

Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller"

Plot of Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller":

Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller" is based on a popular folk legend from the Balod district of Chhattisgarh. Tanvir presents the story as a tragic drama that explores love, betrayal, family secrets, and psychological conflict. The play begins with Bahadur Kalarin, a beautiful, intelligent, and independent woman who runs her uncle's wine shop. She is well known in the region for her beauty and confidence. One day, the King (Raja) of Gangrel visits the wine shop. He is attracted by Bahadur's beauty and strong personality. The two fall in love and secretly marry in a temple. Before leaving, the King promises Bahadur that he will soon return and take her to his palace as his queen.

However, the King never comes back. Bahadur realizes that she has been abandoned. She gives birth to a son named Chhachhaan and decides to raise him alone. To protect her son from pain and shame, she never tells him that his father is the King. She believes that hiding the truth will help him live peacefully. As Chhachhaan grows up, people in the village constantly mock him because he does not know who his father is. Their insults make him feel ashamed and inferior. He becomes angry, frustrated, and emotionally disturbed. The truth about his birth remains hidden, and these unresolved feelings slowly damage his personality.

Years later, Chhachhaan becomes involved in a dispute over land with the Raja of Gangrel. Neither of them knows that they are father and son. During the violent quarrel, Chhachhaan accidentally kills the Raja. Only afterwards does Bahadur realize the terrible truth—that her son has unknowingly murdered his own father. The hidden secret has now led to an irreversible tragedy.

After this incident, Chhachhaan's mental condition worsens. He develops an unhealthy emotional attachment to his mother. Feeling an emptiness inside him, he tries to fill the emotional gap by marrying many women. He marries 126 women, hoping to find happiness and peace. Yet none of these marriages satisfies him because his psychological wounds remain unhealed. Finally, Chhachhaan confesses to Bahadur that none of his wives resembles her. He even begs her not to call him her son, revealing his confused and forbidden desire for his own mother. This shocking confession shows how deeply his mind has been damaged by years of secrecy, emotional neglect, and repressed feelings.

Bahadur understands that her son has lost all sense of moral and emotional balance. She realizes that there is no way to save him from his tragic fate. To end the cycle of suffering and prevent further destruction, she prepares one final meal for Chhachhaan. After feeding him, she pushes him into a well, causing his death. Unable to bear the pain and guilt, Bahadur then takes her own life by stabbing herself.

The play ends as a powerful tragedy. Through the story of Bahadur and Chhachhaan, Habib Tanvir shows that hidden truths, betrayal, and emotional repression can destroy individuals as well as families. By combining Chhattisgarhi folk tradition with psychological ideas such as the unconscious mind and the Oedipus complex, Tanvir transforms a local legend into a universal tragedy about human suffering, identity, and fate.

1. Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller" as a Psychological Play:

Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller" is an innovative Chhattisgarhi folk drama that explores the deep interconnection between literature and psychology. By unravelling the human psyche, Tanvir examines how a disturbed childhood and the absence of paternal love create lasting mental trauma.

The play addresses psychological repression through the character of Chhachhaan, who is raised by a single mother, Bahadur. His repression stems from an "injury to self-esteem" and an "inferiority complex" caused by his mother's refusal to reveal his father's identity. This leaves him vulnerable to "society's taunts," leading to pent-up aggression. He confronts his mother, demanding, "That dau's always calling me a bastard... You tell me that he is a good man, a big man, a king then why do you hide it?". This repressed anger eventually manifests in the accidental killing of his father, the Raja of Gangrel.

Tanvir further explores the breaking of societal taboos through the play's heavy "Oedipal overtones". Chhachhaan exhibits a "leaning type" personality, characterized by an extreme, obsessive dependency on his mother. This fixation disrupts his ability to form normal marital bonds; despite marrying 126 women, he remains unsatisfied, claiming they brought him "no relief at all". He frequently abandons his brides to sleep near Bahadur, telling her, "I won't. I am sweating too much" when urged to return to his wife. The ultimate taboo is shattered when he admits his romantic preference for his mother, stating, "I've been married to so many women, but I have never found a woman like you". He even begs her, "Don't call me son," revealing a desire for intimacy that transcends their biological roles.

In conclusion, Tanvir uses these psychological layers to highlight how repression can lead to destructive behaviour. The play ends tragically when Bahadur, unable to reconcile her son's desires with societal norms, kills him and then herself. Through this folk tale, Tanvir masterfully demonstrates that the "unconscious mind" has a powerful impact on personality and can lead to the total disintegration of social taboos.

2. Habib Tanvir's Handling of Chhattisgarhi Folk Traditions within Modern Realistic Structure in "Bahadur the Wine Seller":

Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller" serves as a sophisticated bridge between traditional Chhattisgarhi oral narratives and modern psychological realism. By rooting the drama in local folklore, Tanvir creates a unique structure that utilizes communal performance to examine deeply personal trauma.

The play's foundation lies in Chhattisgarhi folk traditions, specifically an oral tale about a beautiful, independent wine seller. Tanvir employs the Chorus as a primary folk device, using it to represent the "consciousness of society". This traditional element is integrated into the plot to signify the passage of time and communal judgment; for instance, during Chhachhaan's 126 marriages, the chorus performs the "ritual aarti" while dancers join a line carrying a "pestle". These folk motifs provide a vibrant cultural texture that contrasts sharply with the dark, internal struggles of the protagonists.

Despite these traditional trappings, the play follows a modern, realistic dramatic structure focused on psychoanalysis. Tanvir "unravels the human psyche" by exploring the "drastic after effects" of a "disturbed childhood" and "mental trauma". The realism is found in

the detailed examination of Chhachhaan's "inferiority complex" and "aggression," which stem from his status as a fatherless child exposed to "society's taunts". Rather than a simple moralistic fable, the play becomes a clinical study of the "unconscious mind" and "repressed" desires.

Furthermore, Tanvir adapts the folk narrative to mirror the structure of Greek tragedies, where the inevitable hand of fate leads to the hero's downfall. He uses the Chhattisgarhi setting to ground modern psychological concepts, such as the "leaning type" personality, within a recognizable cultural landscape. This fusion reflects Tanvir's broader theatrical philosophy where folk performers tackle complex themes, a detail I am providing from external knowledge of his "Naya Theatre" movement.

In conclusion, Tanvir's innovative approach ensures that folklore is not merely decorative but the very vessel for analyzing "human nature". By embedding modern psychological "layers of the psyche" into the framework of a Chhattisgarhi oral tale, he creates a dramatic experience that is both culturally specific and universally relevant.

3. Portrayal of Bahadur Kalarin (As a Tragic Figure):

In Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller", the titular character, Bahadur Kalarin, is a subversion of the traditional submissive female archetype. She is portrayed as an "extremely famous and beautiful wine seller" who operates with a level of agency rare in folk narratives. However, her stature as a tragic figure emerges because her very virtues- her fierce independence and protective strength-become the primary catalysts for her ultimate destruction and the disintegration of her family.

Bahadur is established as a "strong and independent woman" who manages her business with competence. Her tragic flaw is rooted in this autonomy; she chooses to marry the King in secret, telling her uncle, "It's hardly a kind of thing one tells one's parents!". This self-governance leads her to raise her son, Chhachhaan, as a single mother while withholding the identity of his father to maintain her own standing or perhaps to protect the child from the truth. While she successfully "fulfilled all his needs," her preoccupation with her business and her silence regarding his paternity foster a deep-seated "inferiority complex" and "repression" in Chhachhaan.

The strength she uses to shield her son backfires, as Chhachhaan grows up vulnerable to "society's taunts". His psychological instability culminates in a "leaning type" personality, characterized by an obsessive, incestuous fixation on his mother. Bahadur's tragedy is that her independence created a vacuum of paternal identity that Chhachhaan could not navigate. When she realizes that her son's desires have shattered all societal taboos—stating he has "never found a woman like you"—she is forced to exercise her final, most harrowing act of strength. She assumes the role of both judge and executioner, pushing him into a well before stabbing herself.

In conclusion, Bahadur Kalarin mirrors the heroes of "Greek tragedies where fate leads to the downfall of the hero". Her downfall is not a result of weakness, but of an over-reliance on her own independence. By attempting to control her destiny and her son's psyche through secrets and self-sufficiency, she inadvertently triggers the "drastic after-effects" that lead to their mutual annihilation. She remains a poignant figure whose maternal strength is ultimately what destroys the very life she sought to protect.

4. Portrayal of Chhachhaan:

Chhachhaan's character in Habib Tanvir's "Bahadur the Wine Seller" is a profound study of psychological disintegration. His conflict arises from a "disturbed childhood" and the "absence of a father", which create a foundation of "mental trauma". This void in his identity results in a complex web of repression and obsession that ultimately leads to his destruction.

The core of Chhachhaan's psychological struggle is a deep "inferiority complex" rooted in his status as a fatherless child. Exposed to "society's taunts," he feels "anxious and devalued" because his mother refuses to reveal his paternity. This "injury to self-esteem" creates a "feeling of humiliation" that shapes his interactions with the world. He confrontationally asks his mother, "That dau's always calling me a bastard... why do you hide it?". This "repression" and "pent-up anger" eventually find a violent outlet through the accidental killing of his father, the Raja of Gangrel, fulfilling a tragic destiny born of frustration.

Furthermore, Chhachhaan exhibits a "leaning type" personality, defined by an extreme, obsessive dependency on his mother to navigate life's challenges. This psychological fixation manifests in significant "Oedipal overtones," where his attachment to Bahadur disrupts his adult relationships. Despite marrying 126 women, he remains unsatisfied, claiming they brought him "no relief at all". He constantly returns to sleep beside his mother, seeking the "actual dermal contact" and joy he associated with being fed by her hands as a child. His desperate plea, "Don't call me son," reveals a desire for intimacy that transcends biological roles, representing a total collapse of social taboos.

In conclusion, Chhachhaan's emotional conflict is a terminal loop of "isolation, discontentment and disconnection". His inability to reconcile his "unconscious mind" with reality leads to a breakdown of the self. Ultimately, his tragedy illustrates how "repressed" emotions and a lack of paternal validation can manifest as an all-consuming obsession that makes social integration impossible.