

in a kind of madness as well as the deterioration of her body.

Through Meridian's experiences, Walker examines one of the society's major contradictions about African American women. Motherhood - the primary role to which they have been assigned and for which they are perpetually praised is also, paradoxically, the means by which they are cut off from life. Since in principle, society places motherhood on a pedestal, while in reality, it rejects individual mothers, as human beings with needs and desires; mothers must both love their role and undergo agony for choosing to be mothers. Though this is true for all mothers, this double-edged dilemma is pronounced for African American women because society does not value their children. As they are praised for being mothers, they are also damned as baby machines, which spew out their products indiscriminately upon society.

It is no wonder that Meridian, a sensitive girl-child who understands that she has shattered her mother's emerging self, tries to break the pattern by giving her own child away not only because she wants to go to college, but also because she knows she will do to her own son what her mother has done to her – poison his growth with thorns of guilt. Walker says, "When she gave him away, she did so with a light heart. She did not look back, believing that she had saved a small person's life" (110). But in keeping with the long tradition that precedes her, Meridian cannot forget her child. Meridian's quest is certainly intensified by the search of her child in the face of all the young children she encounters. Her guilt about her inability to live up to the standards of motherhood that has gone before her shatters her health and propels her on the search for salvation.

The thorns of guilt are woven not only into the fabric of Meridian's life but into the heritage of African Americans, as well. That heritage contains within it the quality of powerlessness as well as strength. Many would like to erase a part of their history from their memory even before they could understand them. Meridian is caught between her own tradition, her own personal desire to become a mother, and the fact that motherhood seems to cut her off the possibilities of life and love. Paradoxically, it is this contradiction that precipitates her quest. In her pilgrimage towards wholeness, she becomes a mother not in the biological sense but in her insistence on nurturing life rather than destroying it.

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Remember

- Durlabh Singh



Remember

Poetry is the blood of your visions
It rips you apart against
The torrid consolidations of mundane
Strengths elongated in the retinues
Sparkled for uncertain verses in trials.

It wants huge skies to fly
It wants ruined castles for your dreams
Vast open spaces for its habitations
Wilder faces and unknown stipends
And the spirit of beauty for
Its hearty congealments.

Open up the worlds for incantations
The barbarous that do not hold
Shipwrecks of your flesh
Sinking downwards
Pleads of the familiar
In an unfamiliar word
Silenced petals and anguished flowers.

It flies to faraway lands
It reaches molten cores of earth
It dances on raindrops of hope
It talks with dry ghosts
In the scorched summers
It accepts the cindered fragments
Forms frolicking in the liquid sea
Or shadows dipped in nothingness.



Dynamics of Corruption in Satish Alekar's *Pidhijat* (Dynasts)

- A.J. Sebastian

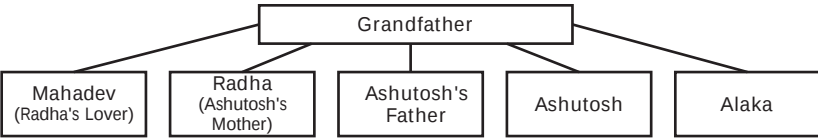
Abstract

In *Pidhijat* (Dynasts) the dramatist probes into rampant corruption perpetrated by political parties in the country. There is a total disregard for moral principles as characters live compromised lives. The story revolves around the family of the Politician getting disintegrated as his wife Radha continues her clandestine affair with Mahadev and spends most of her nights in a bar. Her son Ashutosh, unable to concentrate in his studies, prepares himself to learn the ways of the world of corruption he has learnt from his father. The ironic life they live is a shock to the grandfather who emerges out of his photograph on the eve of his twenty-fifth death anniversary. The absurd drama with its "Godfather theme" is very symbolic of the central theme in the play.

Keywords: Corruption, moral degradation, dynastic hegemony, Caste Brahmin, tensions, Emergency, absurd theatre, Godfather theme.

Satish Alekar has contributed substantially to Indian theatre with his absurdist presentation of plays with black humour, satire and circuitous depiction of reality. He is known for his *Mahanirvan* (The Dread Departure), *Mahapoor* (Deluge), *Atirekee* (The Terrorist), *Pidhijat* (Dynasts), *Begum Barv*, and *Mickey and Memsahib*. He has mingled colloquialism and traditional theatrical practices of Maharashtra. Alekar has been influenced by playwright Diwakar (Shankar Kashinath Garge (1889-1931)) who employed *Natyachhata* (dramatic monologues) to project issues of social customs, women, politics, colonial bureaucracy, using dark comedy and cynicism (Alekar 410).

Pidhijat (Dynasts) written in 2003, is a superb satire on rampant corruption perpetrated by political parties in the country. The play is a mingling of realism with absurd mode of expression. The dialogues between wife and lover, father and son, son and grandfather, wife and grandfather, father and grandfather are unique in presenting the central issue at discussion namely, corruption. There is a total disregard for moral principles as characters live compromised lives.



The play opens with Radha, a pretty forty year old woman in the company of her lover Mahadev, in a bar. He is a political leader in his late forties. Their intimacy shows their long lasting clandestine relationship. The scene presents the moral degradation due to crave for power and wealth in a section of the contemporary middle class society. The dramatist has very aptly employed the stage device of depicting a room beside the bar. In the room there is a large framed photograph of the grandfather who died twenty five years ago. But in his absence a distorted dynastic hegemony is perpetrated through politics and corruption. The lady keeps sipping imported beer as she engages in the usual absurd conversation with Mahadev.

RADHA: Begin. Introduce us.

MAHADEV: To whom?

RADHA: To ourselves. So that we don't turn into vapour in this turbulent weather. Vapour into clouds, clouds into thunder. Thunder into showers. Showers into money. A whole lot of money. Money from the sky. Lot of it. Introduce-self to self- again and again (Alekar 234).

The conversation gives leads to their background. Radha speaks of her status: "Married woman. Caste Brahmin. Husband government employee and politician. Fundraiser and treasurer for his party. Lots of money on hand. All cash. More than needed. Ashutosh our only son, is deep into his studies..." (234). She is worried about her only son who is bothered with his preparation for the class XII Board Examinations. She has been seeking fulfilment outside confines of marriage in the company of Mahadev. She confesses her victim position to bear multiple tensions. "My son's tensions for the Board Exam, my husband's tensions, balancing his government job and political responsibilities. And to add to all this the tension of my friendship with you" (234). Of late it is the tension of her son's Board Examinations that has led her to habitual drinking in the bar. Mahadev on his part, explains how he remained a bachelor, being advised by his Party headquarters. He belongs to OBC (Other Backward Classes). He is glad to be unmarried to be active in party politics. He has great hopes of becoming a Minister since his party is becoming stronger in the state. He came in contact with Radha's husband in prison during Emergency twenty five years ago.

Mahadev is glad to be unmarried to be fully engrossed in his political career and involvement with Radha. He also justifies his affair with her since every one cheats in relationships. He is of the view that relationship between a man and a woman should lead to marriage as it is the only true relationship. He doesn't believe in emotions, feelings and love, as these are incidental. She feels secure as her husband is totally unaware of her clandestine relationship with Mahadev. She wonders why her husband doesn't throw an iota of suspicion on her: "One knows these things by instinct. How can he be so tolerant? Sometime I feel I should get his blood analysed, decode these genes of supernatural tolerance, and publicise

them for the good of the whole world” (237). She even suspects her husband and Mahadev having had some secret pact. As they joke about cheating on her husband, it dawns on her to think of Mahadev to become a minister in the cabinet, so that her son needn't worry about getting through the management quota for his further studies. Madhav promises to do the needful. He also reveals how he had to forgo education since his father died when he was preparing for matriculation exam. He sold milk to collect money to go to college. It was during a protest march in the wake of Emergency in India, that he met her husband. Thrown into prison, he and her husband became bosom friends and entered into politics.

The next scene shifts to Ashutosh trying to concentrate in his studies. The photograph of the grandfather is shown on stage to create the feeling of dynastic supremacy. Observing a nervous Ashutosh, his father enquires about his studies. The conversation is typical of the absurd theatre with its comical elements.

FATHER: ...so, how's your study going.
AHUTOSH: So! What am I asking! How's your study going?
FATHER: What ...what's this?
ASHUTOSH: Answer me. How's your study going? Speak!
(Strikes hard the table in front of him with his wooden foot ruler. The sudden noise startles his father.) If you can't answer, say, how's your study going? Again, how is your study going? (Strikes with his wooden ruler.)
FATHER: How is your study going?
ASHUTOSH: How are your classes? Say it.
(Strikes the ruler on the table.)
FATHER: How are your classes?
ASHUTOSH: Isn't this the year of your Twelfth? Say it.
FATHER: Isn't this the year of your Twelfth? (241-2)

The game Ashutosh plays on his father shows the frustrated and meaningless lives they live devoid of genuine concern. The boy knows it full well that his politically oriented family has no room for his emotional and psychological growth as a child. I have attempted to apply Erikson's 'psychosocial modalities' paraphrasing below the school age, adolescence and young adult stages of Ashutosh's life and the frustration he experiences at 18. ("erikson" <http://www.businessballs.com>).

Psychosocial Crisis Stage	Life Stage	Application to Ashutosh's life
Industry v/s Inferiority	School Age: 5-12 yrs, Early School. Industry here refers to purposeful or meaningful activity. It's the development of competence and skills. Erikson described this stage as a sort of 'entrance to life' when sexual motives and concerns are largely repressed while the young person concentrates on work and skills development.	Ashutosh is unable to develop his competence and skills as a student due to extreme negligence by his parents.

Psychosocial Crisis Stage	Life Stage	Application to Ashutosh's life
Identity v/s Role Confusion	Adolescence: 9-18 yrs, Puberty, Teens. Identity means essentially how a person sees himself/herself in relation to his/her world. It's a stage of self or individuality in the context of life and what lies ahead. Role Confusion is the negative perspective - an absence of identity - meaning that the person cannot see clearly or at all who they are and how they can relate positively with their environment. There is reawakening of the sexual urge.	As a school boy Ashutosh has entered into a relationship with Alaka.
Intimacy v/s Isolation	Young Adult: 18-40, Courting, Early Parenthood: Intimacy means the process of achieving relationships with family and marital or mating partner(s). Erikson explained this stage also in terms of sexual mutuality - the giving and receiving of physical and emotional connection, support, love, comfort and trust especially between sexual or marital partners. Isolation conversely means being and feeling excluded from the usual life experiences of dating and mating and mutually loving relationships. This logically is characterised by feelings of loneliness, alienation, social withdrawal or non-participation.	Ashutosh seeks comfort with his girlfriend Alaka. His parents are least bothered about such a relationship. As the play ends Alaka brings for him a gun licence given by her father.

The only concern in the family is to initiate the boy into the world of corruption. The dramatist goes on to give the family background. They are Brahmins. Their home in the village was set ablaze in 1948 after Gandhi's murder since they were Brahmins. Ashutosh also tells his father that his mother had gone out somewhere and would be coming late in the night. Meanwhile, the jeweller had visited their home. The conversation further leads to the 25th death anniversary of the grandfather the following day. The boy takes out an expensive necklace the jeweller had brought and wears it. He tells his agitated father: "Sit. Sit properly. Don't get scared. All this is yours – Daddy, all this is yours! This house, this gold. You are the head of the family. I live in your house, Daddy dear! Look at me. Don't look so downcast like a tenant in your own house. Look straight into my eyes and tell me. This gold – where does it come from? Not from your government salary. Tell me are you corrupt? You gobble money? Tell me, straight. Don't be afraid. Don't worry. How do you make this money?" (246).

The father brushes aside his questions and tells him that children shouldn't meddle in the affairs of the elders. But Ashutosh doesn't give up his query as to why the jeweller came. He couldn't understand how to match his father's salary with their lifestyle. He also questions the rituals held in the house especially the sacred thread ceremony held on his

behalf. But to his utter surprise the father never wears his sacred thread. His remarks make the father speechless: "Like you I fold my hands to all gods automatically with no feeling like surfing through the channels in TV...How could I ever forget your face glowing with contentment in the glare of a thousand firecracker garlands set off to celebrate the demolition of the Babri Mosque on 6th December?" (246).

The father retorts telling his son not to babble like in Hindi films. He has no choice but to interpret laws according to his convenience as has been taught by his father who wished him to be a lawyer or an IAS officer. But his father's sudden demise left him in the lurch when Emergency was declared. He joined the opposition against the Congress. When Emergency ended, he became part of the Janata party and eventually the BJP. He recalls: "As a loyal follower of the party, money matters were entrusted to me. When you guard a tank, you taste its water as well. The party is good at raising funds but they have no inkling how to use power" (248).

Ashutosh wants to know the sacred source of corruption since it originates in his house. He affirms his determination to be on his father's side and asks him to teach him the dynamics of corruption. "After all I am your son. I am confused. Dad. Show the way, dad. Whom should I look up to with hope? Which principles which parties?" (248).

The boy taunts his father telling him that he has formed a club with his friends who have parents like his. It is a club for money gobbling fathers' sons. They engage themselves in discussing different corruption strategies of their fathers. It is their action plan to join hands "to sing the praises of corruption, the main spring of all our happiness... Corruption is a fundamental factor of our development strategy" (249).

Looking at his father's photograph the man contemplates on his twenty-fifth death anniversary. His mother too died soon, harassing him with her TB. He is afraid of hanging her photograph fearing her making a comeback coughing her lungs out. The duo then busy themselves with the usual ritual in the night lighting the lamp and opening soda. The father tells Ashutosh to light the lamp confirming him the light of the Dynasty. As they drink together, the father tells Ashutosh: "If I die tomorrow, they will speak of me with respect. 'He collected money for the Party.' Nobody will say that he collected it for himself. Every departed soul is saintly in life....he was free of all vices and addictions" (252).

The boy questions if he ever felt guilty of making money. The father acknowledges that he had collected money. "I create wealth for my Party. The money I make is for the welfare of the Party. Where else could you get money for elections? How would you pay the Party workers?...We run it as an enterprise – Industry. Transactions are made on Trust orally. No accounts- no audits. (253). Ashutosh finds his father in great fear and giving into sobs as he utters: "...this is a cry from my heart. A Brahmin wailing in the wilderness. In secrecy. That's the game. Let not