



THEMATIC STUDY OF G. P. DESHPANDE'S *ROADS*

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ABSTRACT

Govind Purushottam Deshpande (1938-2013) was a Marathi playwright and academician. He used to teach at the center for East Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He was conferred with the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award for playwright in 1996 and honoured by Maharashtra State Award for collective work in 1977. He also edited a book of anthology of Indian dramas in translation, Modern Indian Drama published by Sahitya Akademy in 2004.

INTRODUCTION

The play 'Roads' was originally written in Marathi language by the well known leftist ideologue G.P. Deshpande. It has been translated into English by Aniket Jaaware. The drama was also translated into many languages, in Hindi it is known as 'Rastey'. This drama proved to be very successful on the stage.

The drama 'Roads' presents healthy ideological discussion. It tends to presents the ideological differences between the three college friends, Gangadhar, Gokhale and Kachubhai. Madhav, the narrator is a son of Gangadhar. The audience is taken into flashback mode in 1970s when these three friends were studying in Baroda. Gangadhar was a diehard follower of Marxism. Gokhale was a nationalist and his inclination was more towards Savarkarite ideology. Kachubhai was a Jain religious person but practical, like all baniya community, found well balance in his pragmatism and religion. Their ideological differences have been presented by the dramatist through their never ending dialectics. Ideological discussion was the core of their friendship as well as the highlight of the drama. The treatment to the dialectics makes the drama worth of reading and the author has given objective treatment to their discussion. In an article in the Newspaper Hindu, it has been pointed out that, 'The intensity and honesty of debate in the play is a welcome relief to the superficial engagement with politics in many contemporary plays.' Though the drama is politically motivated but the objective presentation adds freshness to it. In addition to the discussion on ideology drama also presents an emotional issue related with Gagadhar's daughter who was absconding from last seven years. The author has used a technique to

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present Durga, Gangadhar's daughter by bringing her on the stage every time whenever her letters were being read. Her absence in the family affected everyone. This incident makes drama more lively and interesting. The drama makes the audience more curious to know about the mysterious absconding of Durga.

Gangadhar was a retired journalist, well settled and led a peaceful life. He made a good property by making shopping mall on his ancestral land. Madhav, his son and narrator works in a bank but is not satisfied with his life. His daughter called Durga though absconding from seven years, writes letters to him. His wife, like all traditional Indian women, was submissive to her husband. Gangadhar was a staunch supporter of Marxism. Throughout his life he believed in the Marxism and has firm faith in its ideology. His faith in the ideology is so extreme that he would believe that Marxism is the only solution for all the problems of society. Communism only can bring transformation, revolution and have power to change the world. The impact of Communism was so immense on him that he was never tired of speaking in favour of it. His son Madhav himself remarks, 'People are blindly religious, our Dada is blindly Marxist...' (Modern Indian Drama, p.719). The dramatist, himself a Marxist ideologue, has given enough space to propagate leftist ideology. Marxist Gangadhar sometimes seems to be his mouthpiece, he would often suggest that Marxism is the only remedy for all the problems of the world. He says, 'We (Marxist) are the only ones who think of the whole of the future. Our eyes are fixed on the glorious future of everyone.....This world has become liveable because of Marx' (p.723). He further says, 'The world is a better place because of Marxism' (p718). He is an incorrigible Marxist whose faith in Marxism doesn't shake in spite of its failure in Russia and other parts of the world. He says, 'We (Marxist) occasionally, stumble, lose, but always get up again. We will rise even if we fall now'(p.723). He would still believe that the future of the world is bright only when there is Marxism. He again says, 'We always think positively. We see the future'(p.723). His faith in Marxism was absolute and limitless. He himself says, ' People think I was born in Moscow' (p.734). Throughout his life like a true worshipper of God, he worshiped Marxism. Sometimes we feel that his devotion towards Marxism is blind, he doesn't see any lacuna in it. He seemed to be an optimist who would visualize utopian world.

Gokhale, a Brahmin nationalist, was a childhood friend and classmate of Gangadhar. Gangadhar, Kachubhai and Gokhale studied in Baroda, all faced their life in their own different ways. Gokhale and Kachubahi went to Chicago in America. Gokhale, a professor of Sanskrit, became the resident of America. A man never tired of speaking about nationalism, accepted nationality of another country. The author has tried here to present the hypocrisy of pseudo nationalistic people. After his wife prematurely died, he took lot of care of his children Sucharita and Sriram. But to his great disappointment Sucharita married an Anglo-Indian and Shriram married an American girl. As the narrator says, 'Gokhale uncle is not a type who says, this is my American daughter-in-law'(p.734). Gokhale can never tolerate that his grandchildren will have one Hindu and another western name. He totally cut off his



relations with his children and never talked about them. He joined a movement to strengthen Hindu sensibilities.

Gokhale, a nationalist believes that if nation has to become great, it is necessary for the people of that nation to understand its ancient history. He says, 'The experience of ancientness too makes my present life meaningful' (p.739). Hinduism has 6000 years history. Marxism emphasizes that the concept of nation is their invention but Gokhale reiterated that the concept of Rashtra can be found in ancient puranas and hence it is not a new philosophy. He criticizes Marxism and says, 'The leaders of people like you sit in Peking or Moscow and dictate the people. And they have cheek to call that dictatorship people's democracy. And mock a real, vital democracy.....counter revolutionary, Imperialist' (p.720). His nationalistic feeling is so intense that he never hesitated to say, 'This is my nation. There's Bharatvarsha in every drop of my blood. It is the tradition of this nation that give some meaning to my life'(p.721). Like fundamental Hindu he attends shakhas and even advocated the philosophy of Savarkar. He objects to those people who oppose the Manu. He even went on to tell that the people who hated Manu had never read a single line of Manusmurti. Gokhale further stressed that his nationalism is not blind like the followers of Marxism.

Gokhal was not happy with the prevailing situation of Hindu dharma for he felt that extremism had really hurt the true meaning of Hindu. He expressed disappointment thus, 'Hindu dharma is in bad shape. Anybody can say whatever they want to, and get away with it. Even those who can't even spell dharma.... All speak freely about Hindu dharma'(p.736). He accepted the fact that he was pro modern like Gangadhar but rooted in traditions and proud of the ancient Indian heritage. He believes that, 'Roads' become indistinct when one forget history.

Kachubhai Shah is a pragmatic character. Right from the beginning he has been presented as the second self of both Gangadhar and Gokhale. He doesnot hesitate to criticize both of them. He is a character who is combination of two opposite qualities, he was a religious and at the same time very pragmatic, like his baniya community. He participates in the discussion of the friends but never upheld views of any one friend. His views on everything are practical and without any prejudice. He doesn't believe in the words of Gangadhar who says that only Marxism can bring transformation. When Gokhale talks about Savarkarian ideology, he snubs him and says that the people of Gokhale school have taken a contract to keep religion alive. When in the discussion Gangadhar and Gokhale point out their failure to each other, Kachubhai like true practical observer of things says,

'Nobody wished to acknowledge their own responsibilities for anything. Criticise others, and shrug off one's own responsibilities. Soviet union thought that the world has gone stupid because of America. Atheist think all Hindus are guilty. Dalit company pour blame on some monster called Manu.... I feel that this is the first step towards destruction'(p.741).



The most important character in the play is Durga, the daughter of Gangadhar. The drama revolves around her mysterious absconding. She is the most rebellious character in the play. Her rebellious and adamant attitude is the result of her upbringing. She has been pampered by her father and brother. She herself remarks, 'This Durga was so pampered in this house that I never got to know the Gog and Magog of prohibitions, restrictions'(p.716). Durga has been presented in the play as a mysterious character. Her identity is revealed only through her letters. She has been absconding from last seven years. Though she was only in touch with her father but through her letter. She has left her house to follow her own Road. She has been given all the freedom by her father to take her own decisions. She too believes blindly in Marxism like her father. She wants to bring transformation in the society. But her romantic view about Marxism shattered when she started facing reality. Ultimately her disappointment in Marxism resulted in to her joining an underground organization which aims at bringing transformation but through violence. Her brother, Madhav point out that her faith and belief in the ideology of Marxism is because of their father. He says, 'These Marxist ideas crawl in your head because of Dada'(p.723). She doesn't write to her brother, but his care and love for his sister made him to go through the letters which were written for his father. In this way he secretly reads the letter and get news of his sisters well- being. The name of the organization for which Durga works has not been mentioned in the play. Madhav pleads his sister to reveal the name of the organization, but it has been kept secret till the end of the drama. To join the organization was her own decision.

Durga was not a traditional submissive kind of women. She was well educated and pro modern women. She doesn't hesitate to talk even about her affairs. She herself boldly admits that she had four affairs. Shivaraman her lover and leader of the organization asked her, ' You had three friends in college. Boyfriends. I mean affairs'(p.728). Durga replies, ' Four.' The fourth affair she had with professor Umakant Karmarkar, who was married and twenty two years older than Durga. Madhav, her brother asked her the unique feature of Umakant that had attracted her. She answers that he taught her how to look at life, he gave magical liveliness to life. But he was coward enough to hid his affair from his wife. All Durga's affairs end with disappointment. Her search for relationship yield nothing. She never gave importance to her body when she wanted to follow her ideal Road. All these four affairs of Durga were her search to find some meaning in her life.

She wanted to devote her life for the cause of the society to bring radical changes in it. She wants to work for the society where everybody should get justice, nobody will remain deprived from justice. She doesn't want to play the traditional role of a woman. She wants to make her life more meaningful. Shivaraman once informed to Durga that she was different from contemporary women. She answers,



‘In some aspects. Otherwise there is no difference between me and these modern girls of today. I am talking of emotional and sexual relationships. If there is a difference, that’s in the point of view. Our needs. For others, marriage and career are enough. For me they are not..... I don’t think that interpreting the world is enough. I believe that it has to be changed’(p.728-729).

The dramatist has portrayed a very beautiful relationship between a father Gangadhar and his daughter Durga. The father and daughter relation were ultra modern in a sense that she even discusses almost all her matters with her father including her affair. There was an emotional bond between father and daughter. Gangadhar believed that his daughter was working for the betterment of the world. Her Road is her own selection but it is not wrong at all. Durga always have had her father’s support for everything she does.

Durga was influenced by her father’s Marxist ideology but eventually she realized that the change which she wanted to bring in the society, a transformation where everyone will get justice, is elusive. Then she gets frustrated and joins a radical group.

Durga works for an underground organization but there comes differences of opinion which is also happens to be the climax of the play. The differences arise between the leader of the organization and Durga. Shivaraman also had an affair with Durga. Durga believes that when they work for some greater cause, personal things shouldn’t affect the relationship or politics shouldn’t affect the relationship. Durga and Shivaraman have political as well as personal disagreements. At personal level Shivaraman wanted to marry and wanted that Durga should make compromises, but Durga who was so devoted to her cause didnot agree for the compromises. At political level Durga wanted to bring transformation through radical way. According to Shivaraman, radicalism only leads to suicide.

Durga’s sacrifices, her devotion to her work, her dream of transformation, utopian society were all shattered. She realized that she was running after the mirage, her ideals were hollow, devoid of any value in the real world. Her search for meaningfulness in life proves futile. She gets frustrated and accepted the fact that all her perceived right paths were now no more right. She could not fathom the reason for her belief that her road was the only right road. She could not realize that her path might mislead her and could not understand the reason for believing in a particular ideology blindly.

Durga doesn’t want that anybody should point finger at her father for her failure in the life. Her Aai, her brother and Shivaraman, all pointed that her nature and behavior is the result of her father’s unlimited freedom given to her. But whenever anyone points her father she gets angry. She says that she is not a pampered, loved, made to understand life and a puppet, doll of her father. She says, ‘She is a living flesh and bone woman. She is attempting to see beyond that pampering and love and understand life’(p. 733). She failed in her attempt to find



meaning to her life. Her all decisions were her own and she herself is responsible for it. She has courage to do something to make life meaningful. She says very emotionally, ‘Will I never get to live my own determination? And life will never come across meaningfulness?’(p.733).

Durga wanted to live her life on her own terms. She even has courage to reject the traditional institution like marriage for the sake of her goal. She didn’t marry because it would deviate her from her determination, her goal and her road. Her father is proud of Durga as he considers her a brave fighter, fighting hard on the battle front, combating with the reality which ordinary people just logically think about it.

Durga in her last letter informs her father that she has gone far ahead in her work for the underground organization from where she can never turn back. But after reaching this stage she finds darkness ahead, no rays of hope. The author symbolically presented the ideological failure of the Marxist ideologues who used to believe that Marxism is the only solution to the world and wanted to bring transformation in the society. When people who follow any ideology blindly confront reality, they feel like walking on a road leading nowhere. They feel shattered, dejected, destroyed and this disappointment leads them to only one road, the road of suicide. Here the author gives a message to the young generation to tread the path of ideology carefully without nursing unlimited expectation from it. He urges them not to follow the ideology blindly to avoid disappointment like Durga.

Durga tells that she has got a daughter from her out of marriage relationship with Shivaraman. Durga fears threat to her life after leaving the organization. She also reveals to her father that she can never bear to see injustice in this world. She puts such questions to the listener and makes them speechless. She asks,

‘Why do people get destroyed, why do they have to rub noses on the ground? Will this story of Bali and Vaman never end? Is it the only truth eternal that of beating one’s head against a stone wall?’(p.748).

At the end of the play Durga says that her Road is finished. She doesn’t find any hope in her life and ultimately realized that this is the end of her life. She is quite aware that some people may think that she escaped herself from it. She knew that some may call her brave and gracefull exit as suicide, some would call it Johar or Samadhi. Some people may go to the extent of calling it an irredeemable defeat but she is not at all bothered about them. She draws consolation from the fact that she fought against the injustice. She says, ‘Injustice is more reprehensible, repugnant than countless rapes’(p.748). Durga assures her father that she will never keep quiet, will raise her voice against the injustice till her last breath. She thanks her father for giving her this strength to fight against injustice. The dramatist remarks,



‘Her quest for change and struggle continues from one generation to the next, fresh ideas will continue to blaze often paved with the blood of those who created them’ (p.721).

The author positively presented that those people who want to bring real transformation in the world will never cease, will continuously struggle against any heavy odds and surely in their sacrifice, they will laid down the Road which will bring ideal change in the society.

The last important character in the play is the narrator of the story, Madhav who is the son of Gangadhar and brother of Durga. He has been presented as a confused young man. He is very much concerned about the well being of his sister. He didn’t have courage to come out of his comfort zone. He was torn between his duty towards his family and self, unable to decide which one is to be given importance. Lack of importance and love in the family made him arrogant. He would oppose whatever his father says. Durga says, ‘It became his second nature to disapprove anything that Dada said, to oppose anything that he suggested’(p.716). Frustrated by his father’s idealism, he started following Savarkarite Gokhale uncle and even attended shakhas as well. His love for his sister doesn’t allow him to accept the offer of settling down in America.

Thus the author in this play tried to present that the characters as an ideologues, everyone has his way of thinking and have faith in their own ideologies. Everyone wants to follow his own Road without making any compromise. The drama, is therefore, the saga of the individuals who tread on different ideologies. The author has effectively presented the conflicting ideologies that makes a deep impact on the lives of the individuals who follow them.

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