

## The Alchemical Theatre: A Theme of Metamorphosis in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Garbo*

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Theatre has been accorded a prime position among other creative arts as an important platform for the representation of those aspects of human behaviour that lay hidden under the socio-cultural dictates of the contemporary times. The earliest theatre performances had been the masked performances where the actors used to put on masks. Physically it would hide the real faces of the actors and as a result, they would assume the new roles assigned to them. Symbolically and metaphorically, this act endorses the fact that theatre hides the real identity of the actors on the stage. The audience is also aware of the fact that the actors are representing somebody else other than themselves. The actors on the stage get a relief from the psychological dictates of being conscious of themselves. Since they transgress from their real selves, they get away from the different inhibitions that condition human life. This transgression allows them to represent those dark layers of human behavioural patterns, repressed desires, unfulfilled wishes not of the actors or the audience, but of the common core of human behaviour across the fixed space and time frames. Thus, the stage becomes a platform for enacting those aspects of human life which might be considered immoral, illicit, illegal, taboo, inappropriate, and so on. Such a stage performance gives the audience as well the actors an opportunity and convenience to dive into the innermost recesses of human psychology, thought processes and behavioural patterns.

The element of transformation or metamorphosis in the theatre has been scholarly and meticulously studied by one of the epoch-making dramatists and drama critics of the 20th century, Antonin Artaud. Himself being subjected to physical illness and mental distress along with the political atrocities, Artaud committed himself to theatre

and tried to explore and expand different possibilities that theatre could offer. His resolute determination to the cause of theatre practices and conventions and his experimentations with theatre performances resulted in a collection of scholarly essays on the conventions and practices of theatre. The essays he wrote at different times and the talks he delivered on various occasions resulted in one of the pioneering resources of theatre practices. Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* changed the course of approaches to the theatre performances at large. The noted critic Susan Sontag<sup>1</sup> underscores the significance of Antonin Artaud in the following words:

The Course of all recent serious theatre in Western Europe and the Americas can be said to divide into two periods—before Artaud and after Artaud. No one who works in the theatre now is untouched by the impact of Artaud's specific ideas. . . . Artaud changed the understanding of what was serious, what was worth doing. . . . Artaud's thought is organically part of his singular, haunted, impotent, savagely intelligent consciousness. Artaud is one of the great, daring mapmakers of consciousness in extremis.

Artaud explored the relation between theatre and the plague and demonstrated how the human body itself produces the elements which lie there dormant for a long time or until it gets the necessary environment to produce it. It is the same body that produces it. But until this takes place, the person is not aware of its existence or that his body carried these elements. Theatre, like a plague, brings out the attributes of the human body that lie dormant under the superstructures that govern human life and brings them to surface on the stage. The theatre is its double. It represents what remains hidden in the ordinary routine life. Another significant observation Artaud made about theatre is its relation to the element of cruelty. He gave an elaborate description of the notion of cruelty and explored the possibilities of the theatre of cruelty. The third significant aspect of theatre that Artaud explores is the relation of theatre with alchemy. Mahesh

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Elkunchwar's play *Garbo* incorporates various features of Artaud's concept of the alchemical theatre. This article attempts to study Elkunchwar's *Garbo* in the framework of Antonin Artaud's alchemical theatre.

Mahesh Elkunchwar is undoubtedly one of the significant Indian playwrights. He is instrumental in the shaping of modern, post-Independence Indian theatre along with other noted playwrights such as Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Satish Alekar. Shanta Gokhale<sup>2</sup> rightly observes, "Mahesh Elkunchwar is arguably the best-known Marathi playwright in the country after Vijay Tendulkar" (270). Elkunchwar has written his plays and other works in Marathi. However, his plays have been translated and performed in the major Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, and Kannada, along with English and other European languages such as French and German. Vijaya Mehta<sup>3</sup>, the noted actor and director who has directed many of Elkunchwar's plays, makes a scholarly remark, "Of his generation, Mahesh Elkunchwar is the only playwright with a truly pan-India reach" (CITATION?) Elkunchwar took the contemporary Marathi theatre by storm with the novelty of subjects he handled on the stage. Though his name and fame rest on his magnum opus play *The Wada Trilogy*, Elkunchwar's craft as a playwright is evident in his plays like *Reflection* ("Pratibimb"), *Autobiography* ("Atmakatha"), *Desire in the Rocks* ("Vasanakand"), *Party*, and *Garbo*. Of course, these are some of the significant plays among many other plays by Elkunchwar.

*Garbo* presents the story of the tragic lot of four individuals—Garbo, Intuc, Shrimant, and Pansy. As Rupendra Guha-Majumdar<sup>4</sup> observes "Garbo deals with the physical and psychological relationship among three male friends —Intuc (the pseudo-Intellectual), Pansy (the Effete), and Shrimant (the Rich)—and Garbo, an ordinary film actress-cum-prostitute who wants to be "successful" (396). These characters have come together by chance and have entered into physical and sexual relationships. Intuc and Pansy live in a flat owned by Shrimant. Elkunchwar sets this play in a closed room and brings out the drama out of the personal contacts of the characters. Anand Lal observes, "He [Elkunchwar] excels in delineating the complexities of personal contact in closed-room settings, often creating a claustrophobic hothouse effect" (xv). The names of the characters are suggestive of the qualities of these characters. Samik Bandyopadhyay aptly points out that the characters carry their roles in their names (xii). Intuc, the Intellectual, is a college professor. Shrimant is a rich, wealthy man. Pansy is a womanish, effeminate adolescent of seventeen. Garbo is a film actor from the B-grade films. Except for the name, she possesses nothing of the legendary Hollywood actress Greta Garbo. Shrimant

likes the company of Intuc and so he has asked him to stay in his flat. Pansy had run away from his home and was about to commit suicide. Shrimant likes the delicate body and womanish behaviour of Pansy and brings him to his flat. Pansy needs shelter and many other luxuries of life so he happily accepts Shrimant's offer. Pansy has great admiration for Intuc's intellect. These three, thus, live together. *Garbo* is their common friend.

Each one of the trio is related to *Garbo* in a specific way. The relationship with *Garbo* provides them access to their beings as well as their relationships with one another. The play has two acts. The central action of the play, *Garbo's* pregnancy, takes place at the close end of the first act. The news of *Garbo's* pregnancy ushers in an era of hope, enthusiasm, and joy in the lives of the trio, and the news of her abortion closes down a short-lived glorious dream resulting in the disillusionment of Shrimant, Intuc and Pansy, and the consequent murder of *Garbo*. The play begins in the atmosphere of boredom and dullness, reaches to the moments of ecstasy, and falls in the ditch of gloom and despair. The play presents a moving tragedy of the common human beings. According to Sandhya Amrute<sup>5</sup>, "*Garbo* is a tragic parody of middle-class society" (34). The characters of the play are by no means exceptional, great people. In this regard, Ujjwala Jadhav<sup>6</sup> observes, "In *Garbo* there are neither heroes nor villains.... It depicts the meaningless life of the individuals" (218). While elaborating the point, Makarand Sathe<sup>7</sup> comments, "The characters in *Garbo* seem to be rootless, weightless, lost, and showy" (1062). Their suffering is not the result of any great action. They are not destined for any great cause. Like the common human lot, they suffer in their little ways. The suffering of the foursome forms the crux of the play.

The first Act of *Garbo* opens in a sitting room of Shrimant's flat and it is a Sunday morning. The opening of the play sets in the mood of ennui, and the "passing of the time" becomes the motif of the inmates of the room. Intuc and Pansy engage themselves in casual talks just to pass time until Shrimant comes. After the arrival of Shrimant, the trio plays various games just to pass the time. They eagerly wish *Garbo* to come so that, again, time will pass beautifully. *Garbo* arrives and joins the threesome in fun and frolic, in flippant and frivolous talk. Amidst this revelry, *Garbo* announces that she is going to be a mother. The threesomes take it to be a joke and continue with the fun games. It is only when *Garbo* exhausts and retires to the inner room that Intuc guesses that she might be pregnant. He talks to Shrimant about the 'problem'. He feels that it would be foolish to take the responsibility of the child without knowing the authenticity of the father. Shrimant accuses Intuc of saving his skin. As *Garbo* comes out, she lets them know

that she is pregnant. A heated discussion takes place on who is the father of the child. Garbo asks them for the money so she could get rid of the child. She accuses them of not supporting her in her moments of crisis. Intuc, steeped in remorse, comes out with the determination of rearing the child and becomes successful in convincing Garbo to give birth to the child. Shrimant offers to give his name as a father to the child. The threesome adore Garbo for being the harbinger of joy, hope, beauty and meaning in their lives. Shanta Gokhale<sup>8</sup> aptly comments, "They look forward not merely to a new individual, but to the new purpose in life, the new hope that this individual will bring" (272). Garbo is brought centre stage. The three men encircle her and pay homage in a ritualistic style. And the curtain falls.

The second Act opens a month later with preparations going on in full enthusiasm for the homecoming of the baby. Garbo is out-station for the shoot of a film in the desert of Rajasthan. The three are eagerly waiting for her arrival. Now the atmosphere is full of joy and reverence for Garbo and so flippancy has no place in it. They are occupied with their 'dream project' — the arrival of 'their' baby. When Garbo comes, she avoids the eyes of Intuc and goes on with her casual, flippant ways, narrating the activities at the shoot. Intuc guesses something has gone wrong with Garbo and the child. At last, Garbo lets them know that the baby is no more. It shocks the trio, especially Shrimant. Shrimant has gone impotent and wanted that child badly to keep his identity as a 'man' intact. The aborted child aborts with itself the hopes of the threesome to create, or at least to witness the creation of something beautiful in their lives, otherwise full of dirt and filth. The characters start accusing each other of deception and mistrust. Intuc wants to have sex with Garbo, for now, she is fit for nothing but a sex-machine. In this regard, Kamlesh<sup>9</sup> observes, "Garbo dreams of becoming an actor like Greta Garbo, but in this attempt forsake the biological creativity of life. Her action leads her to the emptiness and pangs of life" (63). Shrimant still offers Garbo a marriage proposal, once again as an attempt to cover his manhood. Garbo turns down the proposal. Pansy wants to go with Garbo, instead of going home or living with Shrimant as an object of his sexual gratification. Shrimant proposes Pansy and Garbo alternatively to stay with him. When Garbo is about to leave, Pansy shouts that Garbo is a cheater and must be killed. Shrimant, on the spur of the heated moment, stabs her with a knife. Garbo falls on the stage in a pull of blood. Shanta Gokhale<sup>10</sup> rightly points out, "The three men, themselves not creative, kill her for having killed their only means of contributing creativity to life" (272). Intuc, in a frenzy, exclaims "Blood is real, Garbo false"

(Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 66). Pansy cries out for help. There is dead silence and the curtain falls.

The pregnancy of Garbo and the coming of a child are at the centre of the sea-saw of the relationships among these characters. The frivolousness and flippancy of the pre-pregnancy phase and the frustration, accusation, and violence of the post-abortion phase is balanced on the phase of warm and compassionate relationships during Garbo's pregnancy. The play slowly unfolds the anguish and struggle of the lives of these characters who try to the best of their capacity to come to terms with life. The initial mood of the play created through the overtly careless, frivolous behaviour of the characters heightens the tragic story of their lives. Intuc's phony cynicism, Shrimant's sex-ridden talk of perversion and Garbo's flippant behaviour as a sex-machine, in the initial phase, results from their awareness of their true selves. The play slowly leads the audience to the core of this awareness through the initial garb of frivolousness.

*Garbo* portrays various kinds of relationships. The primary relationship is between man and woman. The three men, Intuc, Shrimant, and Pansy, have relations with Garbo. Garbo in turn has relations with the trio. The play also portrays relationships among the men. Shrimant, Intuc and Pansy are related to each other. Shrimant-Pansy relationship has an added dimension of homosexuality. The relationship between Intuc and Garbo is at the centre of the play. They are creative beings. Intuc is a poet and short-story writer. Garbo is a film actor. Both have mutual respect for each other's creative talents. However, at the same time, both of them are aware of the mediocre nature and the substandard status of their creativity. The feeling of not being able to produce up to the mark troubles them. They have physical sexual relationships. However, they share their artistic temperaments as well. Garbo rejects the money offered by Shrimant for the abortion of the child because she knows that the child is of Intuc. She rebukes Intuc for his cowardice. Intuc accepts his guilt and offers to rear the child. Moreover, he makes Shrimant and Pansy accept his decision. He convinces Garbo to give birth to the child.

The relationship between Shrimant and Garbo is purely physical and sexual. Shrimant acknowledges Garbo as a sex-machine. He rejects to accommodate any feelings or emotions in man-woman relationships. According to him, Garbo too does not mind this kind of relationship. He values relationships in terms of money only. But the realization of the loss of manhood shakes him to the roots. He becomes a failure in a woman's bed. Other women rebuke and tease him. But Garbo shields his impotency. Shrimant applauds Intuc's proposal of rearing Garbo's child and offers to give him his name. By that he hopes to retain his identity intact as a man in society. When Garbo

aborts the child, he finds himself at a great loss, and on the instigation of Pansy stabs her. The relationship between Pansy and Garbo is quite interesting. He is half of her age. She initially entertains him as a wayward child who has run away from home. But as the association grows, the physical intimacy also grows. Garbo allows him sexual pleasure out of fun. Later, he starts demanding it on various pretexts. Garbo realizes that she has committed a mistake in seducing him. Pansy even offers to marry her. When Garbo turns him and his proposals down, he induces Shrimant to kill her.

Intuc's relationship with Shrimant is a purely functional one. Shrimant likes Intuc's company for his intellect, whereas Intuc gets free accommodation in Shrimant's flat. Otherwise, no other bond exists in the play that establishes and stabilizes their relationship. Intuc-Pansy relationship is also very functional and lacks any emotional bond. Pansy admires Intuc's knowledge, his status as a professor, and as a poet. Intuc has sympathy for the adolescence of Pansy. However, Shrimant-Pansy relationship is given a base in the play. Shrimant likes the physical appearance of Pansy. As he has lost his utility in the woman's bed, he needed a male body to test his sexual ability. Therefore, he happily accommodates Pansy in his flat and provides him with all the luxuries of life. Pansy gets luxuries of life at the expense of the use of his body. He has no complaints about sexual exploitation at the hands of Shrimant. However, when they dispute over Garbo's possession, Pansy accuses Shrimant of sexual extortion. They express their attitudes to, experiences with, and the perceptions of Garbo. Intuc sets the tone of the play when he tells Shrimant not to define Garbo:

Well, does it make any difference whether we call Garbo this or that? Names don't change things. Garbo will remain Garbo, while we will continue to search for the kind of Garbo we want. If we find her, well and good. If we don't we will suffer a bit. Or, not even that after a while (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 17).

This physical involvement with Garbo is the beginning of their relationship. The three males define and construct Garbo in their ways as they experience her. For Shrimant Garbo is nothing but 'a sex-machine', whose 'only business in life has been jumping from bed to bed', who is 'available at any time you go', and that 'she is just great in bed'. For him, the act of sex is nothing but a physical, mechanical activity:

Just get on the top of th is machine, one machine on the top of another, and presto! Printing begins. Sir Intuc, kindly tell me where emotions enter the picture. Once you get going, there's nothing but the body (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 16).

Intuc, Shrimant and Pansy get surprised at Garbo's 'unusual' behaviour, for this kind of talk might have been

a usual affair between them. But *today* Garbo is not up for such kind of talk. Shrimant tries to make her sure that these words are nothing but mere bubbles. Intuc casually tells her that these bubbles come to the surface because there is an emptiness inside us. Garbo promptly responds, "There is no emptiness inside me," and that, "I'm going to become a mother." Nobody takes her seriously. Shrimant laughs at the idea, while Intuc jokingly laments that, this kind of solution of filling up emptiness is "a bit of physical impossibility for us". They make a sport of Garbo being a mother of three babies of the good fortune of Shrimant, Intuc, and Pansy. Garbo, unable to stand this crude joke, breaks into tears. But, again, nobody takes her seriously. Rather, Intuc calls them "tears of joy" (25, 26). Further reference to her role as a mere extra dancer in a commercial film, "bouncing her tits flip-flop, flip-flop," causes Garbo to lose her temper. She takes it to be a deliberate insult to her waning career as an artist:

Are you trying merely flaunt my failure before me? I'm aware of my failure, perhaps better than you. And I'm trying to come to terms with it. I don't claw at people, draw blood, and then dance with demonic joy the way you do (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 27).

Looking at her rage and as Garbo makes for the door, the threesome sense that there is something wrong with her. They plead her not to go. Garbo grants them their wish, changes her mind, and accepts to participate in the game. She offers a new game -The Slut and Three Gentlemen. Once again, the play gears into its earlier mood of frivolity. However, this game reveals the fact of Garbo's pregnancy. At the end of the game Garbo, too tired, staggers out of the room. Shrimant observes, "Garbo really looks upset today. She has never been like this before. This is a different Garbo" (34). Her behaviour causes Intuc to suspect whether she is pregnant. The thought makes him serious and even leads him to wonder whether Garbo is going to plant this on one of them. Shrimant accuses him of saving skin. Whereas Intuc puts a genuine doubt as to why to accept such responsibility without being sure whose child it is. The fun games are over. The serious games take on.

Shrimant asks why she has no money when she used to earn in thousands. Garbo comes out with the truth that she is not such a hot draw at the box office anymore and that she is prepared to go to bed with anybody who will offer her a role. She demands ten thousand rupees to get the child aborted. Shrimant offers to pay her, but she rejects taking money from him. When he pleads that by giving money he will wash his sins away, Garbo cuts him saying that the baby is not his and that this is not a sin anymore. Thus, the situation gets dramatic. Intuc asks her to accept the money. Garbo takes the cheque from Intuc and slaps

it hard across his face, shouting hysterically, “You son-of-a-bitch” (38). This small but rapid incident drops in many hints. It points towards Shrimant’s failure as a man to impregnate a woman. It points towards the possibility of Intuc being the real father of the child. It also brings out Intuc’s cowardice in accepting responsibility, as at other times he was advocating a brave attempt of creating the aesthetic of filth. Intuc feels ashamed of his cowardice. As Garbo moves to leave, he apologizes to her, “Forgive me Garbo. Honestly, I mean it. I behaved like a cad” (39). Garbo asserts that it is her problem and that she has to find a way out. Intuc suddenly breaks out:

I want that child (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 39).

Intuc’s sudden turn surprises Shrimant. Garbo thinks he simply wants to redeem himself of his callous attitude to her and make penance for the wrongs he has done to her. But Intuc tells Shrimant and Garbo that he really will look after the child—neither for what Garbo has shown him up for what he is nor as a penance. Rather, as:

A chance to pull out of all this, and live bravely. To show some guts. I’ll look after him. We’ll look after him. He will be our only hope and our only refuge. He’ll be pure, fearless, clear-eyed, and clean (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 39-40).

The mood of the play gears into a dreamy, emotional state. Intuc is full of dreams now. He uses all possible power of words and his ability to use them as the means of pursuing and convincing others to accept his views. His speech becomes intensely emotional, verging on sheer poetry:

We will all humble ourselves before him. He will be our creation. And we will bow our heads before our creation. A single smile from him will move us. (*Pleading.*) Garbo let us do this. We are doomed people, we have neither seen nor experienced, nor created anything beyond filth. Let us grab this opportunity. It’s our only hope, our only chance. We will create something beautiful out of this filth. The world will know that there is a life somewhere which is beautiful, pure, fearless, innocent... And Garbo, we cannot achieve this without you. Do you know? Do you know what a tremendous role you have to play? (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 40)

Shrimant and Pansy get immediately struck by the emotional appeal and arresting power of Intuc’s words. Garbo does not outrightly reject this lofty idea. She also leans towards this dream project. A mother in her sees the future of her child. Nevertheless, she merely throws out her doubts. She wants to know whether they will stick to their words, whether they have guts to shoulder this responsibility through and through, what will happen to her career, whether she will be able to find work again, and what and who will be the source of livelihood for her and her child. Shrimant offers all the financial help and

gets ready to “transfer a whole lot of money to his name right away” (41). The whole situation gets extremely warm and cordial. But Garbo still has her doubts. She tries to pull the three men to the grim realities of life:

You have all gone mad. What I intend to do isn’t unheard of. It happens all the time. And please don’t think you’re to blame for this. Right now you’re getting drunk on your own words. Suddenly one day you will come to your senses and then there will be no escape (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 41).

But the threesomes reject to see the validity of their demand. They are busy toying with their dreamy ideas. When Garbo asks, “What’s the use of having this child? Doesn’t he need a name? A father?” Shrimant, already in a trance offers, “He will be my son. People will say, do you see that sweet boy? He’s Shrimant’s son” (41). They are no more ready to come out of the spell that Intuc has cast. They behave as if they have determined to get her caught in their idea. They have prompt answers to all the doubts and reasons for Garbo. When Garbo doubts whether she will be able to live intensely again, Intuc once again comes with a very intense emotional appeal:

Not just intensely, but beautifully Garbo. This is your chance. Your life will once again shine forth like the sun, and the child will bloom like a flower in the warmth of your light. Garbo, Garbo, Garbo, a new life is beckoning you. Don’t reject it. It’s our only chance. Garbo, this is our only refuge. Our only chance to create something beautiful. You are life itself. We will do anything for you. You only have to say the word. We will do it. Come Garbo, come. Come and stand here in the centre. You are Life. We bow our heads before you. Garbo, Garbo (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 42).

The spell of Intuc’s speech is too irresistible for Garbo to resist. She, *deeply moved*, gives herself to the dream of Intuc: “I’ll have the child and rear him” (42). The most intense dramatic moment of the play takes place now. The threesome place Garbo centre stage. They stand around her like humble devotees and pray in her honour:

You are life  
and the root of all life.  
The spring of fearless-beauty,  
the source of all hope,  
the fulfillment of all promises  
are you. You are the beginning of belief.  
You are the everlasting.  
All future suns are in your womb.  
Give us your light.  
Give us your sun.  
He will burn up darkness and destroy it.  
Retribution in the face of injustice,  
Compassion in the face of suffering,  
Sympathy in the face of calamity,  
Courage in the face of death.

This he will be. He will be creation out of destruction.  
Mother! Mother! Mother! (Elkunchwar *Collected Plays* 42)

These are the genuine feelings of the threesome. This incident opens up a phase of warmth in their relationships. The cordial, elevated, charged and charmed mood created at the close of the first Act continues at the beginning of the second Act. The living room is littered with the nursery stuff. The threesome are in a very joyous mood. They are busy with the preparation for the coming baby. Shrimant scolds Pansy as he tries to play with the toy-monkey meant for the baby. When Pansy complains, Intuc cuts a joke, "Shrimant is positively reeking with father-love and that sort of crap" (43). They are eagerly waiting for Garbo to come. They are worried too, for there is no news of Garbo since she had left them last month. Shrimant still lives under the charming spell of the last scene of the first Act when they celebrated the motherhood of Garbo. He pleads Intuc not to pull the cynic on him. He feels the importance the child could make to their lives and specifically to his life. As he has lately gone impotent, the child who bears his name will save him his manhood, his identity in the society. But when Garbo comes after a long waiting for the threesome, all their hopes rested in the child in the womb Garbo vanish with the revelation made by Garbo that she had a miscarriage during one of the stunt scenes during the shooting of a film. This revelation turns the three men hostile towards Garbo. The honour and respect they owe to Garbo for her motherhood suddenly get transformed into extreme hatred. A word battle takes place among the characters and it results in the murder of Garbo.

The play *Garbo* exhibits the dark forces of passions that lie beneath the surface of cultural codes. The theatre, according to Artaud, does not stand for the representation of culture, but rather, of nature. In the preface to *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud<sup>11</sup> writes, "It is right that from time to time cataclysms occur which compel us to return to nature, i.e., to rediscover life." And in the same work Artaud categorically observes:

The action of theater, like that of the plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it (31).

The delineation of characters in *Garbo* exemplifies these observations by Artaud. The play showcases the hidden dark forces that navigate, drive, and control the conscious

human behaviours. The theatre helps in the realization of these forces. In this regard, Artaud<sup>12</sup> observes:

Where alchemy, through its symbols, is the spiritual Double of an operation which functions only on the level of real matter, the theater must also be considered as the Double, not of this direct, everyday reality ... but of another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, once they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep (48).

The play *Garbo* attempts to present this dangerous reality lurking behind the so-called sophistication enforced by the socio-cultural dictates. The play received a severe backlash and biting disapproval from the theatre critics and the audience. It staged everything that a 'civilized, decent, society' would never approve of— the story of human relationships outside the approved social sanction, the obvious sexual references with homosexual overtones, coupled with harsh and in some instances abusive language, and the cruelty and murder at the end of the play. The disapproval of the play and its performance even led the playwright to disown it later. However, the literary merits of the play as a work of art and theatre got shrouded under the so-called dictums of the civilized society. As the playwright later admitted, the play was much ahead of its time and that the contemporary social environment could not digest the representation of the instinctual, essential core of human life. Plays like *Garbo* cannot be appreciated by the conventional, philosophical, or moral yardsticks of the so-called civilized society. A play such as *Garbo* could be appreciated from the perspectives of Antonin Artaud<sup>13</sup>:

To analyze such a drama philosophically is impossible; only poetically and by seizing upon what is communicative and magnetic in the principles of all the arts can we ... which our excessive logical intellectualism would reduce to merely useless schemata, but states of an acuteness so intense and so absolute that we sense, beyond the tremors of all music and form, the underlying menace of chaos as decisive as it is dangerous (51).

Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Garbo* succinctly stages the underlying menace of chaos as decisive as it is dangerous. The 21st-century audience has found itself comfortable with the kind of theatre the play has produced. The depiction in the play is not a shock for the audience. Today, there could be many *Garbos* drinking life to the lees and finding their way out.

## Notes

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