

FACETS OF NATSAMRAT: A MARATHI PLAY (A CRITIQUE)

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Natsamrat:-

The iconic Marathi play Natsamrat (loosely translated as 'Actor King' or 'The King of Drama') considered a milestone in Marathi theatre, was written by a noted Marathi playwright V. V. Shirwadkar. This play was first staged on 23 December at Birala Matoshri Hall in 1970 at Mumbai. It was apparently scripted after Shirwadkar was overwhelmed by the need to give the vibrant Marathi theatre a play that matched the sheer depth and tragedy of Shakespearean masterpieces like 'Othello', 'King Lear' etc

Presence of Shakespeare:-

V. V. Shirwadkar was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare and was highly influenced by the plays of Shakespeare. We come to see this fact when we see Natsamrat. We clearly hear the echo of Shakespeare here and there in Natsamrat because Appasaheb was an actor who has portrayed Hamlet, Othello in his acting career. It is said that Natsamrat is a mixture of Shakespeare's many great plays. In Natsamrat we can clearly see the glimpses of King Lear and Hamlet, especially in Soliloquies of Appasaheb Belwalkar. This is a sort of tribute by a playwright to a great playwright of all ages. But though we hear the echo of Shakespeare in Natsamrat, Shirwadkar immortalized the play by his skill of writing. He has taken the play on the escalating height, as a result of it; the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award was conferred upon the play in 1974. To say that it is merely an imitation of Shakespeare's play is a nothing but demeaning Shirwadkar's worth as a great playwright.

A Poetic Piece of Work:-

As poetry scatters everywhere in the plays of Shakespeare, each and every line is poetically woven in the plays like Hamlet, As You Like It, King Lear and many others, Natsamrat also comes in the same category. The dialogues like *kuni ghar deta ka ghar.., kashasathi jagto aahot aamhi...., Bayko ak Bandar aste, Navara navachya galbatasathi..* are very rich in poetical sense. Shirwadkar made the wonderful use of the device of soliloquy in this play. The soliloquies are full of imagery and contain great symbolism in the context of the play. As Shirwadkar himself was a great poet he used poetry beautifully in the play. The long dialogues through the mouth of Appasaheb are the best example of this kind

The Protagonist: Appasaheb Belwalkar:-

Appasaheb belwalkar, was a very complex and dynamic character which was strongly written by Shirwadkar. It was herculean task to perform the role. From the very first play till the date various artists have played the character of Appasaheb. For many years Dr Shriram Lagoo was the protagonist of the play. By his natural acting skill, he immortalized the role. Even now when the name of Appaseb Belwalkar comes, one naturally remembers Dr Lagoo. As it is mentioned before that the role was not an easy one. Every actor has a dream to play this role because he thinks that it is a challenge for any actor to play Appasaheb Belwalkar. The role has many shades. Dr Lagoo played the role with ease. He played this role for couple of years. Whenever he delivers the dialogue, whether it is the soliloquy or long speech, he presents it so naturally that audience become speechless on seeing his grand way of presentation and style.

After Dr Lagoo hung up his theatre boots, other Marathi theatre and film stalwarts such as Satish Dubhashi, Upendra Date, Yeshwant Dutt, Chandrakant Gokhale, Datta Bhat, Madhusudan Kolhatkar, Girish Deshpande have also played the lead.

Kaveri:-

The character of Kaveri in the play Natsamrat, is stronger one. Her support to Appasaheb in each and every thing means a lot to Appasaheb. She loves Appasaheb very much. She stands physically as well as psychologically with him. It is she, who insists Appasaheb to leave the house of their son as she does not tolerate the insult of Appasaheb. It was her boost and presence which makes the life of Appasaheb bearable in his old age. For many years, as mentioned earlier, Shanta Jog, a theater as well as film actor performed the role of Kaveri with ease. She continued this role even after Dr Lagoo left the play with Satish Dubhashi. Unfortunately on a tour of Natsamrat itself Satish Dubhashi and Shanta Jog happened to meet with an accident and in that accident both died. This is strange coincidence of destiny.

Natsamrat in Recent Time:-

In 2016 actor, producer and director Mahesh Manjarekar brought the iconic drama to the silver screen for the benefit of all Indians beyond the borders of Maharashtra in which the role of Appasaheb Belwalkar was played by the actor Nana Patekar. Manjarekar beautifully wove the play into movie taking some liberty in the original story.(For example in the original play there was no character of Vikram Gokhale.) It is pleasure to watch your favourite play in the form of movie. Much Care has been taken by Mahesh while writing the screenplay to make it compact and commercially enjoyable. Nana gave his best to create the impact of Appasaheb Belwalkar which was a challenge for him. He beautifully presented Appasaheb in his own style. It is very nice to see the famous and all time favourite dialogues of Natsamrat through the mouth of Nana. A very controlled acting of Nana which was the demand of the role itself is seen in the movie Natsamrat. In 2017 Nana won the Marathi Filmfare Award for best actor for his performance in Natsamrat. Medha Manjarekar, a wife of Mahesh Manjarekar performed the role of Kaveri in the movie. She beautifully played this role. Though at first she hesitated and feared to play the part as it was also a challenge to play

Kaveri, she justified it par excellence after Mahesh and Nana convinced Medha to play the role.

In 2018, Zee channel which produced Natsamrat again along with the veteran actor Mohan Joshi who is playing the lead role of Appasaheb Belwalkar. Earlier it was rumored that like the movie, nana will play the lead role again in the play, but Nana Patekar was replaced by Mohan Joshi and this time director was Hrishikesh Joshi, the actor and director. The role of Kaveri is played by Rohini Hattangadi. In this new Natsamrat it is Kaveri who steals the show. Rohini has portrayed the character of Kaveri so strongly and intensely that in few scenes she has surpassed even Mohan Joshi in acting. Mohan Joshi also tried his level best to portray Appasaheb, but many times his voice has failed to create the whole impact which was the necessity of the character. Though Mohan Joshi is a good actor but in this regard the comparison of him with the former actors like Dr Lagoo, Yashwant Dutt and others who played the role of Appasaheb is obviously weak. As far as the direction is concerned, this time the responsibility was on the shoulder of actor- director, Hrishikesh Joshi and unfortunately he did not succeed in this venture. He looks confused in presenting the things as a whole. It seems that he could not handle the pressure of expectations. For example in some scenes of the play, the makeup of Mohan Joshi is not done properly. In some scenes Appasaheb looks very funny instead of serious. More care could have been taken by the director in this regard.

Conclusion:-

Well, putting forth the same drama over and over again since ages with different cast requires not only the skill of the directors but the worth of the script too. Natsamrat fulfils both. Natsamrat is treated to be the milestone in the history of Marathi drama that revolutionized Marathi Theatre. The play, with the super-class performance of the veteran actors like Lagoo, Yeshvant Dutt and Nana Patekar gave a different dimension to the same story that touched the spectators on emotional grounds. However, it was due to the doyens of Marathi Theatre that made Appasaheb Belvalkar immortal. One can't simply compare Shriram Lagoo with Nana Patekar, but yes, critically one can find the aesthetic details supremely showcased by these warhorses that put an everlasting imprint not only in the hearts of theatre goers but the masses in general. Of late, Marathi theatre was on the verge of extinction but thanks to the silver screen that keeps the interest in theatre with the adaptation of such dateless plays like *Natsamrat* and *Katyaar Kaljaat Ghusali*. Long live Marathi Theatre and its ceaseless tradition...!!

References:-

- www.wikipedia.com
- www.youtube.com