



**TENDULKAR'S ENCOUNTER IN UMBUGLAND:  
A POLITICAL ALLEGORY**

**TALLURI MATHEW BHASKAR**

Lecturer in English  
Andhra Pradesh Residential Junior College,  
Vijayapuri South, Guntur District. (AP) INDIA

**ABSTRACT**

*Vijay Tendulkar became one of the leading Indian playwrights with his play, Silence! The court is in session in the late sixties. His Encounter in Umbugland is a political satire. This play was published in 1974. Characters in the play represent the historical personages and the story reveals the political situation in India of the late sixties and the early seventies. India is traditionally called "Jambudwip" in Sanskrit and Vijay Tendulkar deliberately uses the word "Dambadwip". The rhyme in these two words intensifies the idea of hypocrisy. The English translation "Umbugland" which rhymes with "Humbug" conveys the same idea effectively. Umbugland is the kingdom of an autocratic ruler Vichitravirya and his daughter princess Vijaya is an indomitable character who emerges as an iron-lady in taking over the reign in her own hands and in giving a crushing defeat to her enemies. She is portrayed as an intelligent but whimsical ruler who devises her own method of dealing with her opponents. Vijaya reminds us of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Tendulkar uncovers the ugliness and futility of power politics. This play illustrates how people are fooled in power games, how the most cunning person wins the game of power and how the Press plays its role in fooling people.*

**Key Words:** *Umbugland, Allegory, Hypocrisy, Politics, Satire, Jambudwip.*

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar is one of the best known playwrights in modern Indian theatre. His plays rank Tendulkar with some great playwrights like Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Brecht. Tendulkar's plays made a room for him in the international galaxy of the literati. Each of the plays reflects contemporary Indian society, its problems and its challenges. His approach in the depiction of the problematic nature of Indian society is a revolutionary one. Arundhati Banerjee is justified in saying:

*Vijay Tendulkar has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for almost forty years.*



His play *Encounter in Umbugland* (Dambadwipacha Mukabala) was translated into English by Priya Adarkar. It is different from his other plays. The play is a wonderful satire on politics. It throws light on the fact that in the political field, power is more important than the things. The play is essentially a political allegory in the sense that the characters represent the historical personages and the story reveals the political situation in India of the late sixties and the early seventies. The play is a powerful satire on power politics. With the publication of the play, it becomes evident that in the political field nothing is real. Appearances are deceptive, success and treachery go hand in hand. M.Sarat Babu says:

*“Umbugland” intensifies the idea of hypocrisy. Princess Vijaya stands for the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.....The play draws parallels between the rule of Vijaya and that of Indira.*

The play allegorically reflects the political encounter of syndicate group of the Indian National Congress with Indira Gandhi in 1971. The play illustrates the rules of the game of politics which are difficult for simple, straight forward people to accept. In Marathi, the Umbugland is called Dambadwip, which rhymes with Jambudweep in which India, Bharatkhand, is traditionally believed to be situated. Vichitravirya rules the kingdom. His cabinet consists of five ministers: Aranyaketu, Bhagadanta, Karkashirsha, Pishtakeshi and Vratyasom. In the beginning of the play, Prannarayan, the eunuch is seen explaining to Vijaya, the importance of the country and aristocratic ways of life. He welcomes the people on behalf of the kingdom of Umbugland. Prannarayan uses a beautiful euphemism to glorify the falsehood that they speak in their country. He talks about many things. As the curtain rises.

*PRANNARAYAN [to the audience]. On behalf of the kingdom of Umbugland, I welcome you all. It is our good fortune that you have shown respect for our invitation, have come to our small and not very well-known island, have shaken the dust off your feet upon this little isle. [Pausing] All that I said just now was, of course, conventional and diplomatic. But much of it was the truth. I mean, we to have three kinds of truth: conventional truth, diplomatic truth, and the real truth. The truth I spoke just now was of all three kinds. Conventional it certainly was. For to play the host and welcome you who have come here as our guest may be a convention accepted with pleasure. But it is, never the less, a convention. Similarly, this truth is diplomatic. For we in Umbugland behave most submissively and diplomatically towards all powerful countries. But the fact is as well as these two, it is also the real truth, that should not be forgotten. It is a matter for rejoicing that you have presented yourselves here as spectators of a historic encounter in Umbugland. No encounter has any meaning without an audience. With no one to watch them, fighters don't battle with vigour. I am not a fighter. Since I reached the years of discretion, I have lived in the palace of the ruler of this island, the protector of the Umbugite Nation, His Majesty King Vichitravirya. Today is the sixtieth anniversary of his coronation.[P.269]*



Prannarayan, like the Sutradhar, functions as a character in the play. Two people, bearing very large pens, come on to the stage. These two people wield their pens like sceptres. Those pens have a symbolic significance. They announce the sixtieth coronation anniversary of Vichitravirya by banging their pens on the floor. Pompous celebration of the personal things of the rulers shows how public money is wasted by the government. The Ministers flatter him [Vichitravirya] and show their sycophancy. The king is confident that he will live longer as he is taking a rejuvenating medicine. Each minister increases the number of years of his life to win his favour. After the sudden demise of king Vichitravirya, Vijaya, the daughter of the king is made the queen of Umbugland by the scheming and selfish ministers assuming that they could use her as a pawn to achieve their selfish interests. Her character is not devoid of human flavour, which is clearly revealed in her relationship with Prannarayan, the eunuch. It is through him that the playwright introduces the play and the characters and gives a neutral commentary on the actions in the play. Vijaya refuses to be the pawn of the ministers. After the death of king Vichitravirya, a question is roused. The two pen-bearers attired in black began speaking:

*THE TWO IN BLACK [turn by turn].*

*To the future we must turn.*

*[The five ministers turn to face the audience.]*

*We must look to what's to come!*

*The King is dead, the land's undying,*

*Let's gird our loins, and do something!*

*[Together.]*

*After Vichitravirya, Who?*

*[The chorus inside keep repeating this: 'After Vichitravirya, who?' From within, four people at a time enter carrying placards with the names of each minister in turn. These include labourers, merchants, small children, beggars, thieves, madmen. And among these, wonders prannarayan. Each time, he joins a different group.] [PP 283-284]*

Vijaya, the king's daughter is portrayed with utmost care. Tendulkar minutely depicts the changes in her character from a self-willed and politically inexperienced princess into an intelligent, victorious ruler. Vijaya receives training from the eunuch. He tells her several times about diplomatic strategies in handling ministers in various situations. After becoming the queen of Umbugland, she loses the joy and freedom of her childhood days. Her conversation with Prannarayan proves this:

*PRANNARAYAN: I think that we'll have to call an emergency meeting of the cabinet to obtain permission.*

*VIJAYA. In order to play hopscotch or jacks? But we do it every day!*

*PRANNARAYAN. The situation today is different. Now you are the ruler of the island, Her Most Virtuous Majesty, the Queen.*

*VIJAYA. And that means I can't play? I didn't know that! No one told me that, when they made me queen. I thought that becoming queen gave me greater power.*



PRANNARAYAN. *Your Highness must behave with dignity.*

VIJAYA. *I don't think I can manage it. I feel like dancing, laughing and singing. I feel like playing and running about! Sometimes; Prannarayan, I even feel like shouting loudly without any reason.*

PRANNARAYAN. *With all due respect to piety and health, this is just human nature!. But it doesn't do for a ruler to be human. He has to be superhuman, or even divine.*

VIJAYA. *You mean, like Father? Those people didn't give any idea of this.*

PRANNARAYAN. *Now that you've understood it, it'll be useful to both parties.*

VIJAYA. *It's too late. If I'd known this before, I wouldn't have become queen. Prannarayan, I shall play hopscotch or jacks. And you shall keep me company.*

PRANNARAYAN. *It won't be considered correct, Princess Vijaya.*

VIJAYA. *Prannarayan, as the queen of Umbugland, I order you to!*

PRANNARAYAN *[bowing respectfully at this]. Her Majesty's wish is supreme.*

*[Vijaya squats on the floor. Prannarayan sits in front of her. The game of jacks begins. Enter a maidservant.] [P.298]*

Prannarayan takes pain to train her in ruling the country successfully. In his view politics means:

*Sweetly-smiling enmity and the experience of sacrifice. A show of sacrifice is always profitable in politics. [P.306]*

She felt herself like a caged-bird during the first cabinet meeting. She wants to enjoy her life spontaneously. But gradually Vijaya, starts enjoying political power. As a matured politician she grows in her new role. Her ministers who wanted to make her to be their pawn, fail miserably in the power game. She refuses to speak to her cabinet because,

*The Cabinet has broken the protocol of court by omitting to bow to us. We are the queen of this island.*

*[A low murmuring at this among the Cabinet.] [ P.301]*

The ministers say that the queen is like their daughter. But she reminds them of the protocol. "Princess Vijaya" becomes "your majesty" the cabinet unanimously resent the queen's independent functioning without consulting the cabinet. They made up their minds to give her a strong reminder of their importance. Vijaya visits the people of Kadamba tribe whose struggle Vratyasom, a cabinet minister, suppressed mercilessly. She prepares a plan to uplift the Kadamba tribe. A strong determination is seen in her conversation with Prannarayan.





*VIJAYA. This plan will raise my stature on the island. I will get the credit for achieving what has never been achieved before. This plan will make everyone understand that I am not just my father's daughter, nor a puppet ruler. From now on I plan to rule in earnest.*

*PRANNARAYAN. 'From now' means a voyage into the mysterious unknown. Who can tell with assurance what will be there, what will happen. Or to what destination it will lead.*

*VIJAYA. My confidence, my mind gives me that assurance.*

*PRANNARAYAN. The mind is like a lizard, it sometimes chirps the wrong note.*

*VIJAYA. What is your opinion, Prannarayan? Is my dream not going to come true?*

*PRANNARAYAN. To say it will, only after it actually does, would be more realistic. [P.317]*

This plan earns her good popularity in a short span of time. She, ultimately, wins over the rebellious people of her state. The queen's plan to eradicate the poverty among the poor Kadambas within a few years, reminds one of the schemes and programmes of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She takes the trouble of explaining to the ministers her plan of uplifting the people of Kadamba tribe. They secretly devise a plan to raise a revolt against the queen with paid agents. They walk out. Then the queen expresses her resentment to Prannarayan. He exposes her motives:

*VIJAYA. This has to be wiped out! Prannarayan, my blood's just boiling!*

*PRANNARAYAN. When one's pride is ablaze, the blood does boil.*

*VIJAYA. What? Pride!*

*PRANNARAYAN. Which everyone has, and through which everyone gets hurt. Men and nations live by pride alone.*

*VIJAYA[angrily]. My motives are pure! I want to give status to the poor people of this island.*

*PRANNARAYAN. Perhaps there by Your Highness wishes to increase your own! The motive of improving your own position on this Island may also be hidden behind this pure motive----*

*VIJAYA. Prannarayan!*

*PRANNARAYAN. Your motive may also be an obstinate desire to make what hasn't happened, happen in the end. . .[P.325]*

The encounter is of dual nature: 1.the one between ministers and the Kadamba tribe and 2.the other between vijaya and her ministers (an individual against the group). The ministers are enraged at their being ignored by the queen. Vratyasom, Pishtakeshi and others decided to fight against her to regain their power. They wanted to put a firm noose around the queen's neck. Vratyasom says:

*But if we use this very confusion skilfully, we can put a firm, and decisive noose around our opponents neck. . . We must get rid of this situation before it spreads. It wouldn't be in our interests to*



*let her stay on the throne after this. We must gather a mob! We must incite the people! We must loose upon her the tidal wave of an infuriated mob. [PP 333-334]*

The queen uses Bhagadanta as her pawn. Bhagadanta is a Kadamba .She comes to know the plot of the ministers through Bhagadanta. She sabotages their plan. The queen successfully plans her counter-attack. There is disunity among the ministers. Bhagadanta is used as a weapon in the queen's hands. He secretly conveys to the queen the plans of the ministers to incite the people against her. The two pen-bearers describe the encounter between the ministers and the queen. Prannarayan made all the arrangements according to the queen's command. He explained to her about these arrangements he had made:

*PRANNARAYAN. All the arrangements have been completed according to your Majesty's command. Armed guards are already hidden in every window of the palace. More guards are concealed in convenient houses near the palace square. Famished criminals in Kadamba costume have been stuffing their bellies with food behind the palace for the past two days. And a host of burglars, thieves and pick-pockets, disguised as the common people, have been let loose in the palace precincts on daily wages.....has given me a bad headache.[pp.342-343]*

Vijaya turns the tables on her scheming ministers and emerges as the supreme ruler of Umbugland. She devises her own methods of vanquishing her enemies. She transformed herself from the young and pampered princess into an indomitable and intelligent ruler of the kingdom of Umbugland. In the beginning, she is meek, light-hearted, spoilt and pampered princess. There is a marked development in her character. She grows more confident. Tendulkar makes his readers conscious of the ugliness, corruption and treachery in politics and stimulates them to think over them. In the end of the play, the queen gets prisoners released and fed liberally to help her counter their revolt. She deploys her spies as servants in the houses of ministers. She knows every move of her opponents. She faces the angry mob. The ministers think that she will be killed by the angry mob. The queen addresses the furious mob to be silent. She boldly announces the abolition of taxation. In her speech she talks about her future decisions:

*We said, "We shall institute a public enquiry into the private property of our ministers, who have today gone against the interests of the people.....who are found guilty will be severely punished.[P.353]*

The decisions announced by the queen made the audience shout for joy. They cheered the people. Then the angry mob turned against the ministers. The ministers surrendered to the queen to save themselves from the angry mob. They understand the gravity of the situation and surrendered to her. She plays the rescuer and saves her ministers. The characters of Vichitravirya and Vijaya bring to our mind Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The play shows how leaders make people credulous and gullible. Mindless people allow their leaders to be hypocritical. Such people cause a great damage to the nation. Prannarayan's speech at the end of the play is a thought-provoking one:

*PRANNARAYAN[coming to face the audience.]. On behalf of the kingdom of Umbugland, I wish you w\all a thousand years of peace, prosperity and plenty. It is you who give life to the encounter. I am*



*not a fighter.....YOU are a force that claps its hands, make strange noises with its mouth, an amazing untiring force.[P.356]*

It is her transformation from a princess to a ruler, the queen [Vijaya] learns that hypocrisy leads a politician towards great success and achievement. With the publication of this play, it becomes evident that, in the field of power politics, nothing is real. Appearances are deceptive. Success and treachery go hand in hand. The play exposes the role of the Government and the Press in making people ignorant. They arouse emotions in the people and paralyse their faculty of thinking and rationality. The ministers drive and incite the people against the queen, who tactically turns them against the ministers themselves. Political leaders manipulate the mindless people to strengthen their power.

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