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Major Themes in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born on 6 January 1928 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra where his father held a clerical job and ran a small publishing business. He was a leading Indian playwright, movie and Television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator primarily in Marathi. He is best known for his plays *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* (1967), *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) and *Sakharam Binder* (1972). Many of Tendulkar's plays derived inspiration from real life incidents, which provide clear light on harsh realities. For over five decades Tendulkar had been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality in Maharashtra.

Keywords: Power, Violence, Gender Inequality

Introduction

The literary environment at home prompted young Vijay to take up writing. He wrote his first story at age six. He grew up watching western plays and felt inspired to write plays himself. At the age of eleven, he wrote, directed and acted in his first play. At the age of 14, he participated in the Indian Freedom Movement, leaving his studies. The latter alienated him from his family and friends. Writing then became his outlet, though most of his early writing were of a personal nature, and intended for publication.

Tendulkar began his career writing for Newspapers. Tendulkar's writings rapidly changed the storyline of modern Marathi theatre in the 1950's and the 60's with experimental presentations by theatre groups like Rangayan. Vijay started his career as a journalist and became the chairman of Sangeet Nataka 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 of oppression on the basis of gender. The play *Sakharam Binder* is a study of human violence. In *Kanyadan* Tendulkar deals with the emotional upheavals of family. Tendulkar won Maharashtra State government awards in 1969 and 1972; and Maharashtra Gaurav puraskar in 1999. He was honored with the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1970, and again in 1998 with the Academy's highest award for 'lifetime contribution'. fellowship. In 1984, he received the Padma Bhushan award from the Government of India for his literary accomplishments.

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 present 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 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 effect 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 started his dramatic career with his well known play 'Silence! The Court Is In Session'. In this play, the cruelty is exhibited through the system of law court. Leela Benare,

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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 Prof. Damle, a married man having five children. 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.

The issue of power and violence continued to occupy the dramatist's psyche when Tendulkar wrote *Sakharam Binder*. The dramatist sheds ample light on physical lust and violence in a human being. He is not a married man but gives shelter to helpless women who were either tortured by their husbands or turned out of their homes or simply deserted by their husbands. When the play opens, he has already kept six women. Laxmi being the seventh one. It shows his straight forwardness. He has his own concept of morality which is against to the established social norms. 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.

Vijay Tendulkar emerged as a rebel against the established values of a fundamentally orthodox society with the production of *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* in 1976, he became the centre of controversy. *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* illustrates all the characteristic features of Tendulkar art of the play writing. The play won the most coveted and prestigious 'Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award' for drama and has been translated into several Indian languages as well as into English. It is translated into English by Priya Adarkar as *Silence! The Court Is In Session*. The outstanding features of the play are its uncompromising realism, its merciless probing of human nature, its candid security of individual and group psychology and its experimental technique. Vijay Tendulkar is highly realistic not only in the delineation of characters and human relationships but also in the depiction of the setting in which these characters enact the drama of their lives and the locale of the play is a mofussil town and all the actions take place in a single room.

The play is based on a grave social problem of unmarried motherhood and men's attitude to her. The play in fact portrays the rehearsal of a play in an untidy old room of a small village by a theatre group named 'Jagruiti Sabha' of Sonar Moti Chawl. The play moves around the protagonist of the play Miss Leela Benare who is a school teacher by profession. She loves life and is full of spirit and very proud of her performances as a teacher and feels that her life is her own and no one has the right to interfere in it. As she is good at her profession and does her job well, that is the end of matter and there is no sense in amalgamating her personal life and conduct with that of her profession. As Mr. Samant is absolutely novice; he does not know anything about the court. In order to show him the action of a court they play a mock-trial. All the characters except Miss Leela Benare decide to set a trial on Benare for the offence that she has committed against the society. The characters pounce upon her and produce her as an accused in the court before the judge Mr Kashikar.

The commencement of the 'mock-trial' constitutes a new technique i.e. 'a play within a play' and it offers Tendulkar a lot of scope to comment on the sordid, squalid and filthy realities of life and the hypocritical life of the urban society.

Balu Rokde is economically, psychologically and emotionally dependent on Kashikars. His first name is Balu and in Marathi 'Balu' means an innocent boy. Benare pities Rokade as 'poor balu'.

Tendulkar focused on man-woman relationship, that too, in different dimensions. The incestuous relationship between Benare and her maternal uncle is shocking. Benare in her teens is seduced by her maternal uncle. In Marathi culture the place of maternal uncle is of immense importance because during marriage ceremony 'Kanyadan' is done by maternal uncle. His place is second to father. If a teenage girl is seduced by her own maternal uncle then in whom should the girl believe. Her uncle praises her bloom everyday, shows his love to her and misleads her to a social crime of incest. She is too young to differentiate between male's infatuation and pure love. This relationship shows how incest operates in the traditional society and how it is a perverted way of fulfilling natural human urge for sex. He withdraws himself from marrying her and it shows how powerful are the laws of society.

Vijay Tendulkar again and again mentions society and social customs by his characters. Miss Leela Benare has the charge of infanticide. Mr Kashikar, the judge enquires Sukhatme, 'Did you notice also, Sukhatme, that this charge is important from the social point of view. The question of infanticide is one of great social significance. That is why I deliberately picked it. We consider society's best interests in all we do'. Miss Benare, the heroine of the play, is a school teacher. She is totally devoted to her profession and her popularity has caused the envy of her colleagues at school and even the school management.

Another kind of man-woman relationship is between employer and employee. Nanasahab, the chairman of the education society is employer and Benare who is working as a school teacher is an employee. Generally female employees are exploited physically, mentally, psychologically and sexually by the employer and the same thing happens here. Benare is exploited by the employer. When Nanasahab overhears about the licentious and profligate behavior of Benare and her pregnancy, he asks to do an inquiry and the issue is responsible for her dismissal.

Benare is a progressive woman but in our Indian society certain norms are prescribed for the women. A certain frame work is done for the Indian woman and it is expected that the women should adjust herself in these norms. For men and women the norms are different. Ours is the patriarchal society and rules are male prejudiced. Many restrictions are there on the women and when a woman tries to throw away these restrictions away, the society blames her for her action and behavior. Benare continuously struggles against the patriarchal system though she is victimized by the men coming from all social levels. She cries in pain but not surrenders herself to the situation. Marriage as a social institution has laid down stringent rules for the women whereas men have no inhibition as far as extra marital affairs are concerned. This attitude of the authorities expresses the basic hypocrisy and double standards on which our society is founded. Leela Benare who is the victim herself on some occasions becomes the hunter and she ridicules the characters. Another noticeable theme of the play is the plight of a single woman in a male dominated society.

The play contains a latent critique of modern Indian society, mostly middle class and lower middle class from different

angles. The play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by the society. The individual is placed against the backdrop of society and the tensions between the two are explored. Tendulkar portrays life as it is from different angles without trying to philosophize or moralize in any way. His sympathy for Leela Benare is underlying throughout the play. He has made Benare to struggle against the orthodox society. Benare possesses a zest for life and she does not care about social customs and norms. The exploitative society isolates Benare. Benare's private life is exposed dissected publicly. Violence is one of the outstanding issues in the plays of Tendulkar. Conflict, violence and sex characterize Indian middle class society. The social, political and economical power and conflicts concerned with these lead to violence. The middle class people feel insecure but they crave for power and the result is violence. There are various type of violence - physical, psychological, sexual, social, etc. The violence makes the people live in a make believe world and they are confronted with the harsh reality of the world. This generates disillusionment and also violence. But ultimately his characters come to realize the futility of life and sex.

Sakharam Binder is an explosive play of Tendulkar that defied censorship and won unprecedented public acclaim. The man-woman relationship which is based on sex is the main theme of the play. Masochism and lust of the middle class male is kept at the centre by Tendulkar. Though Sakharam is born in a Brahman family, he is ill treated by both his father and mother. He runs away from his home at the age of eleven. Sakharam does not believe in marriage and he brings caste-off women whom, however, he does not keep with him long. Within a period of fourteen years, he has brought six women, loved them for some time and discarded them.

The play Sakharam Binder begins when his sixth woman is leaving him. The seventh woman is Laxmi. Laxmi is a typical Indian woman. Sakharam's morality is of different type. He commits vices and is not afraid of things which he does. Sakharam tells Laxmi about his birth and caste.

In the play Sakharam Binder Tendulkar has challenged caste system also. Sakharam does not know anything about the caste of Laxmi. Later on when Champa comes in his life, he does not ask her also about her caste. He smokes chillum with his friend Dawood who belongs to muslim community. Both of them share a single chillum. During the time of Ganpati festival Laxmi takes an objection with Dawood's presence. She dislikes a Muslim person involving himself in Ganesha's aarti. The things are put by Tendulkar in an ironic manner.

Sakharam Binder is a play divided into three acts and Sakharam who is Binder by his profession is at the centre of the play. The play explores violence and sexual lust which is deep rooted in human nature. Tendulkar has challenged the institution of marriage in Sakharam Binder. Sakharam, having no belief in marriage, remains a bachelor. He makes contracts with women who are left by their husbands. As these abandoned women are helpless, they agree to stay at Sakharam's house as his wife. All the rules and regulations of the contracts are learned by heart by Sakharam and he goes to killing them when he brings a new woman. Laxmi's character brings positive changes in Sakharam's personality. He has become religious and drinks less than usual but the change in him disturbs Sakharam and both of them agree that they should be separated.

The play Sakharam Binder challenges the concept of family relationship. Laxmi is discarded because she cannot bear children. The question comes whose fault is it and why a woman should be held responsible for infertility. Laxmi is punished by her husband without any of her fault. When she is tired and bored with Sakharam, she goes to her nephew but her nephew also throw her away. She has none else to turn to. She has already accepted Sakharam as her husband. Laxmi sleeps in kitchen but her religious chatting of 'Sitaram, Sitaram' disturbs Sakharam's drunken love making. The mysterious disappearance of Champa during afternoon rouses Laxmi in suspicion. She follows Champa and discovers that she is having an affair with Dawood. From the prayer of Laxmi we find her to be resolved to live and die as Sakharam's wife. Laxmi takes pity on Champa's husband and feeds him. Sakharam is told about the sexual affair of Champa and Dawood and Sakharam strangles Champa. It is Laxmi who helps Sakharam to cremate the body of Champa.

Tendulkar's interest in violence in society, the human response to violence and individual freedom has manifested itself in many ways. Tendulkar's plays are unconventional and he penetrated the dark corners, the repression, the brutality, rejection and alienation of his characters. According to him to break the traditional frame work of the Marathi theatre was essential and to do some experiment with theatre was necessary.

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