

Lecture 19

Summary of Mahesh Elkunchwar

Good morning, let us now, complete our discussion of Mahesh Elkunchwar plays, by looking at the slides.

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Mahesh Elkunchwar

- Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939), born in a Telugu Brahmin family, migrated to Vidharba district in Maharashtra. He completed his education in Nagpur University. In Nagpur he was exposed to Marathi theatre and influenced by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar.
- Experimented with expressionist and absurdist theatre.
- Theatre for him had to do with realizing the multiple possibilities of the experience of life.
- Challenged the hierarchy between art and ideology, between individual and social or collective pain and suffering.
- Emphasis on poetry, and the gestural repertoire of the body to connote emotions.

Mahesh Elkunchwar born 1939 was in a born and Telugu Brahmin family and migrated early on to vidharba district in Maharashtra. He completed his education in Nagpur University. And it was a Nagpur that he was exposed to Marathi theatre and influenced by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. He experimented the expressionist an absurdist theater. Theater for him had to do, with realizing the multiple possibilities of the experience of life. He also challenged the hierarchy, between art and your ideology, between individual and social or collective pain and suffering. There was also, an emphasis on poetry, in his or the poetic mode, in his theatre through the gestural, repertoire of the body of the actors body, to connote emotions.

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Garbo

- Portrays the alienation and isolation of urban life in Bombay from the perspective of three male characters from Nagpur. Shrimant is a wealthy businessman, Intuc a professor and Pansy an adolescent. They are all struggling and experience the sterility of their lives.
- Garbo is a “sex-machine” for Shrimant, an exalted mother-figure for Pansy and an inexhaustible aesthetic ideal for Intuc. All the men seek redemption and hope through their imagination of Garbo on whom they project their frustrations and fantasies.
- They use their desires to transcend themselves but their private fantasies of Garbo is undermined by her bitter comebacks and self-contempt as a B grade actress who has sexual affairs with many men.

In the first play we discussed Garbo. Will portrays the alienation and isolation of urban life in Bombay, from the perspective of three male characters from Nagpur. Shrimant is a wealthy businessman, Intuc a professor and pansy and adolescent. They are all struggling and experienced the sterility, of their lives. Garbo is Shrimant calls a, ‘Sex Machine’ and she's an exalted, mother figure of a pansy and an inexhaustible aesthetic ideal for Intuc. All the men seek redemption and hope, through the imagination of Garbo, on whom they project their frustrations and fantasies. They use a desire to transcend themselves, but their private fantasies of Garbo is undermined, by her bitter comebacks and self-contempt, as a b-grade actress, who has sexual affairs with many men.

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- Each of the men see their collection salvation in Garbo’s baby that they later discover was aborted by her during a shoot. They are initially hopeful that the baby will inherit their name but they are later disillusioned and realize they are condemned to remain in their world of filth and sterility.
- Shrimant is revealed as an emasculate and insecure man who needs Garbo to validate his masculinity and sexual prowess while he actually wants Pansy, with whom he has also had a sexual affair. Intuc confesses he is a poet who lacks originality and needed Garbo as his muse who would inspire artistic creativity but now that she cannot become a mother again, they welcome her as a part of their sterile world.

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- The body seems to be the only reality and the sexual act the only way of potentially attaining identity and recognition and relief from a sterile world. But even the body ends up becoming a lie. Shrimant stabs Garbo in the end, the blood is real but Garbo is no more. They realize the Garbo they knew was merely an embodiment of their fantasies of redemption and transcendence. She is barely given the opportunity to speak or resist their constructions of her.

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The Old Stone Mansion

- Set in the old decrepit mansion of the Deshpandes, a landed Brahmin family that is losing its status and power to newly instituted land reforms.
- The growth of Bombay as a metropolis that promises jobs, enables many other caste groups from the village, particularly the cooks who work for the Deshpandes, to migrate to Bombay in search of jobs. Other lower caste groups brew liquor or work in newly set up restaurants in the village.
- The play was inspired by Anton Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* that described socio-economic transformations in early 20th century Russia, with the abolition of serfdom, the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class. The orchard that belongs to a landowner has to be auctioned and sold to a newly freed serf and is chopped off at the end of the play as the family moves out.

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- The tractor is a symbol of the hollow prestige of the Deshpande family, something that is no longer an economic investment in a village with small land holdings and hardly any electricity.
- Bhaskar, the eldest son, refuses to accept that they are no longer as rich as they were. They are indebted to the vegetable seller who has now started his own business and wants to buy their orchard if they can't repay their debts. Bhaskar wants to have an extravagant funeral for his father and asks Sudhir for money. Power over the household is transferred from the mother-in-law to Vahini, Bhaskar's wife and eldest daughter-in-law.
- But Sudhir and his wife Anjali struggle to make ends meet in Bombay, an expensive city, where one has to work all the time to repay loans and mortgages and just survive in a rented apartment. The rest of family assumes he leads a comfortable life and cannot imagine urban debt.

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hardly any electricity. Bhaskar, the eldest son, refuses to accept that they are no longer as rich as they were. They are indebted to the vegetable seller, who has now started his own business and wants to buy the orchard, if they can't repay their debts. Bhaskar wants to have an extravagant funeral for his father and ask Sudhir for money. Sudhir who is, his younger brother. Power over the household also his transfer from the mother – in – law Vahini, Bhaskar's wife and eldest daughter – in – law. And you must remember that Sudhir also, Sudhir also unable to give Bhaskar the money, because he is himself, struggling to make ends in, men's meat in Bombay, which is an expensive city, where one has to work all the time to repay loans and mortgages and just survive in a rented apartment. The rest the family assumes, he leads a comfortable life and cannot imagine urban debt.

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- The family berates Anjali for her Konkanastha Brahmin origins, her fair skin and education. Her son Abhay is supposed to be a good student and sportsman. Abhay is contrasted to Parag, Bhaskar's son, who is a drunk wastrel and drug addict.
- The patriarch's daughter Prabha wanted to study further and leave the house but her father never let her.
- Different generations of characters symbolize historical change – the patriarch's mother has lost her memory and still thinks her son is alive, the patriarch's widow Aai has her share of the house sold by Bhaskar to raise money to repay their debts.

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- The Deshpandes are only left with their ancestral jewelry, which is a symbol of their familial reputation. Bhaskar's daughter Ranju is exposed and drawn to the urban world through the radio and her English tutor with whom she has an affair and elopes, taking the jewelry with her. But the tutor deceives her and steals the jewelry and Sudhir ends up bringing Ranju back in a taxi to preserve the family's reputation. This ruins Prabha's only hope of seeking her share of the jewelry and escaping the house.
- Parag is let down by his uncle Sudhir, he hopes to go to Mumbai with him so that he may have access to a more exciting and freer urban world.
- The play ends with the backyard and orchard being mowed down as it is being sold to save the family from bankruptcy. Chandu is the only son who sacrifices his happiness to take care of his mother and sister.

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Desire in the Rocks

- The play is a story of incest and the sterility of life. The play has two major characters, Hemakant and Lalitha, who are brother and sister and five unnamed women from the village.
- The play like Garbo depicts the self as a site for a drama between the oppressive norms of society and the transgressive impulses of art and eroticism that challenges these norms. This battle is embodied in the body of the woman, in this case, Lalitha, which results in the disillusionment of the man and the de-idealization of the woman.
- Lalitha has spent all her life trapped in a wooden mansion. She was her father's adoptive daughter who abandoned her in the mansion. She belongs to a lineage that is believed to have been cursed with no natural surviving heirs. Every child is stillborn, which is why Dadasaheb, Lalitha's adoptive father abandons her in the mansion to pursue his own education. She is reunited with her much older brother twenty years after he left the mansion to pursue his career as an artist.

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- Hemakant is initially an emotionally detached artist who is willing to isolate himself for the sake of art. Lalitha is the embodiment of his unconscious desire, his creativity. He uses her to assume different postural expressions of his ideal embodiment of love and desire.
- She loves Hemakant but he is unable to return her love. She accuses him of being a fake artist, and he believes she does not understand art. There is an authoritarian nature to Hemakant's unconscious world of art and eroticism and Lalitha is willing to surrender herself to own and possess Hemakant and the transformation in Hemakant occurs when his statues of Lalitha are destroyed by the villagers.
- Lalitha who claims to be a creator like Hemakant gives birth to a dead baby, which confirms her fear that she has sinned by loving her own brother for which she continues to live 'in sin' by turning to prostitution to survive. She has no access to her own ancestral property, which is managed by trustees.

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- When Lalitha sings to a baby, the child of one of the women in the village, they scold her and outcaste her for being an unlucky and sinful presence.
- Both Lalitha and Hemakant realize they are both sterile creators. Hemakant is stoned and beaten up by the villagers while Lalitha turns to prostitution. They realize the falsity of the body, and even as they surrender to each other in love and intimacy they are both destroyed in the mansion where they lived.

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Sonata

- The play depicts the subtle power dynamics between three women, all in their forties and friends from school. Two of them, Aruna and Dolon have been living together for seventeen years in Dolon's lavish flat in a skyscraper in Bombay.
- The play's double, Dolon and Aruna, use Subhadra's affairs and lifestyle, and the lonely typist neighbor to boost their own sense of superiority and privilege.
- Intimacy and animosity are the two mutually reinforcing forces that characterize their relationships.
- They do not approve of Subhadra's promiscuity and her relationship with a violent drunkard.

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- For Subhadra, her friends are a temporary source of relief from her violent and intimate relationship with the man. She is a journalist who has just lost her job.
- After Subhadra exits, the secret desires and animosity between Dolon and Aruna is revealed. Aruna is a disciplined Sanskrit Professor who also writes sentimental stories for a women's magazine. She is also emotionally distant and not open to touching and being touched by others. Dolon is a banker who is self-indulgent and restlessly searching for attention and intimacy.
- If Subhadra's insecurities are concealed by her obsession with attractive men, Dolon is obsessed with her own Bengali culture, Rabindrasangeet and food, and Aruna has intellectual pretensions in terms of her career as a prestigious and well travelled scholar and as a writer.

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- Dolon resents the fact that Aruna wrote a story of a woman who leads a reckless life and is a thinly veiled allusion to Dolon. She thinks Aruna has betrayed her.
- Later, Dolon reveals her implicit desire for Aruna and her betrayal when she had an intimate encounter with her ex-husband Avinash. Aruna is willing to let go of the past and restores her friendship with Dolon.

Dolon resents the fact that Aruna wrote a story of a woman, who leads a reckless life and is a thinly veiled allusion to Dolon. She thinks Aruna has betrayed her. Later, Dolon reveals her implicit desire for Aruna and her betrayal when she had an intimate encounter, with her ex-husband Avinash. Aruna is willing to let go of the past and restores a friendship with Dolon. This ends our discussion of Mahesh Elkunchwar plays, now we will move on to, the plays of Mahesh Dattani. Thank you.