

A Study of Alpha Female in Vijay Tendulkar's Encounter in Umbugland

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* is a political allegory, written and produced in Marathi in 1968. The play moves around the central female character Vijaya, who is portrayed as a successful political leader. The play stands to be unique as a Tendulkarian play, as it depicts the transformation of a woman from being a normal lady to a dictatorial and autocratic politician. Vijaya, the central character of the play though shown as a woman born with silver spoon, she is challenged and encountered by men who are well trained politicians. She counters them single-handedly with her adept and assertive spirit. The present study analyses Vijaya as an 'alpha female'. People who are considered leaders and who occupy the highest positions such as heads of corporations, senior management and those that hold political office are often referred to as "alpha". Vijaya as a politician and as a leader controls her male-politicians with her high-level confidence, emotional intelligence and aggressive-intellect. She is a woman of intellect rather than a woman of emotions as she is attributed with masculine traits such as aggression and assertiveness. She is unlike other female characters of Vijay Tendulkar's plays, who are docile, vulnerable and victims of their situations and the people around them. The paper analyses Vijaya's evolution from a father's daughter to a dominating leader through her special traits of leadership qualities those are the traits of an 'alpha female'. It is those special traits that make Vijaya to be an empowered woman.

Key words: alpha female, leadership

Vijay Tendulkar's political satire, *Encounter in Umbugland* was published in 1974. The play represents the historical personalities through its characters. It is also a record of political scenario of India in the late 60s and the early 70s. The play moves around the character, Vijaya, who is portrayed as an indomitable character. In the kingdom called Umbugland, after the death

of her father Vichitravirya, an autocratic ruler, Vijaya takes over the reign in her own hands and encounters her opponents with overwhelming spirit and power. Her individual traits about being intelligent in designing her own way of countering her rivals elevates her to the top of the political arena in championing the situation and people around her. Vijaya and her situation reminds the readers of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. The present study discusses the presence and development of an alpha female personality in Vijaya pertaining to her leadership qualities like self-esteem, emotional intelligence, leadership and strength.

Vijay Tendulkar's portrayal of Vijaya in *Encounter in Umbugland* is entirely different from other female protagonists of his plays. They are portrayed as docile and weak being trapped and exploited by their male counterparts. Leela in *Silence! the Court is in Session*, Kamala in *Kamala*, Rama in *The Vultures* and Lakshmi in *Sakharam Binder* are to name a few as fragile females. But Vijaya of *Encounter in Umbugland* stands to be completely different from the female characters. She is portrayed as a woman of will power.

The term 'alpha males' or 'alpha females' are often refer to people in leadership positions. In a recent book titled *Alpha Girls: Understanding the New American Girl and How She Is Changing the World* Kindlon defines an 'alpha girl' as 'a young woman who is destined to be a leader. She is talented, highly motivated and self-confident'(pp.xiv-xv). He says that a leadership position demonstrates high achievement and motivation. In the alpha literature, writers argue that 'both alpha even fewer studies have used the term alpha to refer to females and males use aggression to dominate others'. The primary focus is how the definition of alpha female is attributed to Vijaya, the protagonist of the play with her leadership traits.

Vijaya is shown as growing up under the tutorship of Prannarayan-an eunuch. She has been tutored several times about the strategies to be followed intelligently with people of politics. Her slow evolution from a father's daughter as a cocooned princess towards a dominating queen is evident in her conversation with her mentor and advisor Prannarayan many times:

Prannarayan: Your Majesty, the ministers are coming here to meet you.

Vijaya(to the maidservant): Make them wait outside.(She goes on playing).

Vijaya shows her command and authority over her ministers in a very proficient way. She has imbibed this learning from her father as she says, 'They're quite used to waiting outside father's

apartment for hours at a time'. She doesn't yield to any kind of emotions and thoughts for the people(minister) who wait for her as a woman. But as an 'alpha' female, she displays her masculine trait of command and authority and shows her dominance over them without any fear. Also it is her self-esteem- her confidence in her ability of her voice beyond her age and experience is quite clear and apparent.

Vijaya after being coronated as the queen, her position of being 'I am assertive in what I want and believe'. She implements the protocol of the court i.e., to bow to the queen. She insists them to address her as 'Her majesty'. She shows her will-power by standing beyond the teachings and guidance that she receives from Prannarayan. Her attitude 'I am destined to be a leader' is well reflected where she says:

It is the custom that people of royal station should remember the value of their high rank. Three generations of my ancestors have kept that custom. This is the history. This was made by my ancestors'. (P.301)

Vijaya amidst her controversial and cunning ministers like Pishtakeshi, Karkashirsha, Vratyasom, Aranyaketu and Bhagdanta proves her leadership and political supremacy over these men who try to overpower her.

Vijaya who felt like a caged-bird in the first cabinet meeting, gradually starts enjoying political power. She becomes a matured and tactful politician in her new role. The ministers who wanted to use her as a puppet, manipulate her for their crooked plan to attain power. They are dwarfed by the emerging leader-Vijaya with her authoritative voice. She says, '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). When the ministers say that she is their daughter, she reminds them of the protocol. 'Princess Vijaya' emerges as 'Your Majesty' that the ministers altogether develop grudge at the queen's independent functioning without consulting the cabinet. They scheme a plan to prove their importance to her.

Vratyasom, a cabinet minister has suppressed Kadamba tribe, who comes under the territory of Vijaya's Kingdom. Their struggle and voice were suppressed by Vratyasom, a cabinet minister. But Vijaya as a ruler and a leader, prepares a plan to uplift the Kadamba tribe. One could see visibly, a strong determination in Vijaya.

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]

Emotional intelligence is a very essential quality for any successful leader. The person with such quality could understand himself or herself and also others and react accordingly.

Emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership . . . Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive analytic mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader. (Goleman, 1998, p. 93)

Vijaya could able to emerge as the out-and-out leader of Umbugland through her emotional intelligence as she adeptly turns the table on her conspiring ministers. She develops her own scheme of defeating the ministers and transfigures from being a coddled princess to an intelligent and challenging ruler. The political ambience where the circumstance- the unexpected death of her father, pushes her into ugly politics with cunning and treacherous ministers. Her adroitness in releasing the prisoners to help her to counter the revolt stand to be a masculine trait and she proceeds with the same spirit that she appoints spies as servants in the residence of her ministers. She comes to know about the future move of her ministers and faces the angry crowd. She announces the removal of taxation and states 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 crowd is cheered by Vijaya's well designed- announcement. Vijaya, thus becomes the champion as the ruler and a ruthless politician in conniving her plan to control her ministers.

Consequently the ministers are trapped as there is no other go for them other than surrendering. Vijaya's position as a champion and the minister's position as the fallen is described as:

Vijaya:...RIGHT. ABOUT-TURN!

(They turn and stand with their backs to the audience. Vijaya starts walking round them like a ring-master,...)(p.356)

Vijaya, thus asserts her position as a leader through the traits attributed to an alpha female. Her self-esteem as a ruling queen, emotional intelligence in knowing the mind of people and her ministers, masculine traits like cunningness, ruthlessness and arrogance in political circumstances fixes her to be the champion of her situation and the people around, clearly proves her to be an alpha female. It is those traits of an alpha female that establish her as an empowered woman.

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