



Exploration Of Communal Harmony in Datta Bhagat's Play *Wata-Palwata*

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Abstract:

The Buddha says that the whole world is suffering and Lobha (greed), Dvesha (hatred), and Moha (delusion) at each individual are the real causes for human suffering. There are conflicts between nations, states, communities, tribes, groups, citizens and neighbours. Conflicts are there between brothers, sisters, brother and sister, husband and wife, father and son, mother and son, father and daughter, mother and daughter, and every human relation, and the reasons are the same greed, hatred and delusion. The Buddha says the root cause behind greed, hatred and delusion is Avijjya (ignorance) hence, each individual should develop Pannya (Wisdom) and Karuna (compassion) to get rid of sufferings and be happy. In his play *Wata-Palwata* Datta Bhagat has rightly pointed out these human vices at the characters' deep intentions. The play is full of conflicts and most of the times the conflicts are owing to the man-made phenomenon called castes. In this play, the author has shown people with vices and virtues. The people with hatred, greed and delusion are involved in conflicts and are suffering whereas the people who harbour wisdom and compassion are leading a very happy life.

Key Words: Communal harmony, problem play, caste system, conflict, anger, hatred, ignorance, wisdom, compassion, liberty, equality, justice and brotherhood.

Introduction:

Wata-Palwata is a wonderful play written by Datta Bhagat for the purpose of education through entertainment. It was first staged in December 1987 and later published by Continental Publication, Pune in 1988. *Wata-Palwata* is a great lesson for communal harmony. The characters in this play represent people from various castes and communities. This play comes under the category of 'problem play'. It's written in Marathi on the front page of the play itself that it is a *Don Anki Samshya Pradhan Natak* (Primarily Two Acts Problem Play). A problem play generally focuses on discussion on realistic social problems in realistic settings with real life like characters. All such characteristics of problem play are present in this play. M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines 'Problem Play':

A type of drama that was popularized by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. In problem plays, the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as a representative instance of a contemporary social problem; often the dramatist manages – by the use of a character who speaks for the author, or by the

evolution of the plot, or both – to propose a solution to the problem which is at odds with prevailing opinion.” (p.317)

Most problem plays aim to highlight deep social and moral conflicts. Across the world, playwrights have used this form to address pressing issues such as gender inequality and women's rights, prostitution, the struggles of laborers, racial and ethnic discrimination, and the caste system in India. They also explore themes of violence and broader social conflicts, making theatre a powerful medium for questioning injustice and sparking dialogue.

This play *Wata-Palwata* highlights contemporary social issues in order to instigate brainstorming and discussion. A real-life like situation is being recreated here to educate the audience through pure entertainment. The main aim of the play is to show that there are problems in society, and they can be dealt with in an amicable way and violence is not the solution for the issues. Through *Wata-Palwata*, the playwright wants to show that people from all castes and communities can live together peacefully and happily. The author has shown three generations of followers of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. The first generation is less educated but fully charged and ready to fight against atrocities at the stake of their life. The second generation is educated and patient and wants to deal with atrocities in a legal way. The third generation is still learning to deal with atrocities; they take some impulsive actions which prove to be fatal. The first generation acts without thinking, the second generation thinks before taking any action. The third generation is in its infancy, but it's very proactive, it acts first and thinks later.

Problems in the Indian Society:

The major problem in the Indian society is the 'Caste System'. Datta Bhagat has written this play at times when caste conflicts were on its peak. People belonging to upper castes used to do atrocities on the people belonging to lower caste on large scale. At those times there was too much gap between any two castes. There was too much hatred between the castes. It's the characteristics of caste that the person belonging to upper caste hates the person who belongs to lower caste and similarly the person belonging to lower caste hates the person belonging to the upper caste. Each caste was a staunch enemy of each other. Atrocities are done even now may be with the same intensity, but the frequency has gone down due to the law, but atrocities still exist that is the reality of the Indian society.

Indians have created the false notions of caste system. Caste is absolutely unnatural phenomenon and similarly religions are man-made entity. In his famous book *Castes in India* (1916) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar writes that "This sub-division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes." (p.18) Further he writes that "Peculiar interest attaches to the problem of Caste in India today; as persistent attempts are being made to do away with this unnatural institution." (p.22) Due to the existence of this man-made caste system, there have been many problems in the country. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in another book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) explains that probably in order to maintain the caste hierarchy, endogamy becomes a very important and necessary practice. Hence, the self-proclaimed contractors of the religion have invented the tools like 'Child Marriage', 'Honour Killing', 'Practice of Sati', and 'Restriction of Education to Women'. It's a system that benefits a few at the cost of the sufferings of many.

Plot:

Many villagers' homes have been swept away due to flood in a village. The government hires a contractor to construct new homes for the flood affected people. The homes are constructed and now ready for possession, but the contractor delays handover of the homes as he wants to insert his relatives' names in the list of beneficiaries. Arjun, a Dalit leader discovers of his filthy intentions and first warns the Tehsildar and seeing the inactivity of the Tehsildar he provokes all Dalits to take forcible possession of the newly constructed homes for the flood affected people. Arjun is held responsible for all the disturbances and later released on bail. Arjun tries to prolong the case in court for as much time as possible. In return, the contractor indirectly provokes the upper caste people to arrange a march to get the homes back from them. During this march the upper caste mob creates nuisances, destroys public property, sets things on fire and does violence and beats the Dalits. In their clashes one lady name Shewanta is being killed. Some upper caste people are arrested and later released on bail. When they are released on bail, they again beat the poor Dalits mercilessly and ruthlessly. The play ends by showing that the case regarding the allotment of homes is still on trial.

Exploration of Social Harmony in *Wata-Palwata*:

In *Wata-Palwata*, Datta Bhagat shows two kinds of people. One kind, like Satish and Hema, treat everyone equally and don't carry caste hatred in their hearts. The other kind of people are filled with anger and prejudice because of caste differences. The conflict begins because some greedy people, whose houses were not even damaged by the flood, still want free homes from the government. At the same time, upper-caste people feel jealous that poor Dalits who actually suffered in the flood are getting houses without paying. Since their selfish desires are not met, they become angry and turn violent. So, basically *Lobha and Dwesh* means 'greed' for extra benefits and anger and hatred due to caste hierarchy are the main problems highlighted in the play that can be seen in the dialogues below from Act II Scene I:

(Arjun comes in, running)

Arjun:

Sir, Sir, isn't Kaka home yet? (Startled, stands rooted.)

(Hema turns and goes inside. Satish regains control over himself.)

Satish:

Arjun? Anything wrong? How was the *morcha*? Okay?

Arjun:

No sir, the *morcha* was totally ruined. They threw the belongings of everyone in Milind Nagar out on the streets and set them on fire. They are making a bonfire of each Dalit home. And -

Satish:

But the police? What are the police doing?

Arjun:

Police? The bastards opened fire on us! That bloody minister never arrived. With his tail between his legs, he ran away to safety. The situation has gotten totally out of control.

Satish:

And what about you? When the situation went out of control, what did you do? Ran away, didn't you? You are responsible for this disaster. I warned you not to take out the *morcha* today. But you didn't listen. You provoked the Dalits. And now when the *busti* is burning, you condemn the police? Who invited this catastrophe on the heads of the poor illiterate people in the first place?

Arjun:

(Furious) It's easy to hold forth in the safety of four walls. But reason and rationality don't provide a roof over your head when you have lived in leaking huts for ages. The houses are built specially for us. How can we tolerate it if people like Dasrao Joshi brazenly occupy them before our very eyes? Can you? That man had even refused to rent you his rooms. Bloody bastard! They have been claiming every damn thing around as their own. But even our things? Do they also belong to them? Then what do we have which belongs to us here, sir? What can we call our own? We've just one thing left as our own, sir, and that's suffering! Oppression and injustice are crushing us to extinction, and you still want us to think? Oh no. That's not on sir: just not on. This is no ordinary struggle and no ordinary movement. It is an all-our war. Even greater than the two world wars. And anything is fair in war. The path which leads to victory is the right path.

(Trans. P.322)

The couple, Mr. Satish and Ms. Neha, represents the second generation in the play. Both are well-educated and live beyond the boundaries of caste discrimination and hatred. Satish, a professor and a follower of Buddhism, is married to Hema, a Brahmin woman. Their union reflects a progressive outlook, rising above the divisions of caste and religion. Together, they lead a harmonious and happy life, embodying values of equality and mutual respect. Other than this couple, all remaining villagers are suffering from a complexion called casteism. Because of caste - hatred, jealousy and anger, they all are always involved in caste-based conflicts, politics and violence.

In India people are divided in so many castes and religions. If all these people belonging to different castes and religions coordinate and cooperate with each other instead of all the time fighting, cannot serve a good purpose. People must cooperate with each other in order to bring happiness and prosperity. All human beings are equal; no one is great. No one is inferior; no one is superior. Hema and Satish are living very happy and peaceful romantic life that can be seen in the following dialogues in *Wata-Palwata* translated as 'Routes and Escape Routes' by Maya Pandit, Act III Scene III:

(Hema is sitting on the couch and starts knitting. Satish comes in and Hema is sitting with her back to him. He approaches her stealthily and places his hands on her shoulder. She is startled.)

Satish:

Scared?

Hema:

(Holding his hands on her shoulder.) Why are you so late?

Satish:

Well, I got a bit late somehow. Angry with me?

Hema:

No. But this house becomes oppressively lonely when you aren't around, you know.

Satish:

Come on, Hema. You aren't alone now. You've got a four-month-old companion with you!

(Hema blushes.) Wow! It's ages since you blushed so beautifully.

Hema:

(Scolding him) Professor Satish Godghate, you seem to be in a very romantic mood today

Satish:

What romantic mood! Call it a family mood.

Hema:

So that's why you're back so... early! I am fasting today.

Satish:

Fasting?

Hema:

It's *poornima*, full moon day, today.

Satish:

What's this new fad?

Hema:

Nothing new in it. It's six months now. I have told you about it only today. I've been fasting on every *poornima* day since Kaka left us.

Satish:

How come you never told me that?

Hema:

What was there to tell? I felt like doing it, so I did it. That's all.

Satish:

What for?

Hema:

Nothing really.

(SATISH notices the garland on Kaka's photograph.)

Satish:

A garland of fresh flowers on Kaka's photograph! And what's this? You seem to have worshiped the Buddha as well! Hema, Can I ask you something?

Hema:

Of Course.

Satish:

You won't be angry, will you?

Hema:

Of course I won't!

Satish:

Did you really feel like worshiping the statue?

Hema:

I offered the Buddha statue flowers the day it arrived, but that was because I couldn't offend Kaka. But if I hadn't offered flowers today, who was there to feel offended anyway?

Satish:

You mean you really offered flowers today with full faith?

Hema:

I feel nice worshiping. Now if you think that's being faithful, I won't object.

(Trans. P.335)

Their relations are full of life and love. Their relations can be calculated from their dialogues. Satish and Hema are inter-caste & inter-religion marriage. But their life is going on very smoothly and peacefully. Because they are beyond the frontiers of castes and religion. They are well educated and civilized; they have clearly understood the meaning of humanity and freedom.

The root cause of the conflicts, quarrels and violence is the caste hatred. One caste is trying to dominate the other caste. One caste is trying to rule the other caste. In his book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar says that “Every Congressman who repeats the dogma of Mill that one country is not fit to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class” this statement uses John Stuart Mill’s argument against caste system rigidly practiced in the country. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had identified that if our country wants to progress, then we must come across all the internal differences at one platform. The country’s progress means each individual’s progress.

People are unnecessarily and ignorantly depriving themselves from the happiness of their mind. They aren’t aware about what true happiness is. His holiness Dalai lama has said in his speech while addressing the gathering that, earlier the European countries were at war with each other every time. But now time has changed they are not at war with each other and have formed European Union and European countries have become developed counties. Its because now they are not fighting with each other but cooperating with each other. In his speech *Be the love: For one, better world*:

“Now, I’m 86 years old,” he began. “And in my lifetime, I’ve seen a great deal of bloodshed in a variety of wars. The result of such violence has just been suffering and more hatred. This is one of the reasons why I admire the European Union. Historically several of the nations that are among its members, especially the French and Germans, have regularly fought with each other down the centuries. However, after the end of the Second World War they realized that constantly viewing your neighbour as your enemy serves no good purpose. Think how many lives have been lost in this squabbling and how many have been saved in the peace of the last 70 years or so”. (2021, November 30)

The Buddha teaches that quarrels must be avoided by love and compassion towards each other.

Conclusion:

In India, every village has the potential to become an economically self-reliant community. However, this possibility is often hindered by a lack of cooperation among people, who remain divided by man-made barriers such as caste and religion. These divisions foster anger, jealousy, and resentment, preventing collective progress. If villagers cultivate wisdom and compassion, they can overcome these obstacles, leading not only to financial strength but also to mental well-being. When people from all castes and backgrounds work together, respect one another’s dignity, beliefs, and perspectives, the village can flourish in every aspect of development.

“An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind.” – Mahatma Gandhi.

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