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Maniac the Whistleblower in Dario Fo's *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*

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Abstract

The article dwells deep into Dario Fo's classic play *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* to bring out the incomprehensible undercurrents of this political satire. The study focuses on the character of the Maniac as a whistleblower and an organic intellectual in overcoming the interpellations of the ideological state apparatus (represented by Police here) in dismantling the mechanisations of ideology and power perpetuated by the governing authorities in getting the consent of the masses that they rule over.

Key Words: power, interpellation, organic intellectual

Dario Fo's propagandist play *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970) set in 1960s and 1970s Italy, is based on the death of 41 year old railway worker Giuseppe Pinelli, who was arrested on December 12th 1969 following the bombing of Milan Bank of Agriculture that killed sixteen people and wounded nearly nineteen. Pinelli was arrested alleging him to be behind the bombings and was held in police custody until December 15th till falling to death from the fourth floor of the Police Head Quarters.

Police confirmed that the death was the result of a *raptus* a state of suicidal anxiety caused by his fear on being caught in the bombing case; against the popular belief that it was the product of either an overtly harsh interrogative technique or brutal murder. Fo through his play brings to light the incomprehensible undercurrents of those in power who make the ordinary people believe in the so called official version of the truth and willing to give up even their freedom for their perceived safety.

Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* based on 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing; belong to the genre of socially committed theatre and is a conglomeration of entertainment and socio-political commentary. The play is a political satire that encompasses elements of both revolutionary and bourgeois mainstream theatre to evoke the attention of elite and popular sections of the society on an equal footing.

The entire action of the play happens in the Police Head Quarters in Milan where a mad man was summoned for routine interrogation by the police. Through a series of impersonations the so called mad man (maniac) forces the police men to admit the murder of the anarchist under their interrogation. Maniac rips apart the official version that proves the death as suicide and opens before the audience the unscrupulous and unethical methods employed by agents of power during interrogation sessions and how effectively they erase the evidences of their crimes.

In the play Inspector Bertozzo, constable, and Sports Jacket represent the corrupt police forces who are the agents of power who uses everything at hand to cover-up the injustices meted out on ordinary people with the help of "fear" produced and perpetuated deliberately by them. In order to maintain status quo the authorities of power instils fear and confusion in the minds of citizens and through their conscious effort justifies the atrocities they commit.

Through verbal gymnastics and physical escapades maniac could effectively expose the inconsistencies and contradictions in the official version of the truth propagated by authorities of power. In his own anarchic way maniac dismantles the orderly and hierarchic world of the police forces. Maniac obsessively impersonates figures of authority ranging from military and medical personal to the clergy. The play portrays before us how maniac deconstructs the hierarchies in power especially those of police, magistrate (representing law and order forces of the system) and the bishop (representing religious order),

Gramscian idea of the role of organic intellectuals in representing and voicing out for the victimized subaltern people against the hegemonic activities of the agents of power can also be seen in this play. Maniac becomes an organic intellectual when the police perpetuate false signals about anarchic activity and bombings in instilling fear among the common people to win over them and in getting them to give consent for all the injustices perpetrated on them. How maniac could easily identify the pitfalls in the system and could deceive them in a fantastical way in order to establish justice is appreciable in every way.

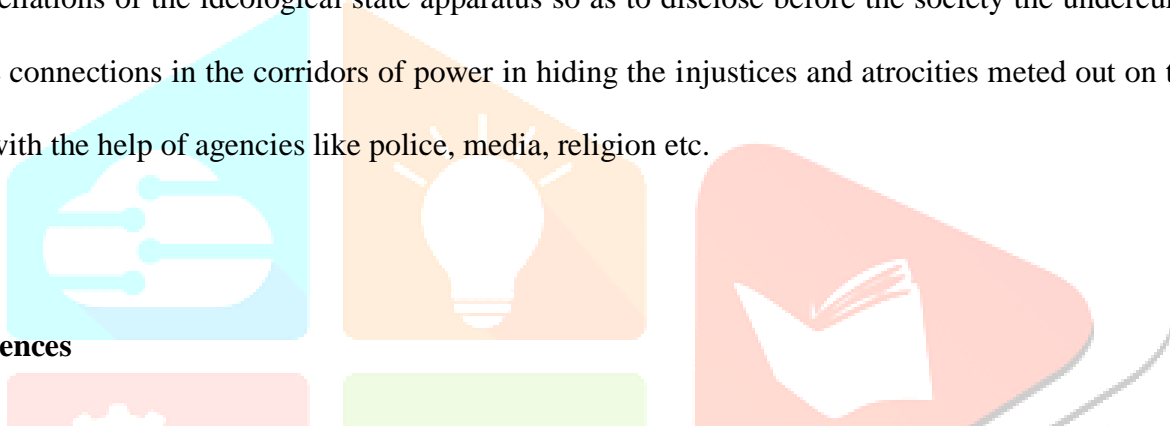
Manic stands outside the system, he observes it, identifies its pitfalls, and uses his knowledge in attempting to collapse it to an extent with the help of the perpetrators of the system itself. In an unjust world maniac dismantles the mechanisations of the ideology and power perpetuated by the governing authorities in maintaining their authority over the masses who are under the spell of fear created by them in succumbing to their plans.

Glitches in the ladders of power are utilized to its maximum by the maniac, in shape shifting to fit himself in the varying roles that he encounters in the Police Head Quarters in Milan. His understanding of the system and its mechanisations are so deep that he was not revealed till the end. And at the end the maniac arrogantly and triumphantly storms out of the Police Head Quarters removing the fear of police that is deep instilled in the minds of common man.

Hegemonic forces make the people succumb to the power; and ideological state apparatus do its role to fulfil the same. Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatus works well through media images of the aftermath of the Bank bombing and related causalities. The fear evoked in the mind of the citizens from these images in a way helps in justifying the actions of police by transmitting the values of the state to interpellate them. Manic do his job well in using the journalist Maria Feletti in deconstructing the role of media in dispersing state dictums and in maintaining the status quo. Her role in unveiling the custodial death of the anarchist is evident in the play.

Loopholes in the surveillance mechanisms are identified to the core and are meticulously deployed to shatter the hierarchies of power by the maniac when he successfully tore apart the agents of power with his talented impersonations within his brief time at the Police station. Maniac becomes the omnipresent eye that could even dismantle the entire power structure when it becomes too corrupt in making an innocent man an anarchist in creating fear in the mass psyche, and thus becoming the protectors of social order when they themselves are the anarchists who are camouflaged and got infiltrated into anarchist groups making bombings, so that they can exercise their mental as well as physical control over the masses.

In the play maniac becomes the organic intellectual and a whistleblower who could win over the interpellations of the ideological state apparatus so as to disclose before the society the undercurrents of the innate connections in the corridors of power in hiding the injustices and atrocities meted out on the common man with the help of agencies like police, media, religion etc.



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