



## VIJAY TENDULKAR: A PLAYWRIGHT OF POWER AND VIOLENCE

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we have dealt with the plays of Vijay Tendulkar who started his career as a journalist and became the Chairman of Sangeet Natak Academy. He wrote thirty full-length plays in Marathi and ten plays were translated into English. All these plays in different forms present the concept of Power, Violence and Gender inequality. In his plays, "Silence, The Court is in Session" and "Kamala" he takes the issue oppression on the basis of gender. The play, "Sakharam Binder" is a study of human violence. In "Kanyadaan", Tendulkar deals with the emotional upheavals of family. He exposes the horrors of Dalit psyche. In the play, "Friend's Story" he makes a dramatic representation of Lesbian issue. "Ghasiram Kotwal" is a saga of the power politics. "The Vultures" is a tragic satire on the aesthetics of cruelty against idealism of civility. "Encounter in Umbugland" is a reaffirmation of Human values against the nexus of Gender Politics and Power Politics. His "Fifth Woman" is metaphysical argument of the Mockery of Gender dynamics. The last play, "The Cyclist" is quite different one which probes into the Journey of Life.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Dalit, Gender issue, idealism, itinerary, lesbian, oppression and psyche.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the Post-Independence era, the patterns of Indian English Drama underwent a drastic change. Theatrical activities were organised and it accumulated a new force with the lively contribution of the dramatists like trio of Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. Indian English Drama saw the new light of humanism and realism against the philosophical creed of Tagore and Sir Aurobindo. Vijay Tendulkar made his place as a Marathi writer but he had modified the shape of

Indian Drama with the Power of his pen to represent the issues that are temporal as well as timeless. To his prolific writing over a period of five decades includes thirty full-length plays, seven one-acts, six collections of Children's plays, four of short stories, two novels and seventeen film scripts. His plays have been translated into English not by himself but by others which makes him stand apart from Tagore, Badal Sircar, Karnad and Mahesh Dattani who either trans-

created their plays into English or composed plays directly in English. However, the contribution of Tendulkar to the growth and development of Indian drama is undeniable for it is the cumulative effort of all regional writers producing plays in their respective languages that has enriched both in India and abroad. V. S. Naipaul considers him as India's best playwright. Arundhati Benerjee attributes, "Vijay Tendulkar has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre almost forty years". Tendulkar was also a journalist and his journalistic vision moulded his creative talent to produce the plays to expose the naked reality of society. He would often assume different 'roles' while writing so that he could actually experience what he was writing about.

**Tendulkar's ideas about dramatic-writing:** Unlike other Indian English dramatist, Tendulkar had set ideas about dramatic writing. Series of lectures and interviews on structuring a play manifest ingredients of play such as Plot, Characterization, Spectacle (Structure), Dialogue Paraphernalia and extensive stage direction but the dramatist projected characterization and structure to be the most significant of a successful play, dialogue coming next. He advised the playwrights to possess at least two qualities-"the skill of characterization" and "the sense of structure". He says that the value of dramatic dialogue is a complementary to characterization. He also says that the structure is felt and not seen. Tendulkar observes that Woman suffers largely as the victim of the institutional body of powers in the Indian society. Often there is a collision between the two i.e., woman and society sparking off Violence. In majority of his plays, Tendulkar appears pre-occupational with this syndrome of Power and Violence. His plays divulge the message that woman possesses the strength, the courage and puissance for facing and surviving the onslaughts of institutional power.

**Critical analysis of Tendulkar's Plays:** Tendulkar stated his dramatic career with his well-known play "*Silence! The Court is in Session*" (1967). In this play, the cruelty is exhibited through the system of law court. Leela Benare, the central character of the plot, ignores

the social taboos living an independent life according to her own free will. In the mock-trial, the co-actors deftly expose her private life and unintentionally reveal her illicit relationship with Professor Damle, a married man having five children specially the fact that Miss Benare is carrying his child. Absence of professor Damle during the trial symbolises his shrinking of responsibility. Ironically, the trial begins with charges of infanticide laid on Miss Benare for society is not prepared to accept a child born out of wedlock. Consequently, this pregnancy has to be terminated. Tendulkar alludes to the existing hypocrisy when Damle appears as a mere witness while Leela Benare delivers a long speech in self-defence. Leela Benare's speech of self-defence is reminiscent of Nora's speech in Ibsen's play "The Doll's House". Sukhatme, playing the role of a lawyer highlights Benare's crime by proclaiming the sanctity of motherhood as "Motherhood is a sacred thing.....Motherhood is pure" (p.79). All concede that girls should be tied in the matrimonial knot at the onset of puberty so that temptations leading to social crimes are prevented. They unanimously agree with the traditional system that women should not be given independence. "Silence! The Court is in Session" is a finely structured play with a compact plot. No wonder, it turned out to be amongst his most staged plays.

The Issue of Power and Violence continued to occupy the dramatist's psyche when Tendulkar wrote "*Sakharam Binder*" (1972). The dramatist sheds ample light on Physical lust and Violence in a human being. Sakharam born in a Brahmin family appears almost like ruffian who does not believe in refinement and sophistication of personal relationship. He neglects his parents. He is not a married man but gives shelter to helpless women who are either tortured by their husbands or turned out of their homes or simply deserted by their husbands. It is a contract marriage, the contract ended by mutual consent. When the play opens, he has already kept six women, Laxmi being the seventh one. As a male member of society exercising power over these women, he never failed to remind them that they

were weaklings. It shows his straight forwardness. He has his own concept of morality which is against to the established social norms. Portrayed as an ideal woman, Laxmi is loyal, docile, hard-working, religious self-effacing and tender-hearted. At the same time, she fights tooth and nail for survival when she finds Champa securing her position in Sakharam's house, tactfully persuading Champa to accommodate her in the same house in spite of Sakharam's opposition to her presence. Being confident in her physical charms, Champa least suspects that Laxmi will snatch Sakharam from her. Later, Sakharam exhibits his power over Champa by killing her when he learns that she has been unfaithful to him. Champa has secret associations with Dawood. This wounds the ego of Sakharam and so kills Champa. The play is admirable for its realism as Tendulkar exposed the bare realities of backward lower strata of society.

The play "*The Vultures*" was actually written 14 years before it was produced. It was published in 1971. The play is focussed round the unorganised family of Hari Pitale who cheats his own brother in business. His sons Ramakant and Umakant and daughter Manik are greedy, ego-centric, cruel and wayward. They have no morality of family and personal relationship. They even make conspiracy to kill each other. Hari Pitale realizes that his family is no better than the vultures, the scavenger birds of prey. The cruelty and obscenity of human behaviour is at apex when the brothers kick at the belly of their pregnant sister. Among the so-called vultures, Rama- Ramakant's wife represents the tender bird; docile, helpless, submissive, gentle and kind-hearted. She has been disgusted with the impotency of her husband. In the claustrophobic and morbid atmosphere of the family, she cultivates an illicit relationship with Rajininath, the half-brother-in-law. Rama is treated malevolently because of this propinquity. Finally, Ramakant aborts the foetus of his wife with physical violence. The play exhibits the violence in the family at various levels, sons against father, brothers against sister, brother against brother. Violence which is intentional takes a brutal form in due course of time.

"*Ghasiram Kotwal*" (1972) is, again, based on the themes of power and violence. The play is set in Poona of the Peshawas. The crux of the play is the relationship between Power and Corruption. Ghasiram, the protagonist of the play is a Brahmin from Kanauj. He comes to Poona in search of his livelihood. In spite of being a Brahmin, he takes shelter in the house of Gulabi, a courtesan. He accompanies Gulabi in her erotic songs and dance. One day in the dance, Nana is hurt in his ankle. Ghasiram forgetting his Brahmin ancestry takes king's foot into his hands. As a reward of his flattery, Ghasiram wins the favour of the king. However under the suspicion of a theft, he was put into the prison. Ghasiram feels himself humiliated out of wickedness and fun of the people of Poona. The Violence, revenge and cruelty grip his consciousness. After the release of Ghasiram from the prison, Nana, the representative of the Peshwa appoints Ghasiram as the Kotwal of the city not on merit but because he lusts after his young and beautiful daughter, Gauri. Ghasiram on his part misuses his position to terrorize the Brahmins of Poona who had humiliated him earlier. Poor Gauri, the victim of Nana's sensuality became pregnant. Ghasiram blackmails Nana. Nana wants to hide his guilt. So, he kills Gauri. With this revelation Ghasiram becomes fury. Like a wounded tiger, Ghasiram persecutes the people cruelly. People of Poona organize a revolt against his atrocities. Nana being no longer in need of Ghasiram, using his royal power, terminates Ghasiram from the position of Kotwal. Now Ghasiram loses both his daughter and his status. Finally Nana orders the death of Ghasiram as well. Here, Vijay Tendulkar pin points the indisputable fact that religiosity and sexuality are misutilized as means of exercising one's power. The story is extracted from an old phase of history.

"*Encounter in Umbugland*" a 'Political Allegory' was produced in 1974. In a dramatic mode Tendulkar presents the political situation of in India late sixties. The play opens with celebrations organised on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coronation of King Vichitravirya. On the occasion the king delivers a speech expressing concern about his successor to the throne. The king

prefers to become a hermit after surrendering power as he is old and has been advised rest. The king died. After the death of the king, there was a political crisis in the state because there was no consensus among the five ministers on the issue of the succession to the crown. Finally they made a resolution to give the responsibility of the state to the Princess Vijaya who was weak, feeble and ignorant. They wanted to make her a puppet queen. Tendulkar has portrayed her well, graphically depicting her development from a head strong, self-opinionated girl to a rather inexperienced and whimsical ruler who uses strange devices to vanquish her foes. Princess Vijaya is very fond of her attendant Prannarayan, a eunuch. He appoints him as her chief advisor. From him, she has learnt the ways and tricks of politics. Instead of being a puppet in the hands of ministers, she made a direct interaction with people. This attempt of Vijaya created confusion and discontent among the ministers because it increased her reputation in the public. Cabinet ministers tried to arrange a rebellion against her but they have no guts. Eventually, the ministers comprehend that she is "a born dictator", thereby surrounding meekly to her authority. The play ends with the grand reception awaiting the queen due to the royal victory she scores over her cabinet ministers.

"*Kamala*" (1981), a play in 2 Acts, depicts the deplorable state of women who are treated as mere objects to be bartered, bought and sold. Here Tendulkar uses 'Media' as an instrument of the mechanization of power. Jaisingh Jadhav, a young and dynamic journalist for wide publicity of his efforts purchases a woman named Kamala for a paltry sum of Rs.250 in the Luhardaga Bazaar in Bihar flesh market. He wants to expose this racket of woman-selling as a slave. Sarita, Jaisingh's wife fails to appreciate and compromise with her husband's act. He fights for the freedom and equality of woman but keeps his wife Sarita as his slave. She performs all household activities as 'lovely bonded labourer'. The tragedy of the life of Sarita becomes conspicuous when Kamala in her innocence considers Sarita as another purchased slave. So, Kamala proposes that both of them must live together like sisters. Jasmine wants to take

Kamala to the press conference to prove his point of view. But to his great surprise, Kamala exposes the attitude of Jaisingh on his wife, Sarita. Sarita now musters up the courage to put forward strong resistance against male domination and then to prove her own capability. Tendulkar was fond of portraying reality whether it was about human life or human nature. So he was referred to as the "angry young man of Marathi theatre".

In "*Kanyadaan*"(1983) Tendulkar tackles the theme of social upliftment audaciously highlighting the chaotic consequences of disturbing the existing social equations. In the play, Jyothi is the 20 years old daughter of Nath, a social activist. He encourages Jyothi to marry Arun, a Dalit poet. While the father has no objection, Jyothi's mother Sena and her brother Jaya Prakash are against the alliance. Finally, their marriage gets settled with a mission to present an ideal before the society. However, after the marriage, Arun finds it difficult to compromise with his own inferiority because there exist is a remarkable contradiction in his idealism as a poet and his ego as a male. Jyothi takes a job to meet the both ends meet and Arun turns to be a boozier and sadist. Being disgusted with the tortures of Arun, Jyothi returns to her parental home. Later Nath offers both Arun and Jyothi to come and live in his house. After sometime Arun comes looking for Jyothi as he is repentant for what he has done and desires to begin life afresh. He realizes that he is an offender, but while begging for Jyothi to return with him his true colours emerge- he draws out a knife. Then Sena asks him why he used to beat Jyothi. Arun becomes nostalgic and says "What am I but the son of scavengers. We don't know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives....I am a barbarian, a barbarian by birth". (P.p.539-40) Arun also says that Jyothi had the knowledge of everything before she married him. So she should have had the courage to bear the consequences. These words are sufficient to change Jyothi's mind and she decides to go back with Arun. Nath proudly admires his courageous daughter, thanks god and prays for Jyothi's well-being. As the title of the play '*Kanyadaan*' Nath Devalikar had indeed gifted

his daughter to Arun. The portrayal of Arun brings out the idea of 'male domination' in the traditional Indian society. Tradition demands that a 'woman' has to yield meekly to male domination and surrender to his masochistic power.

Vijay Tendulkar returns to the centrifugal themes of Power and Violence in '**A Friend's Story**' (2001). Mitra is the central character of the play. She is endowed with masculine personality. She is the victim of physical hormonal imbalance. As she grows, she realizes that she is different from others. It brings stubbornness in her personality and she develops a rebellious attitude towards the conventions of society. She develops friendship with Bapu and it brings consolation in her life. Bapu is attracted by her boldness but he fails to stir her femininity. She becomes homosexual and develops infatuation for Nama, another girl. Nama's attraction becomes a passion in her life and in spite of all the warnings of Bapu, she fails to resist herself. Nama was frightened of the power of Mitra exerted over her and surrendered to her overtures easily. Bapu too, was forced to allow them to use his room. Nama tried her best to get out of this intricate affair. When Nama's marriage was arranged with somebody in Calcutta, Mitra's rage was beyond control. She travelled to Calcutta where she was failing to meet Nama, she committed suicide. On hearing the death of Mitra, there is a sense of relief as indicated in the words of Dalvi, "Everything ends with Death. She is no more". (p.494)

Through the character of Mitra in this **Friend's Story**, Tendulkar explores the manifestation of physical lust and violence in human beings just as he does in "Sakharam Binder", the only difference being that while in one play he portrays a heterosexual relationship, in the other there is a homosexual encounter. Just as Sakharam is cruel, aggressive and violent in his ways so is Mitra. However, Sakharam's overtures are accepted in society but not Mitra's. With the idea of homosexuals to be presented in theatre, Tendulkar explore the possibilities of new dimensions of human relationship. But the world is

not prepared to tolerate human life in all its diversity, anomalies and complexity.

Tendulkar's "**His Fifth Woman**" (1972) is the only play by the author that is written originally in English. It is a prequel to Tendulkar's play "Sakharam Binder" that was published in 1972. Tendulkar specially wrote it for the New York festival in October 2004. The man giving shelter to the destitute women is called Sakharam Binder, a man in his forties and these helpless women are projected as the live-in mistresses of Sakharam who is a bachelor. The title leaves sufficient scope of thought: four have preceded her and several may follow. The play portrays two friends Sakharam and Dawood in conversation with each other sitting near the mistress of one of them, fifth woman lying on her death bed, a destitute picked up from the streets. Sakharam provides food and exploits her physically. Dawood, Sakharam's friend has sympathetic attitude towards destitute women and so he wants the proper burial to the mistress of Sakharam. In this play Tendulkar tries to investigate the conditions that 'flourish the life after death'. The dramatist raises some relevant questions on the issue of morality and necessity of compassion through the play. The message conveyed focusses on the fact that those claiming to uphold the laws strictly are in reality the tyrannical hypocrites. Real justice results out of compassion and love and not from hypocrisy, autocracy and selfishness. Sakharam is conscious of his responsibility towards the patient and even towards the society. He becomes philosophical and expresses his faith that all the accounts of human action are to be settled in the other world. The idea of emotional modification and the justification of human existence after death make this play unique in its own way. Its metaphysical structure echoes the vision of Tagore's play "The King of Dark Chambers".

"**The Cyclist**" (2002) is supposed to be the last play of Tendulkar in which he seeks comments on himself and reality surrounding him. It is quite different from the other plays written by Tendulkar so far. The play analyses three journeys: an actual 'global journey' by the Protagonist, a 'historical journey' of the bicycle

about its different phases of Manufacturer and a 'psychic journey' of the Cyclist submerging into his sub-consciousness. The central character, an enthusiastic youth, sets off on an itinerary around the world on his bicycle. Specific names of places and locations are kept hidden, the idea conveyed being that the young man endeavours escaping from his present location, liking forward to visiting distant lands, touring to exotic places enabling him to meet a large number and a different variety of people en-route. Here the 'Cycle' symbolizes progress in spite of the various obstacles encountered on the way. Similarly, the cyclist wades through several difficult situations while travelling ahead compulsively probing into human nature, discovering the extreme dehumanization that has set in. Hence the journey is not merely physical but equally metaphysical in nature. The play exhales a breath of existentialism with a positive inference that stoic stubbornness leads to success and that for a determined person, life has no misery. Like Tagore's "Post Office" and "The King of the Dark Chambers", the human consciousness becomes the battle ground for the counteracting forces in "The Cyclist".

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## CONCLUSION

Thus, Vijay Tendulkar presents the idea of how Power is used as an instrument of the mechanism of oppression or cruelty. Vijay Tendulkar's plays, not only revolutionized the regional theatre but they have also opened fresh vistas for experimentation in Indian English Drama through the translated versions.

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