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Society and Disillusionment in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays

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Abstract

Tendulkar's works revolved around various themes like revenge, hypocrisy, patriarchy and violence. His works are timeless and, though around fifty years old, they are still as relevant today as they were then. Tendulkar plays were aimed at the middle class, and he always managed to unknowingly shock the middle class. He showed them, through his plays, that ugly side of them which they preferred to hide. He realistically portrayed the complex relation between the common man and society. He did not take a moral stand in his plays. He attempted to find realistic solutions to the violence and hypocrisy without being too naive and simplistic. The central theme of his plays was 'situations make men behave like animals towards other men', and he effectively brought this out through his works. Some of his masterpieces like *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *The Vulture* (1971), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Encounter in Umbugland* (1974), *Kamala* (1981), *Kanyadaan* and *The Cyclist* and many more have brought a revolution on the Marathi stage as well as in contemporary Indian Theatre. A distinguishing feature of Tendulkar's plays is his preoccupation with the portrayal of the dark side of life. He forces us to accept the unpleasant realities of human existence by giving a gloomy picture of the unsuccessful human efforts to get happiness. An atmosphere of violence and cruelty characterizes Tendulkar's plays. He believes in the permanent presence of animal in man along with all the basic animal instincts. He shows that human beings behave just like animals under the impact of lust, greed and self-interest. His plays bring out man's wolfish cruelty to man and his malicious and revengeful attitude towards provoking, almost disturbing. Tendulkar reminds us that man is unable to conquer the beast inside himself in spite of having progressed from barbarism to civilization. Thus the playwright gives a new way of looking at the self and society. Tendulkar's themes of plays, especially those translated into English, portray in unpretentious manner, violence as a part of human life. Through various themes taken from real life experiences, he fights for social justice and it is a never ending fight. It is this touch of reality that makes his plays lively.

Keywords: Social issues, Reality, Disillusionment, Lust, Self-interest



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Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born on 7 January 1928 in a Bhalavalikar Saraswat family in Maharashtra. He spent his early childhood in Bombay. His father Dhondopant was a clerk and ran a small publishing house and also an actor and director as well, mother Susheela and two elder siblings brother Raghunath and sister Leela. There was a literature friendly atmosphere in his family and his interaction with books encouraged Vijay to take up to writing. Tendulkar did not get a formal education of playwriting from any institution. There were not any courses in his time on this skill. He learned by a sheer trial-and-error method. He got his earliest lessons in theatre in his home itself. His father and brother used to write plays and also acted in them. They used to take young Vijay for rehearsals. Vijay felt amused as well as puzzled to see men playing female parts. Tendulkar tells Gauri Ramnarayan in an interview, “From the time I was four years old, I was taken to those rehearsals. They were a kind of magic show for me. That’s where I saw living persons change into characters. At that time women’s roles were played by men. Imagine my amazement when I saw some of the actors suddenly changing their voice and movements to become women. They didn’t wear saris, but in some mysterious way their pants and shirts stopped identifying them as men. I often fell asleep in the middle of those rehearsals. I suppose father carried me home. All I knew was that I woke up in my bed 40 the next morning.”¹

Tendulkar through his plays gave a voice to the oppression of the individual in conventional social codes. He was more concerned with the machinations of power effects of oppression manifested in different forms. His plays present a fictional reality in which the reality of life assumes a new significance. He draws material for his plays based on his own observations of life, from newspaper reports r incidents narrated to him. Tendulkar for his profundity of thought got highest popularity.

Tendulkar reveals that life is dark and cruel. The realization of the reality of life is uncomfortable but it is essential to see the truth. He used violence in all his plays because he thought that if an individual wants to survive in the society, he has to be raising his voice against the taboos of this society. The perception of cruelty existing behind the scheme of truth. Man for his survival depends on this fund of energy called aggression or violence. Samik Bandopadhyaya in his ‘Introduction’ to the collected volume to Tendulkar’s plays admits that Tendulkar adopts “the emerging patterns of violence”. He travelled widely to study the various patterns of violence ranging from individual violence to political movement. He perceived the violence in the functioning of police, judiciary, politics and personal relationships. With these perceptions, he went in for the curiosity for violence. To quote:

“Curiosity about violence- not as something that exists in isolation but as a part of human milieu, human behavior, human mind. It has become an obsession. At a very sensitive level, violence can be described as consciously hurting someone, whether it is physical violence or psychological violence....



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violence is something which has to be accepted as fact. It's no use describe it as good or bad. Projection of it can be good or bad. And violence when turned into something else can certainly be defined as vitality, which can be very useful, very constructive. So it depends on how you utilize it or curb it at times.”²

In his plays, Tendulkar exposed the cruelty of the institutions that impose the mechanization of power. In *Silence! The court is in session*, the cruelty is exhibited through the system of law court. *Kamala* is the dramatic rendering of the power of media how it operates to subdue the neglected and oppressed people. In *The Vulture* the exploitation of power is revealed through the imbalance in the familial relationship. “The state works as a power instrument in *Ghasiram Kotwal* and in the *Encounter in Ubugland*. The sexual mores is exposed in *Sakharam Binder*. In his plays, the oppressive mechanism of power is revealed through the exploitation of women. He presents woman as both provocateur and victim.”³ Samik Bandhopadhyaya remark, “The body of the woman and the institutional body of power come into collision in Tendulkar’s plays, sparking off and calling forth varying intensities of violence.”⁴ Tendulkar was obsessed with individual right for liberty. He wanted to play the role of socially aware person and to use stage to articulate the voice of protest all pervasive exploitation. Tendulkar’s mission was not ethical but social and psychological. He was aware of his role as an artist and a sensitive human being. He mentioned:

“The writer in me is more analytical than emotionally committed one way or the other. The writer in me is raises inconvenient question instead of choosing his side and passionately claiming thereafter that it is always the right one...As a social being I am against all exploitation and passionately feel that all exploitation must end. As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited-exploiter relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end.”⁵

The play *Silence! The Court is in session* (1967), the first important play of written by Vijay Tendulkar has been translated in English. With the publication of this play, Tendulkar established his reputation as a ‘rebel’ who wanted to register his protest against the established conventions and who perceived the possibilities of new spaces for the marginalized sections of society. Through the protagonist of the play Leela Benare, Tendulkar exposes the cruelty and obscenity of male dominated society where the resources of power are used to inflict pain and torture. “Miss Benare is the central character and she appears as a self assertive and self willed type of woman. Being school teacher she has an air of arrogance and maintains her own philosophy of the emancipation and joyous living.”⁶ Tendulkar’s this play created an example in front of those women, who were suppressed or tortured by this male dominating society. Miss Benare was become arrogant and aggressive



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in the play to protect her. She broke her silence and raised her voice, which was the demand of that time and still today.

The play *The Vultures* was actually written 14 years before it was produced. It was published in 1971. The play is focused round the unorganized 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 behavior 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 prop inanity. 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. Tendulkar suggests that the emerging impact of materialistic values and western style is ruining the structures of Indian families." ⁷ The Vulture is a powerful play where Tendulkar tries to split the social commitment of individual against the self-chosen spaces.

Sakharam Binder that was produce in 1972 is a play shocking the double standards of morality of the institution like family and society. It is for the first time that Tendulkar in the character of Shakharam Binder conceived the image of angry young man like John Osbern's Jimmy Porter in the play *Look Back in Anger*. Karnad considers it the play written in the last thousands years. Sakharam born in a Brahmin family appears almost like a ruffian who does not believe in refinement and sophistication of personal relationship. Being a victim of the hostility and neglect of the parents, he develops a rebellious attitude. Through Sakharam's character, Tendulkar wants to show that circumstances make a person good or evil. If Sakharam was well treated by his parents he doesn't become like this as he is in the play.

Ghashiram Kotwal (1972) is the most celebrated and widely acclaimed play of Tendulkar. In this play deviating from the tradition of naturalism, he adopts the practice of folk theatre. In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar's visions directed against the prevalent evil and corruption in politics and administration. It is also a critical satire on the Brahministic feudalism and the deterioration of values in caste based society. Tendulkar wanted to make a serious political statement in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. That was why he wrote the play, not to vent his spleen against Brahmins, as many Brahmins thought, nor to desecrate the sanctity of the age with lucid depictions of lasciviousness, nor rake in money by entertaining audiences with song and dance and a scandalous legend about a historical figure. Its reception by many as a brilliantly mounted, entertaining spectacle upset the liberal social moralist.



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No doubt Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most prolific Indian play writers, who have enriched the Indian drama and theatre by picturing the varied problems of native life in Maharashtra. He wrote about whom, who were tortured, exploited, by the so called highly civilized society. He gave more concern for women's horrible condition in contemporary society by the men. His plays never give solutions to the readers but arouse questions in their minds. He wants justice for the victimized through his plays. In those days when Tendulkar was writing, his surroundings were full of dirt like murders, crimes, rape, loss of moral values, distrust, quarrels between family, extra marital affairs, political injustice, lust of power, greed of money all these follies were on its apex and no one had dare to write upon it then Tendulkar break the rule of traditional writings and used his power of pen to remove such follies by awakening of his readers. Violence and anger became the tools of his writings because he himself was angry by the present condition of humanity and on other way he thought that if an individual wants to live or survive freely, happily in this cruel society, then he or she has to raise his or her voice angrily, forcibly against this society and it's norms. Tendulkar felt the plight of an individual, his survival, sufferings of upper middle class people, and their exploitation. He wrote about all these follies in his plays having a touch of violence and anger and gave a new dimension to the Indian drama through his dramatic art. But before starting a play he never decide that he has to write upon anger and violence, it is his protagonists and complexity of their minds which leads his plays towards anger and violence and the outcome of his writings he got the title of "Angry Young Man."

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