

Beyond The Process Of Alienation

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Abstract: *The character of Azdak is one among the key characters of the play, 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' by Bertolt Brecht. The 'figure' which is dichotic in nature, is in accordance with Brecht's theory of 'Alienation'. However this paper seeks to examine how the character itself works as a metaphor and its actions reveal multiple facets of events which are inadvertently pushed to the background. The paper shall attempt to expose the multiple functions played by the character Azdak and acts how it functions as a perfect tool of revealing Brecht's arguments to a capitalist society.*

Keywords: *Figure, Alienation, Hierarchy, Brecht.*

'The Caucasian Chalk circle' written by Bertolt Brecht talks about how a land originally owned by a section of the society is given to another on the basis of how the latter group ensures that the land is properly used productively to aid both the groups. The play within this play acts as a substantiation to the denied ownership of its initial inhabitants. The concept of alienation is an objective of Brecht's form of Epic theatre, where he wishes to make the spectators politically aware of the actions and reactions happening on stage in order to engage the spectators in the process of dialectical thinking and thereby deduce concrete arguments. Therefore he emphasized on engaging the audience to think while being entertained.

"The purpose, which connects alienation to the general theory of the "epic theatre," is to develop the political awareness of the audience, to teach while entertaining, and to force the spectators to draw concrete (and preferably revolutionary) conclusions from the issues presented on the stage. The alienation thus establishes a special relation between the audience and the play, whereby the former views the latter as an object lesson". (Alter, 1964, p. 60)

As a consequence of this objective which he wished to achieve he also introduced the concept of 'figure'. According to Brecht a unified character did not exist, what actually exists when we see an actor portray a role is an accumulation of behaviors. The character which we viewers disseminate is basically what emerges from these behaviors. Therefore in realistic terms, a character cannot exist on stage. The role played by an actor was hence called as a figure. To Brecht, a character has fixed qualities which are persistent, repetitive

and fixed. A figure on the other hand is flexible, ever changing and unpredictable. The figure works in relation with the surroundings and situation it exists. In other words a figure acts according to the system of hierarchy it is placed in, in relation to the other figures on stage and also the circumstance it faces at a particular point of time. (Barnett, 2015, p. 58- 59) Brecht also emphasised as to how too much empathetic involvement with any character on stage blocks the logical line of thinking. (Barnett, 2015,p. 65) .The present paper seeks to analyse the figure Azdak, as one which exemplifies the concept put forth by Brecht. Azdak's actions are always linked to the ideals he wishes to be implemented in the society and his personal conflicts as well. His actions are symbolic of how the society should function but, but he also keeps his survival as priority above everything else.

The figure of Azdak is one which can be claimed as a central one and at the same time one which creates a sense of surprise as he came out of nowhere in the play . The role Azdak plays is central to the plot of the play and he exemplifies Brecht's concept of a figure. Azdak is not the type of character which is sympathized by the audience, it can be noted that throughout the progression of his activities, the figure of Azdak churns up feelings of hatred in the reader or the spectator as he passes judgements not in accordance with the norms of justice or in context with the cases presented in front of him, but rather according to his whims and interpretation of justice. A point which does enable one to ponder is, why an entire scene is devoted to the figure of Azdak which talks about how he became, a judge and what he

was before the same. The evident line of reasoning, where most would say that this is to ensure the figure is familiar to the audience. One could also argue that revealing the figure's way of working before the last scene, would build up the unpredictability of the same, which emboldens the element of suspense. This is contrary to Brecht's theory where he usually ensures that the plot is revealed and the suspense is buried away, in the very beginning of the scene, which one can easily notice while reading or watching the play. The singer reveals the plot of the scene in the beginning of the each scene. This pattern is not followed through in the last scene, however the Prologue would indirectly give away the plot of the 'play within the play' hence one could, in a way, rule out this possibility. Then the question does arise why so much emphasis on a character, which though does play a pivotal role, receives the liberty of a back story, which is a luxury not given to any other character in the play.

The extensive use of metaphors in not a novelty in Brecht's plays, this in a way is part of the answer to the above query and also to the wider understanding of the role Azdak plays in the piece. In fact the ingenuity lies in how a human being acts as a metaphor of 'justice' in the play and, how the very nature of justice itself can be perceived differently when the enforcer of the same is faced with real human conflicts. In the opening lines of the scene six the cook says

"You're in luck, it's not a real judge, it's Azdak. He drinks like a Fish and he doesn't know a thing, the biggest thieves have got off free. He gets everything mixed up and the rich people never bribe him enough, that makes it better for our kind of people." (Brecht,2006,p.216)

The description here from the eyes of a commoner gives the view of how justice was available to the common folk, which was a stroke of luck for most especially for those of the poor. These lines give a viewpoint of the receiver's end. It speaks of how justice worked for the poor in its most favourable conditions. Brecht through Azdak speaks how Justice is given to the lower rungs of the society as we go further into the play we can see how Azdak functions as the voice of Brecht wherein he redistributes wealth among the poor and empowers the powerless for acting as the swift hand of a socialist doctrine wherein the belief exists that all the wealth is acquired dishonestly. In accordance with Brecht's 'Alienation effect', The build-up of an admirable hero is untraditionally broken down by making him susceptible to the carnal pleasures of the flesh and also being shown as someone who is indecisive when compelled with fear, compromising values when it comes to self-survival and also engaging in speeches which are deceptive and twisted to suit one's own purpose. (Maria p. Alter, pp64) Thus we see a clash or a confusing set of signals given to the traditional viewer which keeps a space between the audience and the spectator to promote dialectical thinking. Azdak according to the article written by Linda Hill is a 'provocateur' who acts as both good and bad who twists accepted principles not only for profit and for the poor but apparently for the sheer fun of it. (Hill,1679,p.319)

We will now take a closer look into the actions, of this figure to examine its intended cause and effects. The dichotomy of Azdak's personality can be observed in the very beginning of his scene where he first talks about the

ideological notions of how his Grandfather was a great man and later talks ill of him to escape death. He claims that rabbits are harmful creatures which eat plants such as weeds (Brecht, pp.197) he justifies his theft here by using verbose and by twisting the truth to ensure his survival. The argument he places seems absurd to a reader or a spectator as the base level of the fact is obvious and clear to us, but when a person usually tries to escape, he twists the same according to his requirement. The providers of justice, truth and equality, hide behind the veil of intellect, and create a boundary by distinguishing those who do not understand as non-intellectuals, who fail to understand, hence it's better to obey and submit rather than question. In the dialogue which Azdak speaks he himself claims that to question is itself a 'temptation'. Upon reading further, he tells the fugitive to "eat like a poor man" further reflecting upon his wish to shape the society around him and think from the perspective of the poor. (Brecht,2006,p197-198).The multifaceted nature of this 'figure', Brecht created, works as a powerful metaphor of both the nature of human and the paradox it creates when it comes in contact with ideological virtues such as justice. Azdak used the book of Law to sit on, again conveys how the law for him was basically something he considered below him. (Brecht pp,2006 215) Placing him above the law which again reflected the reality as to how a human figure presided over the law rather than being an enforcer of the same and the law stands above the enforcer.

Let us now move into the cases which were presided over by Azdak, He indirectly points out towards the corruption which exists due to the involvement of money in the medical field as well. He acknowledges the mistake of the doctor who is at fault but does not punish him, for the crime he commits; neither does he punish the accusers. The dialogue that ensued reveals how even doctors worked towards a system where they placed their own monetary benefits above the ailments of the patients (Brecht, 2006, p.208).In the case of Ludovika, though the charge is that of rape, the judge's ruling had nothing to do with the proof as the same was against the hired man. He accused the woman on the basis of her behaviour, again removing the burden of exploitation against the poor. A judge who does not infer from proof is usually not considered to be worthy of the position. But her behaviour revealed how the sexual episode was consensual more than a rape and the action that ensued was merely an oppressive tactic to save the face of the accuser. (Brecht, 2006, p.209). While presiding over the case regarding the old woman, the judge again believes in the miraculous tale presented by the poor old woman rather than the factual evidence which the prosecution has to say. The larger picture at play is how Brecht tries to focus the attention towards the victims of war, who never received any form of compensations or support (Brecht.2006,pp. 213). The old woman was considered to be synonymous to the condition of 'Gruzinia', where the people who are at the higher pedestals are least affected and those on the lower end suffer lose with the mere consolation that it is a sacrifice to their nation.

And finally in the case of finding the real mother of the child, the concept of motherliness is linked to those who sacrifice and work towards the title or the position rather than those who are entitled to the same by blood. The child being given over to the real mother does more harm to the society

than good. He would be another person insensitive to the cries of the poor and the underprivileged and would also be another susceptible to greed which in a way is the parting blow of his accusation of having those in a society, who are financially superior to another. This viewpoint is conveyed by Brecht through the singer which reflects the Character Grusha's thoughts

"If he walked in golden shoes
Cold his heart would be and stony.
Humble folk he would abuse
He would't know me.
Oh, its hard to be hard hearted
All day long from morn to night.
To be mean and high and mighty
Is a hard and cruel plight.
Let him be afraid of hunger
Not of the hungry man's spite
Let him be afraid of darkness
But not fear the light." (Brecht, 2006p.22)

Attacking the psychological construction of a capitalist system was the final message that Brecht delivers before the conclusion of the play. In response to this the judge never looks at what is good for the future of the child rather than focussing on who holds the ownership of the same. (Bunge and Morgan, 1959, p. 59)

The character's purpose in the play is to ensure a view of Justice in a different light, having an entire scene where different people who are financially superior, being levied with heavy fines whereas the poor are not given a proper punishment per se and one may begin to think that justice was denied to those which truly deserves the same. But what Brecht wishes to invigorate as a line of thought through the Character of Azdak is how the effect of the punishment hurts the poor more than the rich. The whole story revolves around the dominance of the rich over the poor, shows the imbalance where the weight of the punishment has to be borne more by the poor than the rich. The poor is driven to commit crimes because of compulsions societally created by the hierarchy. Thus the judge does not attack the deed, but rather the system which cultivates such hierarchies and hence such behaviours. Every circumstance, conflicts and events are never close to reality, but it does hint towards the flaws of the capitalist hierarchy. The character of Azdak thus gives a much clearer view regarding the concept of equality. The true sense of equality can never be achieved until 'the playing field is levelled' or in simple terms until there is a level of

commonness when it comes to the economic conditions. Hence the effect of a certain punishment can never be completely justified unless the above condition is achieved. One can also interpret as to why the character of Azdak ensures that the Bribes he accepts are also justified. He only takes the same to keep himself secure. For if one does not ensure this aspect is taken care of there may not be another who may help him at a time of need. The problem with a hierarchical construction within a society is that a person's life is devoted to keeping oneself safe or attains a sense of security before he/she could emphasize on the function towards the others of a society. The hypocrisy which Azdak portrays is shown to have its roots in the construction of the system he is a part of. Brecht reveals his opposition to such a system in this way.

To conclude, Brecht provokes the audience by channelling their attention to those aspects of the society which are usually overlooked. His plays are political as he expresses his opinions though the same, but he reveals his argument through logical construction rather than merely stating the same. Azdak therefore works as a tool for looking at these perspectives and understanding the arguments and concerns overlooked by most. The multiple layers of the subtexts is a proof of Brecht's mastery and his designation as one of the best playwrights which stands the test of time.

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