

Vijay Tendulkar's Theatre of Violence, Defiance and Confidence

Dr. Shaily Asthana,

Asst. Prof. and Head,

Department Of English,

R.S.S. College Of Arts, Science and Commerce,

Pathri, Tal. Phulambri, Dist. Aurangabad

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF INDIAN DRAMA IN ENGLISH

Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It is not an off spring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk love with context to contemporary socio-political issues. A cumulative theatrical tradition evolved by Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, prepared the background of contemporary Indian English theatre. Girish Karnad in the capacity of writer, director and actor substantially contributed to enrich the tradition of Indian English theatre.

Karnad's dramatic art lacks stability still his success lies in technical experiment with an indigenous dramatic form. The collective efforts of Karnad and Karalam

Narayana Pannikar are significant in their binding of the traditional forms of Indian theatre with the modern.

DRAMATIST PAR EXCELENCE : VIJAY TENDULKAR

Born in 1828, Vijay Tendulkar began his career as a journalist but from the very first play *Grihasth* in 1955 to *Safar* in 1992, his plays have given Indian theatre a rich and challenging repertoire. Leading the Vanguard of the avant-garde Marathi Theatre, Vijay Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, Tendulkar, relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome

or disgusting in as much as it is in note in human nature. He says,

*“Unlike the communists I don’t think violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that human being is born with. Not that it is bad. Without violence man might have turned into a vegetable.”*¹

(Vijay Tendulkar : 2000)

While depicting violence on the stage, Tendulkar does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable but rather keep it row and natural. The plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache* (1960) *Kalोजanchi Shalai* (1968), *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) reflect Tendulkar’s concern with authority and the idea of exploitation of individual. In the plays *Silence! The Court Is In Session* (1968) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), the theme of oppression dominates. *Sakharam Binder* (1972) is a study in human violence amounted to powerful dramatic statement. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1982) are written on the lines of naturalistic tradition. *Kamala* is a study of marital status as well as study in the theme of exploitation. *Kanyadaan* is a complex play about the cultural and emotional upheavals of a family. Tendulkar was associated with New Theatrical Movement in Maharashtra. He presents a fictional reality in which the

reality of life acquires a sharp focused character having rare dramatic power.

Vijay Tendulkar happens to be one of the most prolific Indian play wrights who has enriched the Indian drama and theatre by picturing the varied problems of native life in Maharashtra. He successfully ventures in unveiling the social turpitude and the holocaust in which the fair interests of the fairer sex are almost strangled. *The way he galvanized theatre through his provocative explorations of morality, power and violence, deserves a standing ovation!*² He genuinely attempted to study, explore and validate ‘violence’ as the natural phenomenon and thereby the root cause of all problems of life through his plays.

(Bharan, N.S.: 1999)

Tendulkar successfully gives the readers a clear insight into the lives of his individual characters and evokes empathy for them all, as they seem to be victims of their own trappings. He also provides a much needed social expose of violence, inherent in man, since time immemorial. If India passed through the rigours of partition, it also bore patiently the tumulus political upheaval that span across decades. All these seem to have been deeply entrenched in the psyche of the common human beings. If ‘Violence’ is the keyword in the everyday context , Tendulkar’s plays are replete with violence. *It isn’t as if common man is not aware of violence around , but Tendulkar’s*

*plays shake them out of their stupor of habitual acceptance of it and make them have the shocking realisation that the picture is far grim than they could have realised.*³

(Naik, M.K.:1982)

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TRANSLATED PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

Power doesn't contradict violence; on the contrary it begets it. The social institutions on which the common man depends on for justice seem to be the epicentres of burgeoning corruption and inordinate violence. Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* shocks the puritans out of their wits. Violence forms the very part of human constitution in the play. It is a metamorphosis or to put it more subtly, the regression of a human being into a mindless and dehumanised form of killing machine. *The play Ghāshirām Kotwāl ("Officer Ghāshirām"), deals with political violence. Its theme is how men in power give rise to ideologies to serve their purposes, and later destroy them when they become useless.*⁴

(Debnita Chakrabarti :2008)

In the play, Ghashiram barter his own daughter to get the post of Kotwal (police chief) of Pune from Nana. Having got the post he begins to enforce strict rules in the

city. He starts asking for permits for everything and starts throwing people in jail for the smallest offences. In the mean time, Ghashiram's daughter is killed by Nana. The situation goes out of hand when a few people in the jail die out of suffocation. The Brahmins then complain to the Peshwa. The Peshwa summons Nana who gives order to kill Ghashiram in the most derogatory way possible. Thus it leads to Ghashi's Death. *The play was a violent and aggressive satire on the double standards of Peshwas and Brahmin community hence, it was temporarily banned in the state but finally it acquired almost a global reputation.*⁵

(Babu, M. Sarat:2001)

Another gripping saga of violence is *Silence the Court is in Session ! (Shantata : Court Chaalu Aahe !)* which brings into focus the psychological torture that is forced onto a young and independent woman, leela Benare, who dared to defy the patriarchal authority and institution thus bringing upon herself the societal violence that destroys her at the end. The play deals with the most controversial issue of its time- female infanticide. The story is violent and provoking since not only it deals with the exploitation faced by the female protagonist Benare by her so called beloveds but also deals with the social awareness of the evils of female infanticide.

Silence! The Court is in Session presents the course of a mock trial where Benare, as the accused, is tried for an imaginary crime of infanticide. Though the trial is conducted in a game like and non-serious manner, it exposes the past life of Benare and authenticates the feeling of superiority of men over women in Indian society. The play *Silence! The court is in Session* deals with the mental state of educated woman in a traditionally male dominated Indian Society. The so called social workers like Kashikar and his troupe show social concern for social reform. They are known for their double standards attitude. Tendulkar has expressed his attitude towards such people in the society. He attacked ironically and satirically throughout the play.

In *Silence! Court is in Session*, he directs his criticism against the hypocritical male attitude in Indian society where a woman is quite suppressed and any small attempt by a woman for her freedom is highly deteriorated.

Another play by Tendulkar namely *Vultures*, is one of the most realistic portrayal of gender and domestic violence that is meted out to a woman that is torn apart between her desires and her family. There can hardly be a more nuanced metaphor than the word vultures when it comes to the description of ordinary man who selflessly devote his anger and

frustration to the women in the family. Tendulkar wrote the play, "*Gidhāde*" (*The Vultures*) in 1961, but it was not produced until 1970. The play was set in a morally collapsed family structure and explored the theme of violence. *In his following creations, Tendulkar explored violence in its various forms: domestic, sexual, communal, and political.*⁶

(Duff, Grant : 1987)

It was with the production and publication of *Gidhade* that Tendulkar became associated with sensationalism, sex and violence. As a result, conservative section of Maharashtrian society were stunned by the open display of illicit sexual relations and scenes of violence. The play is a ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness. The degeneration of human individuals belonging to a middle class milieu is exposed through the interaction among the members of a family. Ramakant and Umakant's greed viciousness, their sisters Manik's gross sensuality all add up to naturalistic depiction of the baser aspects of human instincts.

In 1972, Tendulkar wrote another, even much more acclaimed play "*Sakharam Binder*" (*Sakharam the Binder*) in which, he dealt with the pick of domination of the male gender over the female gender. The

main character, Sakharam, is man devoid of ethics and morality, and professes not to believe in "outdated" social codes and conventional wives, and uses them for his sexual gratification while remaining oblivious to the emotional and moral implications of his exploits. *He justifies all his acts through claims of modern, unconventional thinking, and comes up with hollow arguments meant in fact to enslave women.*⁷ Paradoxically, some of the women which Sakharam had enslaved buy into his arguments and simultaneously also badly want freedom from their enslavement.

(Debnita Chakrabarti : 2008)

Another play Kamla was inspired by a real life incident - the Indian Express expose by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented at a press conference. The central character of the play is a self-seeking journalist, Jai Singh Jadhav, who treats the woman he has purchased from the flesh market as an object that can procure him a promotion in his job and a refutation in his professional life. Jai Singh buys, Kamla, an Adivasi woman, at the flesh market of Luhardaya beyond Ranchi for two hundred and fifty rupees. Jai Singh's enthusiasm is directed towards sheer sensationalism. He creates sensationalism at the express of Kamla. Jai Singh Jadhav discards Kamla as an orphanage for woman and washes off his

hands for his safety, after she ceases to be an advantage to him. Jai Singh Jadhav exploits not only Kamla but also his wife, Sarita. *It is through Sarita Tendulkar exposes the Chanvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes himself to be liberal minded. Jai Singh- through his treatment of Kamla, makes Sarita realize that she is also a slave- a mere lovely bonded labourer to him.*⁸

(P.D. Dubbe : 1993-1994)

CONCLUSION

Tendulkar is a creative writer with a fine sensibility. He exposed alienation of modern individual to contemporary politics. He also exposed men's dominance over women, his portraiture of overt and covert violence in human-beings and above all his deep and abiding consciousness of women's vulnerability in Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern is the relationship between individual and society. In play after play he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man.

All of his plays have direct, one to one relationship with reality with an extraordinary mixture of violence that is so much omnipresent yet invisible in real lives of real people. Most of his plays deal with the individual placed against the backdrop of society and explore the

tensions between the two. His creativity has a prismatic quality myriad potential and a multitude of colors. This multifaceted, towering genius has explored genius the potentials of the dramatic genre- his primary area of creation. His works will also have a massive impact on the tender fresh minds of the world wide avid readers.

8. P.D. Dubbe : *'The Theme of Flesh Trade in Vijay Tendulkar's 'Kamla'* The Commonwealth Review (ISCS) vol v. No. 1, 1993-1994.

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