

Critical Appreciation of Riding The Tiger of Vizai Bhaskar

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Abstract

Dr. Deerghasi Vizai Bhaskar is a notable playwright in the contemporary Telugu theatre. He has connected with sociopolitical issues and the idea of social justice using Vedic, Puranic references, and popular religious symbols, metaphors and idiomatic expressions to convey his message of emancipation and its core values such as humanity, social concern, and moral values. This paper attempts to critically appreciate Dr. D. Vizai Bhaskar's '*Puliswaari*' - '*Riding the Tiger*' with deeper social injustice, social concern and humanism. He has written nearly thirty plays to his credit and his works translated to languages including Kannada, Gujarati, English, Malayalam and Hindi. He received Nandi Award for five times, Sahitya acadamey, and so many puraskarams.

Keywords: humanism, social injustice, social concern, emancipation

Dr. Deerghasi Vizai Bhaskar born in 1958 in Ampolu village in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh is a notable playwright in the contemporary Telugu theatre. He has pursued academic studies in theatre, and done his PhD on Brecht's influence on Telugu drama. In his

own works, he has engaged with sociopolitical issues and the idea of social justice using Vedic, Puranic references, and popular religious symbols, metaphors and idiomatic expression to convey his message of emancipation. He has worked as a municipal commissioner, and is now an Officer on Special Duty to the Minister for Roads and Buildings, Andhra Pradesh. His major plays include *Kichith Bhogam*, *Gandhi Jayanthi*, *Jeevannatakam*, *Ruthwik*, *Kurchi*, and *Bommalu Cheppina Bhajagovindam*. Some of these have been translated and performed in languages including Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi. *Ruthwik*, *Kurchi*, *Kalakootam* and *Riding the Tiger*, all of these have been translated into English. Among other honours, he has received the Nandi Award conferred by the Government of Andhra Pradesh on five occasions. A documentary film on his work – Vizai Bhaskar as a Playwright – presents a critical assessment of his plays. Dr. Vizai Bhaskar receives the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for his contribution to Indian theatre as a playwright..

Vizai Bhaskar exposes in his plays the double standards in a society divided by caste, class, gender and inequalities of every kind. Speaking to the Hans India, Vizai Bhaskar says that “the theatre is more meaningful when it highlights the problems of the underprivileged society as an effective people’s medium.” Theatre doesn’t merely entertain. It transcends other art forms in its power to educate, interrogate, provoke, protest, transform and heal. He says that he is inspired by children’s magazines like ‘Chandamama’ and ‘Balamitra’ and started writing stories and poems from his childhood. His teacher

B. Lakshmana Murthy spotted literary talent and encouraged him to pursue writing. Under the guidance of Sk.Misro and Kalipatnam Rama Rao he began writing plays. (HANS INDIA: March 30, 2019).¹

‘*Riding the Tiger*’ deals with the subject of faction murders of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. “A faction is an organized group of people within a larger group, which opposes some of the ideas of the larger group and fights for its own ideas.” (Collins Dictionary) A lot of killings were seen in faction it is because to increase fear among rivals and to make them stay away from auctions of liquor contracts, road building and also for extortion from local business units.

Faction always takes the help of politics, since contracts for civil works, liquor licenses and every industry or business is allowed only with the blessings of the faction leaders, a culture of know-towing prevails, boosted by the entry of these factions into politics. “Today’s opposition is tomorrow’s ruling party in this region and hence all businessmen and contractors make peace on both sides and pay off in the ratio of 60:40 to buy immunity,” said Radhakrishna Rao, a senior journalist based in Kurnool.²

‘*Riding the Tiger*’ deals with faction violence which is existed in the village between two groups Ramireddy group and Peddi Naidu group. Both of them maintain henchmen, one group kills the other group man and there starts revenge, provoking henchmen to take part in bomb blasts and kill other group persons, if they hesitate, leaders offer

them by offering acres of land and women, children can work at their houses . Mareppa a person from Ramireddy group who calls him as ‘god’ says about him as:

What is the great work that is entrusted to me by Reddy?
At the most he wants us to commit a murder casually once in a month! That’s all! On such occasions, he never hesitates to spend any quantum of money for liquor and biryani, you know? To tell you frankly, it will be a gaga day for us. Show me a single fellow who can spend like our Reddy? (scene-1) ³

By the advent of new ‘DSP’ who is called a tiger is transferred to that particular village and the words of head constable and constable make the henchmen to know the realities of their lives. Inspired by DSP, constable and head constable sermonises henchmen of both the groups.

Constable: Try to realise it! Mutual bickering is theirs and blood-shed is yours!

HC: By getting into these bloody factions, you are unnecessarily spoiling your own lives, getting your own families destroyed. It is you and you alone who are the ultimate sufferers, I say. (scene -3) ⁴

By the words of constable and HC Tirpataiah, Khadar, Kistappa and Obulesu come to the decision that the harm being caused to the bereaved families of the deceased, all of them start repenting a lot and

wanted to come out of this factions. Then constable says that “By God promise, are you really decided to stop riding on this tiger and get down from it to live fearlessly and peacefully? DSP endeavours their inner conscience, developed self-realization in them, converted them as law-abiding citizens and then brought the story to the climax! Both Ramireddy and Peddi Naidu repent and ask DSP to arrest, he says that, “It is not deadly weapons that we have to hold, but the pigeons symbolizing peace and harmony. It is not the songs of violence that we have to sing, but poems of friendship and fraternity. Come on! Join hands with us for moving towards a faction-less and philanthropic society.”⁵

R.P. Meena, a former inspector general of police in Rayalaseema, was specially tasked in 2005 to eliminate factional violence. In his report submitted in 2007, Meena said that the violence created by factions was worse than that of the caste gangs of Bihar. “They hacked, maimed and beheaded their opponents just to create terror,” he said in his 210-page report to the government.

T.G. Venkatesh, former Congress minister, now in TDP and a prominent campaigner for a Green and Peaceful Rayalaseema said that “What we need are more officials like Thomas Munroe (a tough officer in British India who broke the faction groups of Kadapa),”⁶

Conclusion

Dr. Vizai Bhaskar has brought the Rayalaseema factionism into stream light, exposed the real life experiences through one of the

literary aspects drama. A number of performances were made in Rayalaseema region made the people to think about their lives and the women of that particular area are much influenced and started to revolt against it. Through this play he highlighted the social issues that were prevailed in down trodden society with a good solution.

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