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THE ISSUE OF POWER IN THE PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

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ABSTRACT

Among all the literary writing forms, drama has a special significance as it has an immediacy of appeal which poem or fiction may not need. Drama as a theatre has had a glorious tradition and in India it has been a popular folk entertainment. The major advantage of drama is even an illiterate can understand and enjoy it when it is being staged. But the Indian drama in English is of recent origin. The most important achievement in modern English drama is the plays by the playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Guru Charan Das were successfully staged in England and USA. Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar have been regarded as the most significant modern playwrights in Indian English drama. They are the Children of the new resurgence in their own areas and have established by translating and performing the translated plays in other language areas than their own.

Vijay Tendulkar is the most eminent and creative dramatist among the modern Marathi play wrights. His plays *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghashiram Kotwal* created a storm in society and at the same time he won the highest award in the field of dramatics, on an all India level for his play *Silence! The Court is in Session*. His literary tendency can be observed through his numerous articles, short stories and one – act plays. Though his eyes are focussed on the middle class, his chief targets are the human mind, the way of life and the complexities there in. While depicting the man – woman relationship, he shows something uncommon and strange: but it is equally true that he never gives a perverted and vulgar form to this depiction.

Key words: perverted, target, Ghashiram Kotwal, complexity, power etc.,

Introduction

Tendulkar's plays are primarily an example of the art of representation, reflecting critically reality of life as he sees and understands it. The amazing range and variety of ways of power he depicts in his plays reveal the comprehensive and inclusive nature of his view of the world. His interest

in exploring and understanding reality leads him deeper into scrutinizing and unveiling the factors and forces motivating human attitudes and behaviors. He suggests that almost all human relations and actions are motivated by the quest for power, resulting often in conflict and even violence. But his interest as a playwright is not limited to a mere depiction of power and dominance on women

and probing into its causes, he goes further and dramatizes different ways and means men and women adopt to cope with this pervasive and potent element of human experience.

The element of power is a successfully employed by Vijay Tendulkar in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is the story of Ghashiram Savaldas, the rise from anonymity to the Kotwalship of Poona, and his inevitable fall and gruesome end. The sutradhar is at once an actor and a commentator. The Brahmans reveal themselves to be priests, scholars and learned men. The sutradhar's interception of two Brahmans who sneak off in order to go to Gulabi's Bavannakhani reveals, despite their priestly and scholarly professions, are adulterers. Ghashiram savaldas is first seen dancing with Gulabi, the courtesan. Ghashiram offers his back to Nana to rest his injured foot. One day he was accused of robbing of Nana's reward of necklace, he is beaten up and is put in the cell on charge of picking the pocket of a Brahman. After release from prison, he is looked down upon by all. He feels highly humiliated at this on his self-respect. He challenges and takes an oath to torment the poonaites :

I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It'll cost you! Your good days are gone... There's no one to stop me now, to mock me to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I'm a devil. you've made me an animal: I'll be a devil inside... I'll make this Poona kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more. (GK 377)

Thus without bothering about any moral principles he offers a sixteen year old girl to the sexual hunger of a sixty year old man. Ghashiram traps Nana through his sexual appetite and in return Nana makes him as the Kotwal of Poona. In the following conversation between Ghashiram and Nana, Ghashiram gives promise to deliver his daughter to Nana :

GHASHIRAM. This is the only way. Otherwise lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again.

NANA:No! Send her. I'll make you Kotwal. When will you send her?

GHASHIRAM:After I have the order sealed in, signed and sealed in my hand!

NANA: Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

GHASHIRAM:Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter. (GK 384)

Tendulkar here brings to focus how men take all rights over women only to exploit them for their personal motives.

Now onwards he will be on unbrahmanical course – a journey that demands of him criminal qualities and sinful acts. Ghashiram becomes atrocious in his behaviour when put to power. "Ghashiram Kotwal started... ruling in person. Accosted anyone he met in the streets. Whipped people. Arrested people. Demanded people's permit. Imprisoned people and sued people" (GK 387), comments Sutradhar in the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

The character Ghashiram Kotwal buys power through sex. He exploits his daughter and uses her as a pawn in his power game. Without caring for the morals Gauri's chastity is sold by Ghashiram to satisfy his thirst for power. He even accepts her death only to continue with his exercise of power. The character Nana clings to the policy 'use a thorn to take out a thorn' and tolerates Ghashiram until he satisfies his motives and discards him after his designs have been fulfilled. Both Ghashiram and Nana are viewed as the ancestors of power seekers irrespective of time and place. Tendulkar is more concerned with showing how power operates within society than examining the sources or implication of that power.

Tendulkar produces congruous situation where an innocent Brahmin is wrongly is punished of theft. Ghashiram refusing to listen to the explanation displays a remorseless behaviour making him to undergo the ordeal of holding a red ball iron with his hands. The poor Brahmin moans and grumbles with agony, "You have tormented a poor innocent Brahmin. You'll die without children! You yourself will endure torments, greater than mine. ... " (GK

397). The words of innocent Brahmin forecast the future decline of Ghashiram. The wages of sin are to be paid by him which is suggested by the death of Gauri in the hands of the midwife due to forced abortion. Ghashiram, a common man becomes a monster is a product by society. It is also the society which is responsible for turning him into devil and being stoned to death.

Ghashiram realizes his sin when he says, "I danced on your chest but I wasted the life of my little daughter... Beat me... Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull..." (GK 415). Thus Ghashiram dies like typical tragic hero with his sins recomposed. He anticipates his inevitable fall, he will rise to power, but will end up where he started from. This way the play shows the power politics in contemporary society.

The issue of power is very skillfully used by Vijay Tendulkar in the play *Encounter in Umbugland*. The play contains three acts, which is a fine, amusing portrayal of political intrigues. Every incident happens in the play for getting power. More significant thing in the play is the starting evolution of princess Vijaya from a self-willed, mischievous and playful girl into an ambitious dictator. It is a political play and a study of human nature as well. He welcomes all to the ceremonies arranged to honour king Vichitravirya on the sixtieth year of his coronation. Then two pen-bearers, on the stage, describe the king in glorifying terms and wish him a long life. Pannarayan's words make Vijaya think and she longs for freedom. She tells him that she feels imprisoned. She tells him that she feels imprisoned in the palace and ignored by her father, who has no time to spare for her. Prannarayan asks her to greet her father on the glorious occasion.

Though they are against to his dictatorship, they can't do anything against him. Moreover, the king has the whole-hearted support of his people. Even the ministers have no unity among themselves as everybody wants to rule after king's death. The cunning king Vichitravirya accuses the ministers of their duty as "Power seems more important to you than duty. Selfish designs have replaced service". He also tells them that power is a crown of thorns. Power is a sword hanging over, power is bread they

can eat at the stake; power means responsibility. The playwright points out the change that wielding power has brought about in Vijaya's personality through Pranarayan's remark. Anju Bala Agarwal aptly comments: Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* is a concrete embodiment of the transformation that the sense of power brings about in an individual (203).

Power means problems and painful decisions. There is no headache like power. The king refers to his daughter Vijaya as "Childish and half-witted" and she feels her father as 'Decrepit old'. One day a painter is trying to paint to portray the king. He asks the king to sit still. The painter finishes his work only to see that the king is seated dead. 'Who is the king After Vichitravirya ? This is the burning issue and every minister has an eye on the throne. The two pen-bearers announce the development of crisis caused by the political vacuum created by the sudden demise of the king and the same is reported in the newspapers of Umbugland. The people stand divided, thus, making it impossible for any of the ministers to rise to power. The pen-bearers announce this as "serious crisis". Vratyasom tells to them that she is their compromise and princess Vijaya is His Majesty's heir. He tells to Pistakeshi as "This one in front, five of us behind, she'll be the rule, we'll be the rulers". The cabinet minister had an idea of making Queen Vijaya as a puppet ruler and they would rule the country behind her. But Queen Vijaya proves to be a powerful dictator dominating all ministers who nominated her to the throne. "This little brat has given us blow after blow" (EC 332), states Vratyasom. There was similar situation for Indira Gandhi when she was put to throne by the ministers. In the Act II, we see princess Vijaya as the queen of Umbugland. Soon after she is put to power, Vijaya puts forth her proposal for upliftment of kadamba tribe, but the ministers does not approve of her proposal.

They devise a plan to raise revolt against her. But Vijaya comes to know about their plot. She audaciously faces the angry mob throwing stones at her. She makes announcements about the abolition of taxes and plans for the welfare of the public. This does not please the people. Finally when she promises to punish the corrupt ministers, they were

pleased and they turn against the ministers. She orders the elderly ministers to address her as 'Her Majesty'. Unwillingly they obey her. This way the play displays how the power is operated with treachery, greed and selfishness.

The play *Sakharam Binder* depicts the element of power to some extent. Sakharam Binder, born in a Brahmin family, ill-treated by both his father and mother, runs away at 11, fends for himself and at length finds a job in a press. As he does not believe in marriage, he brings home cast-off women whom, he does not keep with him long. The play begins when the sixth woman has left him and when he brings the seventh woman, the typical Indian woman, Laxmi to his house. Sakharam Binder is aggressive in his manners. He always talks of himself as a self-made man who has no respect even for Gods. From Sakharam's conversation with his friend Dawood Miyan, We understand that Dawood Miyan is no stranger to Sakharam's life-style. Strangely enough, this same man, who has the aesthete in him, is still capable of shocking cruelty towards his women.

On the first night itself, Sakharam warns Laxmi that her religious fastings should stop, for she will need all her strength to serve him. Laxmi, though frightened at first, however, soon learns to adapt herself to her new environment. Sakharam's friendship with Dawood causes a minor problem in the house. Strongly asserting her Hindu religious faith Laxmi does not allow Sakharam to have the 'aarti' to Lord Ganapathi performed by Dawood too. She gets beaten up, yet she refuses to give in. Sakharam sends her away to her nephew at Amalner. With the reluctant departure of Laxmi a reversal of sorts occurs in Sakharam's life. So far he has been the master of the house and the woman has had to dance to his tune.

The arrival of the next woman, Champa, turns the tables against him. She is younger than Laxmi, slightly more plump and better built. She is the wife of a police fouzdar in Chimkhada who has just been sacked for drunken irresponsibility. Fouzdar Shinde, Champa's husband, comes to Sakharam's residence, fully drunk, begging her to kill him. Sakharam is shocked to see the way Champa

beats him up. Laxmi returns to Sakharam's house, driven away from her nephew's house. The mysterious disappearance of Champa during the afternoons rouse Laxmi's suspicion. She follows Champa and discovers, to her shock, that the latter has been having an affair with Dawood. In scene 5 of Act III the conflict between Champs and Sakharam reaches its climax. Champa refuses to sleep with him. The enraged Sakharam compels her. There follows a heated exchanged of words between them. Her disclosure to Sakharam of Champa's clandestine relationship with Dawood enrages Sakharam. First, he rains blows on Laxmi, then drives her out. In a blind fury he rushes out. He returns quickly, and chokes Champa to death. Sakharam shudders at the thought of having murdered Champa. All his strength leaves him. Laxmi takes over, she urges him to bury Champa in the kitchen. Finding that Sakharam is too dazed to dig the grave, she summons all her strength and digs away. This way Sakharam's hegemony and cruelty towards his women is represented by Vijay Tendulkar.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* has the element of power. Benare is, a school teacher, conscientious in her work and commands the love and respect of all her pupils. She is a member of the amateur theatre group called "The sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) progressive Association". The other members are the Kashikars, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, professor Damle and Rawte, who all belong to the urban middle class of Bombay. Benare and Samant, a villager, arrive at the village hall where the artists from Bombay are to hold a 'Mock Law Court'. She tells Samant about her career as teacher saying that her pupils are 'so much better than adults'. He is embarrassed to know that the management holds an enquiry against her 'Just because of one bit of slander'.

Arrangements are being made to stage a 'mock-trial' and at Sukhatme's suggestion, they all decide to frame Benare as 'the accused' in the 'mock-trial'. The furniture arrangement is completed. Ponshe startles Benare saying that Miss Benare has been arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extremely grave nature and brought as prisoner before the bar of the court. Kashikar, the judge of

the 'Mock Law Court', asks her 'prisoner Miss Benare, under section No.302 of the Indian penal code you are accused of the crime infanticide. Benare stands numb holding on to chair for support. Sukhatme asks a few questions to Ponshe to know about her moral conduct. Further, Karnik, the next witness, is persuaded to confess the fact that Rokde has seen Benare in "a compromising situation'. He adds to Sukhatme that he saw hell.

Benare has been teasing Rokde all along as 'speak, Balu, speak A-B-C'. He tells Sukhatme that he saw Benare in professor Damle's hostel Room. Thus, she lands herself in trouble, much to the excitement of her tormentors. It is clear that Benare has become target in the cruel game being played on her by Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik and Rokde. She accuses them saying "you've all deliberately ganged up on me! You've plotted against me!" Ponshe describes how she told him of Damle's refusal to marry after having made her pregnant. Kashikar observes with respect to Benare's immoral behaviour..". Just one step away from total depravity'.

Benare in her monologue accuses all men as 'hypocrites', whose only interest in her body and not in her bleeding heart or agonized mind. She confesses that as a grown-up woman, fell in love with Damle who exploited her hero-worship and went his way. She mumbles 'He wasn't a god, was a man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body Again the body'. Kashikar gives verdict that she has broken social customs and sacredness of marriage and motherhood and deserves no mercy. And as a teacher she has set a very bad example, by daring to conceive a child out of wedlock. Therefore, the sentence meted out her by him is that she must destroy the foetus in her womb. On this cruel verdict, she felt intolerable despair, she collapses on the table with sobs. Silence reigns the room then. This way male domination and aggression over the female is depicted by the playwright.

In the play, *Kamala* we find the element of power to some extent. The theme of the play is flesh-trade and Jai Singh Jadhav seeks to capitalize on it without caring for the victims of this awkward trade. Jaisingh is a journalist associated with an English daily published by Sheth Singhnia. Sarita is his

educated wife hails from a village. They live in a small bungalow in a neat locality around Delhi. Kamalabai is the servant of the house. Kakasaheb is Sarita's uncle who runs a paper in the vernacular and a man of Gandhian principles. Jaisingh is very often out of home and the repeated phone calls to him disturb both Sarita and her uncle.

However, Sarita has to note down all the incoming calls and the names of the callers. If she fails to do this, it attracts the displeasure of Jaisingh, leading to domestic discord. One day he arrives home with Kamala, a village woman, whom he has bought for two hundred and fifty rupees from Bihar. He wishes to present her as an exhibit to prove that flesh-trade is rampant in the remote villages in India. Jaisingh looks forward to the Press conference to prove about the flesh-trade, as he is successful in his mission. Though his reputation as a journalist is admirable, Kakasaheb and his friend Jain have nothing good to say about him. At last, Jaisingh also becomes a victim in the game of power as he is terminated from his job by the editor.

CONCLUSION

The struggle for power, persecution, tyranny, sufferings, passivity and submission has been continuous process from ancient man's life and it has prolonged to thrive also in the civilized society. In this power game man is either a captive to others or captivates others. This power structured relationship or power game operates at different levels; domestic, social and political. In the cut throat competition for power, reputation, wealth, dignity and position man makes his fellow beings in particular women as Pawns to fulfill his ambitions.

The plays of Tendulkar can also be termed as documents of innate cruelty in man where man exploits woman and also his fellowmen to quench his thirst for power. Tendulkar highlights the corrupt practices involved in the field of judicial system, journalism, at domestic environment and in politics. These plays are Tendulkar's powerful expression of human foibles but he does not intend to offend or aggravate people but strives for enlighten and refinement.

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