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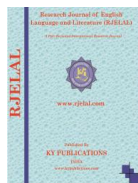
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VARIOUS THEMES AND BURNING SOCIAL ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY IN THE PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR: CASTEISM, MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP, POWER POLITICS, ALIENATION AND PLETHORIC ACQUISITIVENESS FOR MONEY

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is a well-known Avant grade Marathi Playwright. His works deal with various social issues and are like a mirror to the Indian society. He portrays the true reality and social issues that are present in society. His plays deals with contemporary social issues like gender inequality, theme of alienation in modern society due to various social factors, politics of power, theme of casteism, hunger for money which are fully responsible for developing social problems in the society. In this paper these themes are presented after studying deeply his various plays like *Sakharam Binder*, *Kanyadaan*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *The Vultures*, *Kamala*, *Silence!* *The Court is in Session*.

Keywords: Alienation of modern man, casteism, politics of power and plethoric acquisitiveness for money, unequal treatment towards women.

In this paper six plays of Vijay Tendulkar have been studied and each play is unique having its own significance. In all the plays social problems of contemporary society have been presented by Tendulkar. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the problem of casteism and issue of politics of power is highlighted.

In *Kanyadaan* also social issue of casteism has been brought into light, where Nath a Brahmin by caste, allows her daughter Jyoti to marry a dalit boy Arun and later on after marriage Arun beats Jyoti and misbehaves with her and Jyoti alone has to face all the after effects of marriage. This marriage can be called as a social experiment where to prove the hollow Gandhian principles right, Nath does experiment with her daughter's marriage and later on regrets. Nath wants to prove that love can bridge

all gaps and the gap between upper class and lower class can be bridged by this marriage. But Jyoti's mother Seva opposes Nath's decision as she says:

SEVA: My anxiety is not over his being a dalit. You know very well that Nath and I have been fighting untouchability tooth and nail, God knows since when. So that's not the issue. But your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this over night is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it.(509)

However when Arun marries Jyoti he used to beat her and loves her also.

Wadikar rightly remarks, "Jyoti and Arun get married, but what follows is a sequence of violence, misery and disillusionment". (Wadikar, 26).

He behaves the same way as he had seen since his childhood, like her father used to behave with her mother and to Arun it seemed all a part of normal life. Thus Jyoti's marriage turns out to be a living hell and she in the end blames her father Nath for her situation because he allowed this marriage just to prove his Gandhian principles correct, however knowing in mind very well that this marriage cannot bridge the gap between high class and lower caste people. Knowing well that it's just a dream and not reality, he experiments with her daughter's marriage and spoils her life. However later on in the end Nath feels guilty and accepts his mistake. Prasad rightly comments, "Father feels guilt-conscious thinking that his daughter becomes painful and miserable for having sincerely adopted his scale of values on the path of humanism". (Prasad, 100)

In relation to Jyoti's married life Sarath Babu aptly quotes, "Jyoti thus becomes mindless and surrenders to the situation. She like her father plays the Rescuer while Arun plays the victim. Her rescuing, at first, makes him behave more helplessly and then triggers his feelings of inferiority. Consequently, he shifts to thereof prosecutor in order to feel powerful....Jyoti goes down to the role of victim. Thus the Rescuer-victim transaction. This Drama Triangle make not only Jyoti but also Arun mindless to feel powerful. The unreal idealism of Nath and Jyoti reflects their favourite role of rescuing which impairs their perception of the reality." (Sarath, 1997)

In Sakharam Binder, Tendulkar has tried to mirror the condition of women in society when they are left by their husbands. A clear picture of helplessness of a woman is presented and it is shown that how it becomes very difficult for a woman to face this male dominated society. It has also been picturised that how men make use of the opportunity and marginalise the women race when she has no support from anywhere. Smita Paul rightly remarks in her book *Theatre of Power*, "he women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergo a

series of sufferings and tortures as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. In male-dominated theatre-world they are constantly being 'othered'." (Paul, 2010) In the play Sakharam in the name of helping women brings the woman who is left by their husband to his house and provides her food and shelter but he also expects that woman to act like a wife with him in bed. Shailja B Wadikar rightly quotes him, "a foul mouthed womanizer". (Wadikar, 2008) He makes use of this opportunity and uses women to fulfil his lusty desires. Sexual marginalization is clearly visible in the play and victimization of second sex can be clearly observed. He also wants the woman to act according to his wish. If he says laugh then she should laugh and if he ask her to cry she has to cry. Like he acts like a boss in the house and also wants to hold the command of the woman's life in his hands. He desires that the woman should act like a puppet and dance according to his orders and wishes. This is clearly seen as he says:

SAKHARAM: In this house, what I say goes. Understand?.....And one last thing...you'll have to be a wife to me...You agree to the deal? Right, then, go in and make some tea. (126)

In the play Ghashiram Kotwal, Ghashiram uses her daughter Gauri as a bait to attract nana phadnavis so that he could get the power into his own hands and could punish the people of Pune, who made fun of him and who misbehaved with him. This is clearly visible in speech of soldiers.

GHASHIRAM : I am a Brahman too.

SECOND SOLDIER : You a Brahman ! Where is your shaven

Head ?Where is your holy thread ? Where is your pious look ?

FIRST SOLDIER : Where is your holy book ? Recite the hierarchy of caste ! Tell us, when did you last fast ?

SECOND SOLDIER : Looks like a thief !

FIRST SOLDIER : Looks like a scoundrel ! (373)

Thus Ghashiram was arrested and nobody believes him and he was imprisoned and punished. After this insult Ghashiram decided to take revenge

from Pune people. Expressing his anger and revengeful feeling, he says :

GHASHIRAM : But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona . I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone ! I am a Kanauj Brahman, but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made mean animal; I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. (376).

To gain power in his hands he decided to become kotwal of Pune. In order to gain the kothwalship of Pune he uses Gauri to attract nana phadnavis. This play is a fine example of politics of power and casteism which is spread all over in Indian society. When he becomes the kotwal he implied many restrictions on the people of Pune. Everyone in Pune started fearing him because he used to give the people very strict punishments. This is clearly when Sutradhar says,

SUTRADHAR : Prostitute's Lane was desolate. The chasing of women was halted. Pimps turned into beggars. Counterfeit coins were worthless.(388)

SUTRADHAR: The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out. The fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap. All the lines and signs of his hand are noted. His hands were wrapped in a bag and the bag is sealed. The ordeal is prepared. (395)

In this play politics of power has been highlighted which is a severe burning social contemporary issue in society. This is clear in the research paper as Surete says, "Thus, Ghashiram in his quest for power forgets morality and duties of a father."(Surete, 2016)

In relation to the play Shailaja Wadikar observes, "The sadistic objective in his mind renders him blind and fails him as a father, as a kotwal and finally as a human being also. In his role as the kotwal of the city, he creates a hell not only for the Brahmans but for himself and for his daughter also.

He fails to realize the treacherous ways of the culprit Nana and is reduced to a tool in Nana's power game." (Wadikar, 2003)

In *Vultures* the story of pitale family is presented and efforts have been made to show the vulture like savage and barbaric nature of each member of the family. Arundhati Banerjee in the Appendix added to the volume of *Tendulkar's Collected Plays* observes: "The play (*The Vultures*) is a ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness...The decadence and degeneration of human individual's belongings to a middle class milieu is exposed through the interactions among the members of the family." (Banerjee, 575-76)

Family members are hungry for money to such an extent that they do not even care for emotions and family values and do not trust each other in the family. Pappa the head of the family feels that his children Ramakant, Umakant and Manik are after his wealth and are always making plans to kill him to get his wealth. This thinking is clearly visible in his speech.

PAPPA: If I die, it'll be a release! They're all waiting for it. But I'm your own father, after all! 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. (209)

Manik feels that both his brothers want to kill her and wants to take her share of wealth also. Samik Bandyopadhyay rightly remarks, "Violence in *The Vultures* operates in a series of axes-sons against fathers, brother against sister, brother against brother, each leading to an exile from home, followed by a series of returns/reversal, the exiles attempting to avenge themselves." (Bandyopadhyay, 2008) Family members are so suspicious about each other that they are always in tension and do not share their problems with each other and it results in alienation and loneliness. Manchi Sarat Babu rightly comments, "The spiritual deformity facilitates ruthless exploitation and oppression and destroys human relations even within the family."(Babu Sarat, 1997) The situation of our contemporary society is also same as is presented in the play.

Plethoric acquisitiveness for money is clearly seen in the play *Vultures*. Harish Tapadia rightly comments about the play, "The play brings out the moral degradation of the Pitale family. There is a horrifying depiction of the evil consequences of man's avarice. The incidents like the cruel man-handling of the father by his own children and the ruthless abortion of their sister's child by the brothers show the extents to which men can go to satisfy their greed." (Tapadia, 2011)

In the play *Kamala*, story of women objectification has been presented. A journalist Jaisingh Jadhav is hungry for name and fame and can go to any extent to achieve his aim and does not care about anyone's emotions and feelings for his selfish motive and success. He wants to present before the world in a press conference that human trade still exists. To prove it he buys a female from the flesh market and presents her before the people who ask her many types of vulgar questions and Jaisingh at that time instead of stopping people feels proud as if he has done some great work by presenting Kamala in press conference. He does not care about her torn saree or her emotions at all. He does not care least that where Kamala will go after this press conference or how society will treat her after the press conference is over. Shailaja Wadikar rightly observes about Jaisingh, "He accepts such a dangerous task not with a view to reforming Kamala's life but as a part of his professional commitment. Kamala, for him, is a means by which he can get a promotion in his job and win reputation in his professional career. He never stops to think what will happen to kamala after this expose." (Wadikar, 24) Jaisingh treats his loving wife like his office P.A. who has to attend each and every call that comes for Jaisingh. He does not care about her wife's love, dedication, feelings, affection and emotion. He treats her like an object to fulfil his wishes and run on his orders and do everything that Jaisingh wants. Shibu Simon remarks, "Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who believes him-self to be liberal through his delineation of Sarita's character." (Simon, 187) Thus this is a story where marginalization, objectification and use of female race is presented.

In the play *Silence The Court Is In Session !* marginalization and objectification of female race by patriarchal society is presented. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in a letter to Susan Anthony writes, "Women's degradation is in man's idea of his sexual rights. Our religion, laws, customs, are all founded on the belief that woman was made for man." (quoted in *Shameless*, 245)

It is a story of Miss Benare, an independent working woman is presented who does not think about the society and does whatever she loves to do. Prof. Shubha Tiwari aptly comments, "The problem with Leela Benare is that she accepts what she is, she is sexually alive and all above she is not ashamed of her instincts." (Tiwari, 36). She is like a free bird and is an unmarried lady living life on her conditions and teaching in a school. Freedom of thoughts is clearly visible as Miss Benare says:

BENARE: My life is my own- I haven't sold it to anyone for a job. My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those- no one. (58) In contemporary patriarchal society such women are not considered as good and respectful. Shibu Simon comments, "In today's world, the division of labour, the division in access to means of production, the division in decision making power and the division in distribution are all in favour of men and detrimental to women. Even the institution of home and family are the source of women's oppression within all spheres of society, reserving the private sphere to women and public sphere to men." (Simon, 182)

In this play Miss Benare gets pregnant due to the illicit relation between her and Prof. Damale but all fault was levied on Benare alone. It is presented that how a woman has to face all the guilt by herself alone and how the male counterpart skips away very neatly. All the guilt of illicit relationship is put on Miss Benare and Prof. Damale very neatly escapes. Marginalization of Miss Benare in the play is the marginalization of whole female race, where the male dominated society has different set of rules, one for men and other for women. Shubha Tiwari in her comment supports the above thought as she says, "Men are by nature, considered to be willful, wild, childish, innocent and mischeivous. Their sins are no sins at all. The society has a very light,

parental and pampering sort of attitude when it comes to sexual offences by men. In case of women the iron rod gets hot and hotter. No punishment is actually enough for such a woman. There is no respite, no shade and no soothing cushion for a sinning woman. She must be stained and abandoned. Her femininity, her needs, her very existence must be ignored or rather destroyed. She must be cornered and brutally killed- both in physical and psychological senses." (Tiwari, 35)

In this play biased, chauvinistic, patriarchal society has been presented who blames and punishes the women for the guilt alone however male is made to escape neatly and no one questions the male who is equally guilty for the crime.

Shibu Simon aptly comments, "Women on the other hand, are portrayed as helpless victims of the conspiracies hatched by men. In the play *Silence The Court Is In Session!*, Benare is mercilessly harassed by her own co-actors. Women as a whole collectively are always in worse situation than men everywhere." (Simon, 181).

Conclusion

Tendulkar has very aptly presented the crude truth of contemporary society. He has thrown light on every social problem be it man -woman relationship, politics of power in today's world, be it alienation of human beings, hunger for name, fame, power and money, be it division of society on basis of caste system or marginalization of women in biased chauvinistic patriarchal society. Every aspect is very clearly covered in his plays and all the aspects of burning social environment from all angles are highlighted and brought before the people so that ideas can be found out to make the society a better and safer place for every being.

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