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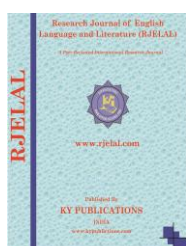


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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *THE VULTURE*

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ABSTRACT

This article signifies the unpleasant atmosphere of the play *The Vultures*. The vulture is a ferocious and ruthless bird that eats the flesh of dead animals. A person who hopes to gain from the troubles of other person can be termed as vulture figuratively. The play recounts the story of the Pitale family comprising Hari Pitale (Pappa), his two sons, Ramakant and Umarkanat, daughter Manik, and Rama, Ramakant's wife. Yet another member of the family is Rajaninath, Pappa's illegitimate son. We find the cruelty, greed and cunningness of the vultures in all the members of Hari Pitale's family except Rama and Rajaninath. Pappa, Ramakant, Umarkanat and Manik display the savagery of vulture through their words and actions. The interrelationships among the members of the family are detestably degenerate. All their energy is spent in inventing inhuman tricks to cheat one another. The play is also a study of a tender human relationship between Rama and Rajaninath that is refreshing like an oasis among the deserts.

Keywords : Violence, Sex, Joint family system,

Rajaninath, Pappa Pitale's illegitimate son, has a dual role in the play. Besides being one of the principal characters, he also acts as the chorus. The three poems recited by Rajaninath tell us about the past and the present of the Pitale family. The long song that he sings at the opening of the play makes it clear that the incident in the play occurred during a time span of twenty-two years. The sight of Ramakant running away from his paternal house along with Rama in order to escape from his creditors brings back all these past memories to him. He feels sorry for the plight of Rama and recalls the painful past that tries to overpower him.

The high flying vulture is self-dependent. But the human vultures in the play, with the exception of Pappa, are dependent upon their ancestral property built over years by their father. Pappa is basking on his past glory. His habit of working on his toothless mouth is suggestive of his desperate condition. He made the transition from

working class to upper middle class by dint of his own hard work and duplicity. But now he thinks that the working class people like the family gardener Jagannath need a "kick as they rise and curse as they sit."

Pappa Pitale's motto is to get what he wants by hook or crook. He has no moral scruples in cheating his own brother, Sakharan, and capturing his hare of business. Moreover, he is a man of loose character as he has a bastard son, Rajaninath. He accuses his daughter-in-law Rama of neglecting him and fears that his corpse will lie rotting for days as no one will notice his departure. He feels that the business set up him with his blood, sweat and tears has been ruined by Ramakant's crooked deals. He has handed over his business and property to his children probably to enjoy a peaceful old age or perhaps he has done it under duress as he avows to his illegitimate son Rajaninath when he meets him in the garage. He makes loud protests that his children

are ungrateful wretches who do not treat him properly though he has shared his wealth with them. His life has become a hell owing to their ill-treatment and indifference. He rants and raves.

If I die, I'll become a ghost. I'll sit on your chest! I won't
Let you enjoy a rupee of it. I earned it all.
Now, these
Wolves, these bullies!... (Act I, Scene II)

Only his fit of coughing puts an end to his tirade against his sons. His final effort of recapturing his wealth through a law suit with the help of Rajaninath also fails. In spite of all his cunningness, he has nothing but stress, insults and misery staring him in the face in his old age.

Ramakant reveals the stuff he is made of by abusing and hurting the poor gardener Jagannath who comes to request for his rightful wages. There is no trace of civility or decency in Ramakant. Given to indulging in shady practices, he has ruined the family business a goose that has been laying golden eggs under his Pappa's control. He has no gratitude to his Pappa though the old man has gifted him a well established business. He openly declares that he is waiting for Pappa's death. For him, his father is a "confounded nuisance" and "A bloody burden to the earth!" All his intelligence and energy are directed towards making money using all unfair means available. He is fond of gambling. Excessive drinking has made him impotent. When his self-interest is concerned, he follows no moral scruples or legal restraints. When Pappadencounces him by saying that it was his utter stupidity to have produced such useless bastards like him, he retorts, "As the seed, so the tree!" Did we ever ask to be produced?"

Umakant is a bachelor with loose morals and a barbed tongue. He is a wicked and greedy as his elder brother Umakant. He is very crafty and vigilant in matters of money. When his Pappa partitioned his property, he grabbed the solid landed property at Lonavla. Unlike his brother who is unable to hold on to his business, Umakant manages to make a lot of money by selling paper in the blackmarket. There is no brotherly or sisterly feeling in him for Ramakant or Manik respectively. For reasons unknown, he avoids marriage and when

Ramakant makes taunting comments about it, he falls foul of him and threatens to smash open his mouth:

Shut up! Don't bring my personal life into this, Ramya. If
you open your trap again, I'll smash it open for you! (Act I, Scene II)

Though he would object to his brother talking about his personal life, he would not hesitate to talk damagingly about the personal life of their sister Manik and mock at her promiscuity. He takes a sadistic pleasure in bullying her about her picnics with her lovers and rolling all over the town and then scrubbing herself. He makes abusive/obscene references to her by calling her 'that cow', family. He teases and bullies her when she comes out of his unsavoury comments, he pulls the bath-towel off her shoulders leaving her exposed in her blouse and petticoat. He even smacks her buttocks and enjoys her embarrassment. He has no love or respect for his Pappa either. He says 'A mangy dog would have made a better father!' Unlike his Pappa and Ramakant he handles his finance better. Though he has got enough and to spare, he is a penny pincher and does not part with his money. Ramakant out of jealousy and anger taunts Umakant that he is only capable of swelling his bank balance but not the belly of a woman: "My brother!" Swelling his bank balance! Blackmarketing paper! If you're a man, swell a woman's belly for a change." He also says that when Umakant dies his bier will be stuffed with money, and he will have no issue to perpetuate his line: "When he dies, he will spread bundles of money on his bier! He'll lie down on them. And they will cart him off to the cemetery No heir to his name!"

Tendulkar depicts Manik as selfish and assertive as against Rama who is sensitive, timid and kind-hearted. In her thirties, she appears to be a hysterical type. She accuses her brothers of plotting to eliminate her from her share of the ancestral property. She claims that all of them tried to poison her medicine and kill her when she was laid up with typhoid. It was her alertness that saved her from becoming a victim to their evil plot. Her suspicion is confirmed when she plays a game of cards with her brothers. In order to extract money due to her in the game, Umakant grabs her neck and starts twisting it.

Manik raises an alarm for help. Ramakant eggs on Umakant to torture her and extract money from her, then and there:

"Don't bloody let her go, Umya. Drag the bloody money out! Look, how she is wriggling! Squash her bloody neck! Twist it!" (Act II, Scene I)

Manik does not suffer from any pricks of conscience, however, when she assist her brothers in trying to extract the secret hoard of money from Pappa. Thus, Manik does not in any way lack behind her brothers in wickedness. All these characters in the play are ready to go any extent to fulfil their avarice. They are "embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery."

Rama, in the words of Rajaninath, budding poet, was just like an innocent doe, who after marriage, had come to a house where "vultures lived in the shapes of men". (Act I, Scene I) She undergoes infinite deaths everyday due to the cruel and greedy nature of the members in her father-in-law HariPitale's house. Though she does all the household chores patiently and attends on everyone with meticulous care and concern, she is subjected to carping criticism by her aged father-in-law, Pappa and her sister-in-law, Manik who make a mountain out of a mole-hill. She is the only person in her husband's family to sympathies with Rajaninath. She often provides him with food and tea though her husband opposes it out of hatred for Rajaninath, the illegitimate son of Pappa Pitale. She is very meek and does not utter a single word against her husband's tyranny,

She patiently bears the cross by submitting to his wishes by visiting Sathus, Swamis, astrologers and doctors and seeking their blessings and following their directions for being blessed with a child. This has been going on for years on end serving no useful purpose. She has been bearing with her husband's drunken love-making and foolish talks about their begetting a child. Her burning desire to become a mother which is the birth right of every woman born, including a whore makes her cross the threshold and seek fulfilment through her half-brother-in-law, Rajaninath. It is the union of two abandoned souls seeking fulfilment in each

other's bosom. This act of Rama's momentary courage, however, does not lead her anywhere. Her joy of becoming a mother does not last long. Manik, her vicious sister-in-law manages to abort the child in her womb by resorting to black magic. As a result she is left "empty of pain and empty of desire" as given out by Rajaninath in his poem. (Act I, Scene I)

Rajaninath is a much neglected, much hated and lonely young man. His fury at his illegitimacy and hatred for his parents who are responsible for it finds expression frequently. He has nothing but hatred for his father and siblings whom he considers as devils in disguise. He becomes an angry young man unable to find an identity for himself. His anger against Pappa and family makes him become a rebel and violate the norms of the organized society. He visits the Tamasha and does all questionable things like visiting a prostitute. He directs his anger against his sister-in-law Rama for her being a coward fearing the dissolute members of Pappa's family. He makes love to her not out of lust for her body but out of respect for her soul longing to have a babe. She has been a true companion to him who was a leper (the illegitimate son) of a mangy dog (the degenerate and lewd Pappa). Rama leaves the house with her impotent husband bereft all hopes being rendered barren by Manik, the she-devil. Though he is fully aware of Rama's suffering, he does not do anything to alleviate it except for his angry reproaches to her timidity. He is not after his father's tainted money or property and does not fall a prey to temptation when PappaPitale tempts him with his property to settle his scores with his venomous sons Ramakant and Umakant who had thrown him out of the house though they were living on his property and earnings.

For Ramakant and Umakant, the latest love affair of their sister Manik with the Raja of Honduras seems to be a blessing in disguise. They intend using this opportunity to blackmail the Raja using Manik's unwed motherhood as a handy tool. Together they indulge in an unscrupulous enterprise of detaining Manik in the house and extracting a hefty sum of money from the Raja by threatening to make his clandestine relationship with their sister Manik public. Armed with a broken bottle and a sharp tin-

opener, the brothers fracture their sister's leg. As illluck would have it, their violent plan, however, peters out as the Raja dies of a heart attack. In their mad rage they decide to wipe out the Raja's brat in their sister's belly. Ramakant gives a fatal kick on Manik's belly and aborts her child. Manik with her broken leg and white sari stained with blood rushes out of the house crying with unbearable pain. One is shocked by such savage cruelty. Ramakant and Umakant do not care about the family honour when they are trying to exploit their sister's illicit relationship with the Raja. But hypocritically enough, now they worry about the slur to their family prestige due Manik's unwed motherhood only when the opportunity to make money out of it is lost. Manik takes her revenge later on, by trying to abort her sister-in-law's child by employing black magic.

I've done it ... I've done it as I planned ... I cut lemon ...

I rubbed the ash. Seven times on my loins and stomach!

It's going to abort sister-in-law's baby's going to abort.

Ramya's brat is going to abort-it won't live. It won't live! (Act II, Scene VI)

Pappa and his offspring are all standing examples of hypocrisy, lack of sincerity, promiscuity and dishonesty and a host of other ills that afflict the society. Through these characters Tendulkar takes a dig at those people in the society who throw all values to the winds to satisfy their avarice for money. That "Blood is thicker than water" does not apply to the members of Pitale family. Here money is the underlying factor governing relationships which binds when it suits the members and unbinds when it does not. The characters like PappaPitale, Ramakant and Umakant and Manik who are ready to sacrifice human values to get worldly pleasures are representatives of the modern materialistic culture. Referring to this trend Arundhati Banerjee writes: "Tendulkar presents modern man in all his complexities. He portrays life as it is from different angles, without trying to moralise or philosophies in any way."

Pappa, Manik and Umakant, one by one, are turned out of the house. They are all victims of their own evil designs. Ramakant becomes a pauper in the end. Pappa wants to make one final effort to regain his wealth. He had never accepted the responsibility of Rajaninath all his life but he seeks out his help so that he can avenge his venomous sons and get back his the property through a law suit. He offers to write out a fresh will in favour of Rajaninath and Manik and make him argue in the court that the earlier will was signed by his father under duress. He tells Rajaninath that he will support him in the court of law. But Rajaninath, however, refuses to have anything to do with this and so it fails. Thus the house of HariPitale collapses owing to the wickedness and murderous deceit coupled with violence by Pappa, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik. As they sow, so they reap.

Thus the play *The Vultures* brings out the moral degradation of the Pitale family. There is a traumatic description of the evil consequences of man's avarice. The incidents like the cruel man-handling of the father by his ownchildren, the ruthless abortion of their sister Manik's child by the brothers and Manik's abortion of her sister-in-law Rama's child to settle her scores with her brothers show the extent to which men can stoop to satisfy their greed and suppressed ego. Tendulkar probes deep into the inner recesses of human nature to portray its dark and seamy side.

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