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Social Hypocrisies in Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures*

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Abstract: Early plays in India were written in Bengali by Bengali writers which were mostly translated into English from Bengali in the 19th century. But drama in English failed to serve a local theatrical habitation, in sharp contrast to plays in the mother tongue (both original and in the form of adaptations from foreign languages); and the appetite for plays in English could more conveniently be fed on performances of established dramatic successes in English by foreign authors. Owing to the lack of a firm dramatic tradition nourished on actual performance in a live theatre, early Indian English drama in Bengal as elsewhere in India grew sporadically as mostly closet drama; and even later, only Sri Aurobindo, Ravindranath Tagore and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya produced a substantial corpus of dramatic writing. Between 1891 and 1916 Sri Aurobindo wrote five complete and six incomplete verse plays.

Keywords: exploitation, sexual violence, homosexual, individuall degradation, consciousness, hypocrisies

I. INTRODUCTION

Regional drama in India is getting the status of "National Theatre" which in turn will make Indian English Literature rich and varied, forging a link between the East and West, North and South. Major Indian language theatres in India - Hindi (Mohan Rakesh), Marathi (Vijay Tendulkar), Bengali (Badal Sircar), and Kannada (Girish Karnad) have made fruitful experiments.

Vijay Tendulkar is the representative of the contemporary modern Indian drama. One can find varied characters – criminals coming out of the jail, exploited women, precarious life of middle class couples, broken promises and adamant decisions creating turmoil in the emotional world etc., picked up from extraordinary situations.

Tendulkar's themes are woven round the characters that are always the dregs of society, the debased, the fringe people and persons leading life not in keeping with the accepted norms and values of society. He deals with social themes in naturalistic or realist manner. His plays do not deal with the rich or the elite class and their sophisticated life style but down to the earth characters. He has changed the form and pattern of Indian drama and was noted for criticizing the hypocrisies, promiscuity, dishonesty and such other vices existing in the society.Vijay Tendulkar, who started his career as a journalist turned to full time play writing in Maratha. He finished 30 full length plays, 24 one act plays, several articles, editorials and 11 plays for children. For almost 40 years he stood as a stalwart in Indian writing in English. The title, *The Vultures* attracts many and thought provoking of the rationale behind this title selection by the writer. Tendulkar himself has once said in this context:

The paradoxical quality of human nature is not only the rejection of their evil mentality, but also the exhibition of manipulated outward behavior. Outwardly they are saints, but inwardly they are sinners and sadists.[1]

Tendulkar's observation is not philosophical or theatrical but practical. He was influenced by some unforgettable memories witnessed in his childhood days. For him violence is all around. It is the culmination of festering elements in many areas. There are professionals who survive by regularly killing other people. The value of life has degraded in the modern days. Money has dominated human values and ethics.

When Tendulkar was asked why there are scenes of atrocity and bizarre sadism in some of his plays such as kicking a pregnant woman in the belly (*The Vultures*), Tendulkar reacts:

In *Gidhade*, the cruelty is great because it deals with an exceptional family. As for what you call perversion, let us accept that human existence is full of it. We shut our eyes to it……I know many people who enjoy torturing their wives; it can be physical or mental. They are outwardly decent folk and you don't suspect they have this dark side. So, when I deal with masochism or homosexuality, I am drawing your attention to something near you.[2]

Tendulkar believes that people are so unconscious of evil in the society. It is in their families, in the neighbourhood and capturing the family members in front of one's eyes. Man has lost social consciousness. When one reads news papers one can find new ways of violence spreading cancerously. The power of the play, *The Vultures* lies in its most central idea: can an individual or society live with complete disregard for moral values? Tendulkar writes this play with the conviction that the vulturine instinct in man is deeply rooted.

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By attempting to explore the meaning of man's life victimized by sinning nature, Tendulkar seems to be totally against to the basic belief of Indian mythology 'aham Brahmi' which means I am Brahma, the ultimate goodness, upholding the ultimate goodness in human nature. Tendulkar has taken Pitale's family as the microcosm and shows how each member is responsible for its breakdown. By using analogy of vultures, the play dramatizes deep-seated unmitigated depravity, perversity, greed and diabolic villainy in the ravenous members of the family. The family of human vultures consists of Pappa vulture(Pitale), his illegitimate son (Rajaninath),his elder son (Ramakant), his daughter (Manik), his second son (Umakant), his daughter-in-law (Rama, wife of Ramakant). Almost all the characters in the play are corrupt and violent except Rajaninath and Rama. The characters symbolize sensuality and domestic violence.

The second scene opens with uproars, shoutings and sounds of blows and beatings. Through these voices audience can understand the antecedent of the story. Pappa Hari Pitale and his brother Sakharam build up a huge business firm called "The Hari Sakharam Company" — a construction firm. It is through sheer hard work they achieve this feat. As days pass by Pappa takes the company from his brother by means of treachery and false law suits. As a result, Sakharam Pitale finds himself on the street. As the saying— 'as you sow, so you reap' — Pappas' sons and daughter plot against their father and are waiting to drive him out one day.

Hari Pitale is a smoker. He has a habit of working with his toothless mouth. He doesn't have any respect for his two sons. He expresses his disgust for his selfish children.

1) *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. Now, these wolves, these bullies! [209]

He is considered as a 'confounded nuisance' by his sons and eats other's food and 'tries to act smart.' His diseased wife is an enemy to him and left three children with him. But he becomes a burden to them. Pappa says it has been his stupidity to produce bastards like them. Ramakant tells his brother Umakant that "a mangy dog would have made a better father." [213] Umakant is only too ready to agree with his brother. And all these in the presence of their own father! However, the old man, hardened by his own past crimes, remains nonchalant. He doesn't want to pay his servant.

Fifth scene dramatizes the most violent incident in the play. After driving away, Sakharam, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik make their Pappa drink to extract the truth about the money. The sons pretend to fight each other with the father getting trapped between them. Pappa gets injured. In order to escape from further assault, he admits to them that he has deposited some money in the Punjab Bank. Ramakant and his brother hate each other. They both hate their own sister Manik. For him lying for business is a convenience. He believes that money can buy anything like lawyers, courts and justice. Even when Ramakant and Umakant talk to their own sister about her affair with the Raja of Hondur, they use obscene language, which is suggestive of their incestuous nature. Their suspicion that their father still has some money stacked away somewhere leads them to have a cruel plot against their own father. Though they receive their share of the father's wealth, their plan to squeeze him to his best penny and planning a murderous assault on him to drive him out is a kind of heinous honour that could be given to a father. It is a rare incidence one could witness in human history. Like Rama, Rajaninath has a sensitive personality. His deep empathy for the victims of human viciousness flows like an undercurrent throughout the play. If one recalls Tendulkar's ambivalent 'ethics', the split between the social self and the more individualistic writer self, one can read something of the 'writer' in Rajaninath, who watches the violent disintegration of the family, and bears witness to it.

Manik appears to be a hysterical type. She smokes and drinks liquor. Her attitude towards money and other members of the family reveals her character. Manik is an embodiment of materialism. Her craving for money to purchase a thousand-rupee necklace at the cost of her life gives a kind of public demonstration of the bestiality and monstrosity of people in a family living in a nauseatingly consumerist world. Perhaps nowhere in Indian English literature one sees a woman like Manik. No Tendulkar's woman character is so uglily portrayed as Manik's character does. She pursues poor substitutes in pleasure with diminishing returns. Tendulkar reminds, through her character, how the meaningless pursuit for pleasure makes her of easy virtue. She prowls and scavenges relentlessly through a variety of life styles in search of that all-fulfilling treasure. She seems to have forgotten that this hyperactive pursuit and empty-hearted feelings are not new to the human experience. Her pleasure jeopardizes the sacred rights of Rama. She, later, gives an instance to support her fear, "when I had typhoid last year, far from looking after me, you'd all plotted to put poison in medicine!." [208] Manik's intention of being alone which results out of her feeling of insecurity is the essence of modern man.

The fact that both Ramakant and Umakant want to get rid of their sister becomes clear. Playing game of cards by the members of family for serious transaction of money not only stuns the audience but also alerts them how human relations have been gradually taking the shape of commercial dimensions. At the game of cards, Umakant is about to choke Manik to death. Watching these Ramakant goads on Umakant saying:

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2) *Ramakant:* Don't bloody let her go. Uma! Drag the bloody money out! Look, how she's wriggling! Squash her bloody neck! Twist it!" [235]

His words reveal the inherent violence in him. Discussing Manik's love affair with the Raja of Hondur, Umakant tells Ramakant that he might marry her "If her belly swells out." (236) If it happens, they can blackmail the Raja of Hondur for money. This reveals that there is no healthy atmosphere at home but they can go to any extent just for the sake of money just exposing modern attitude of 'money maniacs'

If Manik is one of the vultures, then Rama is the exact opposite. The contrast between Manik and Rama is black and white respectively. Rama cannot bear a child despite her almost divine goodness, because the seed that should bring it forth is 'rotten'. Her infertility is a symbol of the putrid evil that her husband Ramakant, his brother and father fill the air with. It is also symbolic that the two brothers kick the growing life out of Manik. To quote a few of Rama's utterances with regard to her survival in the house of vultures.

3) *RAMA:* Every day, a new death. Every minute a thousand million deaths. A pain like a million needles stuck in your heart. Blinding you, maddening you with pain." [240]

Rama intuitively knows that material prosperity may give satisfaction but cannot be a solution to despair. For her, the house is full of individualism, competitiveness and power games. Thus, she feels insecure and says "I see lots of things. I hear them too. I feel so very very scared." [248] Such a house cannot accommodate love, compassion and joy. It is a real hell.

As individual degradation is increasing, the gradual disintegration of the family is also clearly seen. Ramakant becomes a pauper. Ramakant and Umakant quarrel for sharing the business and property. Umakant learns that there is a double mortgage on their house. Ramakant advises his brother to go ahead with his flourishing business and leave the house to him. But Umakant demands him to settle their account about their father's hidden property, their sister's money and mother's jewels. "Otherwise" he says "I'll quit when I've got every single paisa, you bastard! I won't let you get away with it! I'll sit on your neck. I'll make you puke it out!" [255] Then, he tells his brother that his wife is carrying in her womb the child of Rajaninath. This enrages Ramakant, and he scolds Umakant and twists his hand. So, Umakant goes out. Ramakant calls Rama down and talks to her tenderly only to elicit her tender feelings for Rajaninath.

In the mean time, Hari Pitale, the Pappa, and Manik have been hanging around the house, thirsty for revenge. Hari Pitale realizes that his legitimate children will kill him for property. He knows that Rajaninath, his illegitimate son, is human. So, he seeks his protection from his own children and promises Rajaninath to make his 'will' in his favour by back dating. Rajaninath is repulsed by the property as it has made the people loveless vultures. He detests the very idea of inheriting the property. So, he cannot show any compassion to him and mercilessly asks him to get out.

Pappa Pitale is one who has lost his guilty consciousness. In spite of his rearing children in such a way that they attempted to kill him, he doesn't seem to have any traces of repentance. Pappa collides with Ramakant who has been eavesdropping. So, he runs away.

As Ramakant and Umakant exhaust their share of money and want some more, together they decide to blackmail the Raja of Hondur who is in love with Manik and by whom she becomes pregnant. So, in order to prevent her from meeting her lover further and informing her lover about their blackmailing him, they hatch a plot to break Manik's leg. They ruthlessly execute the plan and hope to get twenty five thousand rupees from the Raja of Hondur. However, a phone call informs them that the Raja of Hondur has died of heart attack. As a result, their plan of black mailing Manik's lover is vanished.

So, they break Manik's room open and Ramakant kicks Manik's belly hard. She aborts, and in sheer agony runs away. Thus, one vulture leaves Pitale's house. This is the most violent of scene in the play.

Ramakant, in utter despair, caused by drunkenness behaves like a mad man. He sings and dances. He doesn't allow Umakant into his house and suspects his intention of the grabbing house through black magic, he says "Brother … the day after one new moon. I found a lemon, a coconut . . ., in the bloody grounds … The ghost was in your bloody control! And was sucking me dry!"[262]

Apart from their materialism, momentary pleasures, it is clear that their mechanical religious belief has blunted their faculty reason. Religion, which is expected to create common good, lacks moral vision in Pitale's family.

The imagery of the play reiterates the thematic design of the play- Images of animals and disease, images that stress the disjunction between appearance and reality. She observes:

The avaricious and vicious villains in both the plays are in consonance with ferocious animals like bloodhounds and wolves and preying birds like vultures and hawk. The Duchess mentioning the trees evinces life and continuity. Rama's attachment to the Tulsi plant in Tendulkar's play also suggests the same.[3]

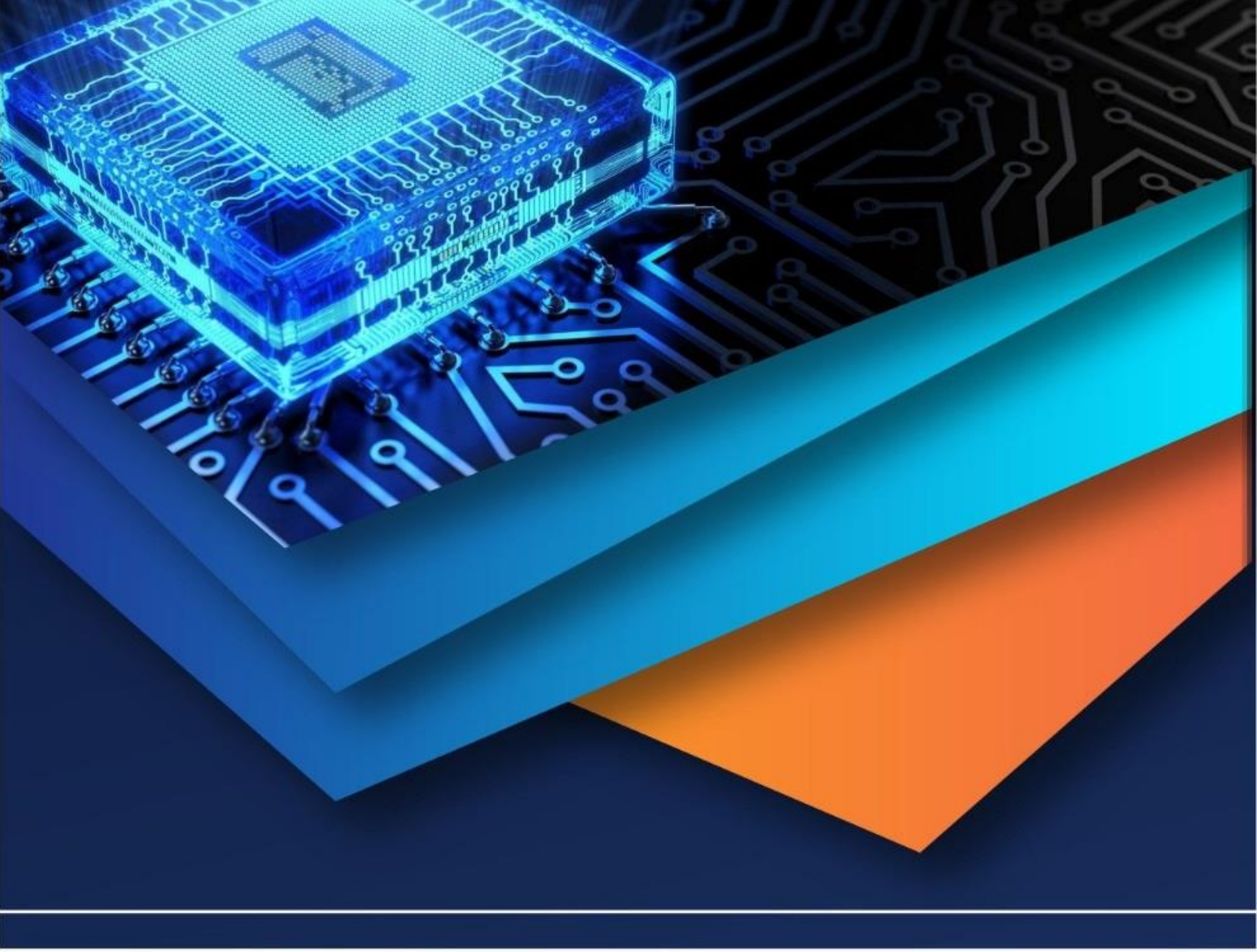
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The Vultures depicts several evil traits in human nature. The play is as special of Tendulkar's plays as it fully presents so many contrasting evils work within a family and the family members have lost their sensitivity and become so rude and crude to human compassion. Thus, man since his childhood is more lenient towards evil, lives in it, enjoys it, making life hard to him and to others who are associated to him and finally dies ignorantly. Man is not giving any chance for self realization and repentance but growing more and more wicked.

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