



Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ)

Vol.3/ NO.1/Spring 2013

Bertolt Brecht's Concept of 'Epic-drama' and Alienation Theory and 'Tamasha Art' in Marathi
Theatre: A Comparative Study

Smita Mujumdar

ABSTRACT

Bertolt Brecht is a bewildering figure in the field of drama. Brechtian theory of epic theatre became so popular that its influence reached far beyond the communist countries. Since earlier period of Marathi theatre, this concept of epic-drama with A-effect theory was already implicit in 'Tamasha' - Folk Art form of Marathi tradition. The main purpose of this paper is to see whether Brecht's theory of alienation A-effect and concept of 'epic-drama' was already implicit in Tamasha form in Marathi theatre.

If we allude to the historical background and the history of development of European drama and Marathi dramatic tradition, we can see that the changing conditions of society inspired Brecht to think differently about dramatic form which resulted in bringing out a new technique with a new theory and it influenced the whole world theatre including Marathi theatre of the time onwards.

It is noted here that how old, ancient this form is, known since ever before the birth of Brecht, and how it is coming as new literary form in written play form, imitating Brecht's style and

Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ) ISSN 2249-4529, Vol.3/ NO.1/Spring2013

URL of the Issue: <http://pintersociety.com/vol-3-no-1spring-2013/>

URL of the article: <http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Smita-mujumdar-9.pdf>

© www.pintersociety.com

Women and Life Force in Shaw's '*Widower's House*' and '*Man and Superman*'

concept. In Marathi presentation types of ancient days this 'Tamasha' art form, a musical opera type medium for the instruction and education through entertainment had a long run and popular tradition. It has become a cultural heritage of Marathi audience..

In Marathi tradition, the playwrights could never elicit such potential already implicit in ancient play-performances, in folk arts like Tamasha, Wagnatya, Loknatya, Songi Bhajans etc. However, these are popular folk arts and from 18th century up to now there influence on Marathi audience is seen intact unknowingly and unconsciously they are performing the social role and achieving A-effect expected by Brecht. It was real and suitable form for Marathi mind. It shows its closeness to Brecht's epic drama form.

Bertolt Brecht is a bewildering figure in the field of drama. His work is invaluable, as he has had an enormous influence on the World-theatre. He is famous for his revolutionary innovation experiments in drama. He introduced the idea of 'Epic-drama' to the German theatre. However, as he said that the phrase 'Epic-drama' was not a new one. It is very close to the movement known as 'Neuesachlichkeit or Sachlich' (German) translated as 'Matter of Fact'. Brechtian theory of epic theatre became so popular that its influence reached far beyond the communist countries. The word 'Epic' is deceptive here and it should be viewed with the help of Brecht's concept of 'epic-drama'. He has developed the concept of 'epic-drama' in his own way. He introduced it with purpose and to prove the need of alienation or A-effect through drama. He has explained his alienation theory along with the concept of 'epic-drama' and with such new experiments with drama, even in actual performance on the stage. It was so effective and striking to the Europeans that they followed it in all over the world theatre, however, it was not new to Marathi theatre in India. Since earlier period of Marathi theatre, this concept of epic-drama with A-effect theory was already implicit in 'Tamasha'- Folk Art form of Marathi tradition. But it was not known, nor explained as a theory or special form for the desired A-effect, never was it explored much to give due importance and value as for the development of Marathi dramatic arts.

The main purpose of this paper is to see whether Brecht's theory of alienation A-effect and concept of 'epic-drama' was already implicit in Tamasha form in Marathi theatre. However, the paper does not attempt to compare Brecht's concept of 'epic-drama' with Tamasha form in every aspect, as this comparison in large scale is not possible in such a short span of this paper.

I Brecht's theory of alienation

It is known that Brecht was a practical man of theatre and an intellectual dramatist. His aim as a dramatist was to give the mood of the whole world objectively and not of dramatist's own private mood or his own emotions and thought. Therefore, he emphasizes the intellectual and objective method of writing the play and presenting it on the stage. According to him-drama is such form, which should not be written with poetic sense or sentimentality. The story or incident when it is written and is enacted or performed should not create an illusion, but it should be written and enacted objectively and without involvement of any kind. The other members of the team-producer, actor, directors etc. also should carefully and purposefully do this and it is to achieve same effect of non-involvement of the audience in the story. The alienation theory of Brecht grew out of his many years practical experience in the theatre. He was an exponent of experimental drama in 20th century.

Brecht's concept of 'Epic Theatre':

It's challenging influence on World Theatre: Borrowing the name 'epic' from Aristotle, Brecht wanted to offer indication that he has challenged the tradition of drama by a new form of anti-drama. The term 'epic-theatre', first used in Germany in 1920, has become firmly associated with the name of Brecht. He sketched the general outline of his theory of epic theatre in notes to *The Opera Rise and Fall of the Town of Mahogyan*. He announced in 1930, "Modern theatre is epic theatre." (Brecht 13). "Epic theatre is certainly in 'non-Aristotelian' in approach as it upsets the sequence of time which Aristotle presupposed as one of the constituents of tragedy," (Heinz 56). Brecht does not confirm to the Aristotelian concept of epic. He opposes his concept of

Women and Life Force in Shaw's 'Widower's House' and 'Man and Superman'

coherence and consistency. In the notes, to the *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*, he stated, "certain incidents in the play should be treated as self contained scenes and raised by means of inscription s, epic theatre is to 'lead the audience not feel intensely but to judge critically to see the characters not determined by fate and human nature but by social music and sound effects and the actors way to playing above the level of the everyday, the obvious the expected. (Brecht 221). He rejected Aristotle's theory of catharsis. To Brecht the aim of circumstances is to leave the theatre not emotionally drained out but intellectually stimulated and determined to bring about Marxist reforms" (Arthur 77). Brecht was the inspiration for such new experiments in the field of drama after Ibsen. After long experience, what Brecht created was "a dramatic form in which men were shown in the process producing themselves and their situations. That is at root, a dialectical form, drawing directly on the Marxist theory of history in which within given limits man makes himself" (Reymond 279).

British writers of left-wing political views took him as model. Brecht's worldview stressed man's role as an integral part of the society whiles the 'theatre of absurd' stressed man's role as psychological outcast of society. Brecht's panoramic conception of series of short scenes in structure also helped to break the convention and the privacy of the domestic focus in serious drama. Consequently, the audience was forced to determine its own response to the whole spectacle. Brecht felt the need to cater to the taste of newly arising class of audience of his time by providing reflections of social changes through dramatic art so he expanded and modified the dramatic art. He aimed at awakening the power of the audience and not allowed them to involve emotionally in the art. John Arden, Edmond Bond, Tom Stoppard and Robert Bolt were under his influence with their vision enliven by conception of the clash between ideal and the real in American theatre, Eugene 'O' Neill and Arthur Miller rejected though not in Brechtian manner, convention of Aristotle.

Brecht's concept of epic theatre in structure, staging and acting effect:

Structure:

Brecht suggested 'epic structure' based on epic—a looser narrative form. Actually epic form is different from dramatic form. Nevertheless, Brecht felt episodic form most suitable to narrate the incidents as matter of fact. Instead of dividing the play into acts and scenes, Brecht attempted to destroy continuity by dividing his fable into series and episodes, each of it self-contained, demonstrates the lesson of the whole work.—Explaining the difference between Aristotelian and Brechtian theatre John Elsom has rightly remarked: “In Aristotelian theatre, Brecht argued the dramatic emphasis is upon why the event has happened, what caused and how it can be prevented from happening again” (Elsom 118). In order to achieve this end Brecht suggests the concept of *verfremdung* (alienation) mainly under the influence of Russian formalist theory of defamiliarisation. In place of sympathetic understanding the term 'alienation' as a new theatrical device for the artistic treatment of his subject matter he introduced a revolutionary change in the concept of theatre by using the term 'alienation'. Its importance lies in the fact that it offers “a way of judging and explaining those means of achieving critical detachment which he had hitherto called epic” (Willet 179).

Staging:

Staging the epic structure also is a part of Brecht's theory of alienation. Here he introduced his own techniques and devices to achieve 'A-effect'. He was less interested in changing the shape of the stage or the physical relationship of the stage with the auditorium (as in 'Arena theatre' where a circular stage is placed in the centre of the auditorium).

Role of Narrator:

In such plays the role of narrator is important who breaks the linking effect of involvement of the audience by his narration and his comments about the coming incidents. Brecht insists on keeping this narrator visible on the stage, telling everything detachedly and the audience to listen to it with the same detachment. He also rejects stage decoration atmosphere creation by darkness in the theatre, light effects, sweet emotional songs and music that make the audience to flow emotionally in the feelings. He rejects darkness in the theatre on insists on keeping lights on while performing the play. His using pop-music, unemotional songs, projecting letters and posters on the screen, keeping orchestra visible while the character sings- all such experiments were in order to break emotional involvement of spectator into the story. He considers

Women and Life Force in Shaw's *Widower's House* and *Man and Superman*

'interruption of such kind as a cardinal element for producing the effects of alienation. In this connection, Astoadur Eusteinsson remarks, "in order to get closer to these real conditions, the world as we see it must not simply be reproduced in another holistic mould. Rather it has to be interrupted" (Astoadur 204).

The purpose is to alienate the spectator though he is entertained by songs, music, story etc. not allow him to feel empathy but make him think rationally. Hence, Brecht's theatre is also called 'duel theatre'. Then Brecht devises the method of interruption in order to break the work into a series of gestures, which is one of the remarkable achievements of the epic theatre. He wants the spectator to have an enlightened vision of the world. He remarks, "We do just want people to see simply 'differently'. We want them to see in quite a specific manner". (Brecht 106). Actors are encouraged not to emotional identification with their roles but to adopt the unhistorical style of presentation. He prefers to present such characters that are alienation from themselves as well as from another, their words belie their feelings, and their deeds belie their words.

In Acting:

Also Brecht expects the same non-involvement of the actor in his role. Brecht was inspired by the Chinese actor in his role and formulated his theory of acting with non-involvement of actor into character. He thinks that gestures are very important in acting. An actor achieves 'A-effect' by being seen to observe his own movements. He should put an incident before the spectator with perfection of acting. He should not conceal that he has rehearsed it. He must present detachedly how that character might have spoken or behaved in that given situation as per the writer's view. The actor must not involve himself that character he presents. He/She must remember all the time that he is not Lear, not Hamlet, not Othello etc. but he has to reproduce their remarks, features and put forward their ways of behavior to the best of his abilities and knowledge of them.

No complete transformation is expected, Brecht says, and then only is alienation achieved in acting. Brecht has suggested three aids to actor for this:

- i) Transposition into the third person;
- ii) Transposition into past; and
- iii) Speaking the stage direction aloud;

Using the third person and past tense allows the actor to adopt the right attitude and detachment. His reading aloud stage direction and remarks on his lines create a clash between two tones of voice alienating the second of them. In addition, transposition into the past gives the speaker a standpoint from which he can look back at his sentence.

This composite process leads to an alienation of the text in the rehearsal, which generally persists in the performance too. The actor should adopt direct approach or communication to the audience to cut them from involvement and from pretending to think that the actor is the character himself.

This is all about Brecht's alienation theory and how he expects its working through acting and presentation of various devices on the stage. If we allude to the historical background and the history of development of European drama and Marathi dramatic tradition, we can see that the changing conditions of society inspired Brecht to think differently about dramatic form which resulted in bringing out a new technique with a new theory and it influenced the whole world theatre including Marathi theatre of the time onwards.

II Historical Background of European and Marathi Theatre:

In Europe during Brecht's time, every thing was undergoing a change. In 1920, when he started his experiments the First World War was over, the medieval feudalism declining. The religious and capitalistic beliefs of the people were shocked by new ideas of Marxism and Communism, and by the principle of equality and equal share etc., a newly awakening feeling of right and self respect among the poor and downtrodden class was a blow to the capitalistic. However, the thinkers and intellectual writers like Brecht were looking at this class as new

exponent of humanistic revolution. With this social Marxist view, Brecht made experiments in theatre and tried to consider dramatic art useful for social and educative purpose.

On this background, the drama was undergoing a change giving reflection of changing society and social viewpoint. It also took a revolutionary form- a new form under a leadership of Brecht. If he cast a short cursory glance over the conditions of Marathi theatre at this time, we can see that the glory of Marathi musical plays disappeared and from 1943 to modern period it shows many changes under the influence of European dramatic movements. Many translations, versions, adoptions and imitations of European stage techniques and concepts are seen taken up. In middle fifties, the growth of contemporary Marathi theatre began. Vijay Tendulkar and his colleagues developed a movement modern artistic drama aiming to give a new form to it, made some experiments. Some others were setting new standards of creativity regarding the musical comedy. P. L. Deshpande stands as Solitary Island in the contemporary Marathi drama. It is true that he has many adoptions and very few independently written plays to his credit but his overall contribution to the form in theatre is considerable. There is much scope to see how Brecht and P. L. Deshpande both under Marxist socialistic influence and as artist of theatre attempted to give new experimental drama to their theatre, opposing traditional play forms, Still P. L. Deshpande too could not write independent play in new form giving such novel theory or expressing such social purpose. He just gave adoption of 'Three Penny Opera'.

III Tamasha Art and Epic Theatre:

'Tamasha' is also a dramatic art, the origin of the word 'Tamasha' is in Persian, and it came in Urdu first and then in Marathi. It was recognized just as a fun up to 1898. It is noted here that how old, ancient this form is, known since ever before the birth of Brecht, and how it is coming as new literary form in written play form, imitating Brecht's style and concept. In Marathi presentation types of ancient days this 'Tamasha' art form, a musical opera type medium for the instruction and education through entertainment had a long run and popular tradition. However, it was in oral form. It is still popular and famous among villagers it is loved by Urban. It has become a cultural heritage of Marathi audience. It caters the thirst of the free entertainment

with education through it. But this education purpose and potential of Tamasha Art form is not understood and the alienation theory is not known to any playwright before Brecht who recognized the importance and felt the need of A-effect non-involvement in entertaining and instructing people through drama. The social purpose and rational approach, objectivity and intellectuality are the things considered by Brecht here.

In Marathi tradition, the playwrights could never elicit such potential already implicit in ancient play-performances, in folk arts like Tamasha, Wagnatya, Loknatya, Songi Bhajans etc. However, these are popular folk arts and from 18th century up to now there influence on Marathi audience is seen intact unknowingly and unconsciously they are performing the social role and achieving A-effect expected by Brecht.

Its Closeness to ‘Epic-Drama’ and Implicit Nature:

‘Tamasha’ also tells story like Epic in its typical episodic form having many more interruptions in its continuity. The scenes are coming separately content by themselves with songs, narratives, dances, music and comments by the commentator who is also called Sutradhar, and even comments by actors. The provision of Sutradhar ‘Gana’, ‘Goulan’ and ‘Nati’ all provides entertainment and lead the action further. The singers sing songs loudly and the music is not sweet and classical type. It is pop music of noise and shouting. It comes intermittently with rustic type songs and prevents the audience’s emotional involvement in the story. It prevents the audience from thinking that it is all real happening on the stage. It creates the scene that this is a story, a play, a game on the stage. The dances with rhythmical tunes most famous as a ‘Lavani Nrutya’ amuse spectator, appealing to their aesthetic sense.

The provision of ‘Gana’, ‘Goulan’ adds in the attraction of the form. It again has a comment on the social conditions. Moreover, the actors while performing give the current social reference in such ironic comments. It shows their intellectual, satiric, ironic presence of mind. ‘Songadya’ is such a character that is free to use his own comments. This amuses as well as provokes the audience for thinking. The crispy witty dialogues are one more attractive and lively feature of Tamasha. The relation of characters to the audience is direct and makes them aware that they are viewing a play, a game, and not real life. It is direct communication, the audience

Women and Life Force in Shaw's '*Widower's House*' and '*Man and Superman*'

becomes alert, and quick receiver of the things said and about what is happening on the stage. In this way A-effect is achieved which Brecht expects.

Thus in Marathi tradition, Tamasha was the real and ancient original Marathi play form existed since long before. It was actually proposed for social awakening through powerful entertainment catering to the rustic illiterate village people of the times. This sort of folklore was the best medium to reach to the illiterate, ignorant lot of the society. It was real and suitable form for Marathi mind. It shows its closeness to Brecht's epic drama form.

This intellectual quality of Tamasha was neither recognized, nor thought over by Marathi writers of dramatic form. In addition the alienation theory is not attributed to this type of play by any playwright like Brecht who explained it in his theory for its importance and need in social education. Marathi playwrights never thought to develop this original powerful form into new form. They failed to recognize its potentiality, intellectuality and social aspects. They did not follow Brecht correctly and there was no Brecht appeared on the horizon of Marathi tradition until Brecht was known and imitated. Brecht transformed ancient play, changing the form, brought it in to movement in the development of theatre. Brecht then used what was in Shakespeare's play and performance due to stage limitations as new stage devices to cut off the audience and all from emotional involvement. He made use of breaking conventional desired theory of Catharsis and made use of Shakespearean contemporary stage devices to form his own theory. Composed with such ancient forms he formulated his alienation theory for social purpose. This did not happen in the case of Marathi play. Tamasha has this all implicit in it and unconsciously it served the purpose of A-effect. Brecht's theory became famous and popular and Tamasha having same quality, technique and high entertaining dramatic values remained undeveloped, unused for purpose and so lagged behind still it is in its rustic, junky form.

However, knowing to some extent its dramatic values, some Marathi writers are seen trying to reach this art to urban audience by modifying its nature into 'Wagnatya', or 'Loknatya' that may be a projection of Tamasha art. The writers like Vasant Sabnis, Shankar Patil and Anand Yadav did this. Then came many experimental plays and while during 1920-25,

all over the world, the theatre almost of every country got tremendous influence of Brecht's plays, Marathi theatres remained no exception. P. L. Deshpande's *'Tin Paishacha Tamasha'*; V. Madgulkar's *'Devajine Karuna Keli'* and C. T. Khanolkar's *'Ajab Nyay Vartulacha'* (based on 'The Three Penny Opera'. *The Good Women of Selzuean*. *The Caucasion Chalk Circle'* respectively) are examples of such versions and adoptions.

However, they are just imitation or versions and not independent purposeful efforts to develop Marathi theatre. Also they seemed to be lacking in giving the Brecht'an view and meaning to Marathi audience as the social and political conditions of Europe and Maharashtra were different, so was the audience different. Girish Karnad a powerful innovative contemporary Indian English playwright however, is aware of the problems and challenges Indian playwright had to face after Independence. He says, "they had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self justification, tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved". (Karnad 13).

Therefore, to conclude we can say, while adoption or while imitating it also should be considered that Brecht has a remarkable intellectual and thoughtful base behind his theory. He has some fixed, definite concept of what and how to give a desired model to the relations between the audience and playwright e.g. this theory of alienation. Therefore, it is inadequate to find out similarity in Brecht'n play and Tamasha art with the only criteria of freedom of three classical unities. Tamasha has nothing to say its own special as a powerful art form. It unconsciously was becoming a medium to be used for social and intellectual purpose. Tamasha art has natural power of creating 'Make believe world' breaking all classical unities. It was able to give any kind of experience in life that too, by alienating the spectator. "The dramatic spirit and interesting technique with 'A-effect' were already implicit and achieved by Tamasha form for which these playwrights like Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, Wilder seem struggling much." (Kale7). Bertolt Brecht remarkable influenced the experiments made by Marathi Rangabhumi in last three decades. Admitting this influence the well known Marathi critic V. I. Kulkarni maintains: "While reading Brecht's plays *The good women of Setzuan* and *The*

Women and Life Force in Shaw's 'Widower's House' and 'Man and Superman'

Caucasian Chalk Circle it reminded me that they tried to create laughter and pathos simultaneously and with efforts, where Tamasha could do this easily, naturally and unknowingly also effectively" (Kulkarni13). But unfortunately, Marathi playwrights were unaware of this potentiality and intellectuality of Tamasha form. Therefore, it remained unattended, ignored and so unused for social and education purpose. Tamasha remained still just as a folk art and Epic theatre though keeping tune with folk literature developed itself in an intellectual revolting and strikingly new form, followed by the world theatre. With entertainment and social awakening, Brecht also expects the audience to understand the complexity of problems (i.e. *Three Penny Opera* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*). He presents the facts, does not take sides and leaves everything to the audience to think. He regards that dramatist is not a surgeon but he is the onlooker, the audiences are not patients to treat. They are free to think.

This all about objective relationship of author and audience was not thought over in such a way by Marathi playwrights while imitating Brecht. Therefore, though Tamasha like powerful entertainment media was in their possession, they could not and did not succeed in making use of it for dramatic development and for social purpose. Thus, 'Tamasha' though very close to Epic-drama never became powerful or useful source for the development of Marathi theatre.

In my view, as said earlier, it is essential to give new form to such powerful art form in course of changing time and conditions. The potentiality in real art never ends; it should be recognized, explored and exploited for the good of society and humanity.

In modern times of changing and declining of moral, social and humanistic value, these famous and popular art forms like drama, cinema even musical theatrical programs and TV like media should serve the main purpose of moral and social education, intellectually, rationality through enough entertainment values. It is very important as these arts and media have great impact on human mind and lifestyle. Recently Girish Karnad made him sharply aware of the theatricality, imaginativeness, and inherent power of the Indian theatre. It sensitized him to the rich potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques of our traditional theatre. So admitting

Brecht's influence on his dramatic works Karnad remarks, "Brecht's influence received mainly through his writing and without the benefit of his theatrical productions, went some way in making us realize what could be done with the design of traditional theatre. (Karnad 14).

Works Cited

1. Bekson, Karl and Ganz, Arthur: *Literacy Terms: A Dictionary* (Calcutta: Rupa and Company, 1991).
2. Brecht Bertolt: *Shriften Zum Theatre* (Frankfurt: 1959).
3. Brecht Bertolt: *Uber gegenstandslose Malerel,*
Uber Politik and Kunsl ed. Werner Hecht,(Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).
4. Elsom John: *Post War British Theatre* (London: Routedledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).
5. Eysteinsor Astoadur: *The Concept of Modernism* (London: Cornell Uni. Press, 1990).
6. Karnad Girish: *Author's introduction, Three Plays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1994),
7. Kulkarni V. L. , Dnyaneshwar, Kale K.N: *Samiksha: Marathi Natak and Marathi Rangabhumi* (Mumbai:Popular prakashan, 1963).
8. Politzer Heinz: *How epic is 'Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre'*
Modern Drama" ed. Travis Bogard and William Oliver,(New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).
9. Willet John: *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1996).
10. Williams Reymond: *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chtto and Windus, 1971).

Bio-note- Mrs. Smita Mujumdar Associate Professor Dept. of English, Shivraj College Gadhinglaj.