd. in Dijkstra 36). Elkuchwar also brings this idea of sexuality into his play, *Desire in the Rocks* where he brings a clash between the rigid religious rules and sexuality as a personal matter. The villagers as depicted by Elkunchwar refuse to accept Lalitha or Hemakant due to their breaking the religious rules. They exclude Lalitha saying, "If you want to sin, go sin in your cursed mansion. Don't come to defile this place" (*Desire in the Rocks* 110).

Curse is an idea brought out by Elkunchwar not only in the words and deeds of the villagers but also as an imagery wherein the large mansion stands as a symbol of curse and punishment. The incomplete desires of Lalitha and the objective passion of Hemakant result in their being frustrated. Incompleteness and barrenness enters their selves thereby punishing them from within. Elkunchwar balances the symbols to form the meaning as:

The slow growth and eventual outburst of violence in/from the community matches the course of the pitched battle between Hem and Lalitha, though maybe at a different level. Primeval passions lie at the root of both the passages of violence; the passion that holds a conventional society together against inroads from outside, and the passion that will hurl itself at the constraints to break free. It is the violent confrontation of the two passions that charges the Hem—the Lalitha relationship with a corrosive, self-destructive force. (Bandyopadhyay xvii)

The incompleteness of Lalitha's love toward Hemakant and Hemakant's incomplete attempt of remaining objective during his experience of raw passion, leave them barren. This not only creates frustration but adds to it the feeling of being cursed which is supplemented by the villagers and their myths and finally leads to complete destruction.

Intuc also falls into incompleteness as he loses his control over Garbo and becomes hostile toward Garbo: He says, "Let's go to bed. Now that



you have grown barren, that is all you are good for anyway. Come" (*Garbo* 62). Intuc loses his love for Garbo and this change into hatred and disgust. Frustration in Intuc leads to his own destruction as he becomes totally hollow from within. This is expressed in the form of hostility towards life.

Shrimant, on the other hand is an individual whose frustration forms a circle wherein he begins to inflict pains on others in order to come out of this incompleteness. His frustrations make him force himself on Pansy. However this leads him to even more incompleteness as Pansy never accepts him, thereby pronouncing Shrimant's weakness loudly. Shrimant at this moment comes to realize his barrenness and his act of inflicting pain is heightened as he bursts out in hating anyone who is around him. One such instance is:

INTUC: Come Garbo, come ...

SHRIMANT: No. Not in my house.

INTUC: Garbo.

SHRIMANT: No. Never again will anybody find sexual happiness here. (*Garbo* 61)

Shrimant is unable to bear anyone talk about the idea of raw passion as he himself is barren both physically and mentally. Garbo in one way sails in the same boat in which Shrimant is struggling. In an attempt to take revenge on the Director who does not give her any importance, Garbo not only loses her baby but also her capability to bear children. She is physically barren and the barrenness pushes her to the realization of incompleteness. She is no more a mother to Pansy and detests him. His words of love receive hostile replies as she says, "Lovely. Charming idea. It's all very well your slobbering over me now. But it won't last long, when you grow a little older, you'll ditch me and leave, and I'll remain alone, an old hag" (*Garbo* 58). Garbo loses her only meaning of life and her relationship with Pansy reaches its climax and falls- "The boy's love for her only makes her loathe him even more. In reality it is self loathing" (Jayaseelan 74).

Pansy, on the other hand meets with disillusionment due to his misuse both by Shrimant and Garbo. The condition of Pansy can be expressed as, ". . . Pansy charging Shrimant with homosexual assault, Garbo taking responsibility for corrupting Pansy . . ." (Bandyopadhyay xiv). Pansy not only detests Shrimant for his attack on her but also Garbo for her reality. The hostility shown by Garbo and her internal barrenness make her hate him. His only hope that Garbo would save her from Shrimant is shattered as she does not even shield her from Shrimant. He wishes to commit suicide but is unable to gather his courage to do so. His illusion of Garbo as a mother breaks down:

GARBO: Don't come to my place. I'll throw you out.

PANSY: I'll commit suicide.

GARBO: Do it.

PANSY: You've deceived me. You deceived me.

GARBO: This is nothing. I've deceived you in a much bigger way. You deserve it. (*Pause.*) Listen carefully. There was no accident. I meant to kill my baby. (*Pause.*) Do you understand? I killed that baby. (*Garbo* 64)

Pansy's regard towards Garbo breaks as he realizes about her heartlessness to the baby. This creates barrenness in his life and he realizes that he has been used as an object by both Garbo and Shrimant.

Elkunchwar in this way creates a platform in his plays for the internal pains and sorrows that individuals of various background face. The two plays which are taken for analysis are from two different backgrounds. *Garbo* is set in a busy city and among busy working urban individuals who belong to various walks of life and place whereas *Desire in the Rocks* is set in the rural side of the society with individuals who attempt to break the conventional understanding of the society. Elkunchwar moves



from the cramped rooms of urban cities to the deserted mansion of the village.

However at every level the problem is the same. High frustrations and desires move the individuals to manifest their self and their strength sexually. The individuals not only harm themselves but even others in turn. This seems to be pleasing to the individuals up to a level but later it turns out to be bitter. This is projected by Elkunchwar in his plays- "Elkunchwar's development has covered a course from an almost uncontrolled outpouring of raw passion to a superbly controlled interplay of emotions barely emerging into view" (Bandyopadhyay xxx). The outpouring of raw passions is witnessed in two forms. One form is that of words as in *Garbo* and the other form is that of actions as in *Desire in the Rocks*. In *Garbo*, Elkunchwar places the individuals with various psychological dilemmas and grows them to their tragic end whereas in the latter, he places only two individuals with different dilemmas, makes their mental stress into the same one and brings out the interplay of actions, emotions and deeds against the repelling backdrop of the village.

However with such wide differences in the platform set by Elkunchwar, both end in a similar fate. Sexuality in an uncontrolled, savage atmosphere leads the individuals of the play toward destruction. All the individuals of the plays of Elkunchwar end up in a destructive fate and none is saved. Garbo is murdered and does not even receive sympathy at the end. All that she receives is meaningless barren conclusion given by Intuc who says, "Garbo's gone. Murdered. Or did she die first and was murdered later" (*Garbo* 66). Intuc's words have layers of meaning. By falling prey to barrenness and hostility, Garbo is indeed dead even while living. She is equal to a zombie or a living dead body. She misuse her sexuality which ultimately leads to the death of her emotions and compassion and what is left is her lifeless body which is killed.

Intuc faces his spiritual death as his love for Garbo dies. All his love quotes for her are changed to hate as he exclaims, "She's beginning to sicken me.

So abject" (*Garbo* 65). Even the death of Garbo does not move him and he just looks at her and gives his morbid philosophical conclusion to her saying, "Blood. The blood is real ... Garbo was false" (*Garbo* 66). Intuc's soul is too destroyed.

Pansy not only faces destruction spiritually but also physically as he falls prey to Shrimant for life. His shout to the world through the window is heard by no one as the play ends, "Help! Help! (*Silence.*) Nobody's coming. What now? What now" (*Garbo* 66). He faces isolation and alienation, which is his ultimate end.

Shrimant destroys himself and others around him. He becomes a murderer and this does not even affect him. His emotions and humanity are completely dead. Even at this moment he tries to have Pansy for his frustrations. He says, "Pansy, don't shout. Stay with me" (*Garbo* 66). Although he attempts to keep his sexuality alive by hoping for Pansy, he is dead spiritually.

Hemakant and Lalitha end their lives in destruction in all forms. The play can be summed as, "There is violence at both the levels, though perhaps more physical and collective in the former, and more verbal and mutually recriminatory in the latter" (Bandyopadhyay xx). Hemakant is unable to feel the guilt of what he has done on Lalitha initially. He realizes this at the end and this makes him feel incomplete. Lalitha on the other hand loses herself from the time when her baby is born dead. She realizes that she and Hemakant have lost their touch with truth and thereby brought destruction over themselves. They are beaten by the villagers and Lalitha herself brings an end for themselves. She burns the mansion down and destroys herself as well.

All the individuals portrayed by Elkunchwar face their destruction, either physically or spiritually. Heightened passions result in them killing each other and the manifestation of the mental crisis to sexuality leads them to the ultimate end.

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