

PERVERSION IN HUMAN VALUES IN THE PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR: A RETHINKING

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The fact cannot be ignored that in the long span of nearly seven decades of Indian Independence, there is a consistent increase in violence – overt and covert, active and passive, outer and inner. Indians may feel proud of their culture and civilization which they have evolved through ages of their tireless endeavor, but they are not really happy in as much as the milk of human nature is being sapped by the western civilization which suppresses human personality in terms of cultural deformities and degeneration – individual, social, political and spiritual – which truly reflect in Tendulkar's literary works.

No doubt, Tendulkar was a rebellious, bold and visionary playwright. He revitalized Marathi theatre, handled his plays with great skill and went far ahead of his time. His themes have universal appeal, and are relevant even today. In 1955, he deviated from the traditional themes of morality and honesty, and introduced new themes because of which the audience as well as the critics bitterly rejected some of his plays. He broke the established fences of dramatics, and gave a new dimension to script, dialogues, and backstage.

Like the novelists namely Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh and Bhagbani Bhattacharya, like the playwrights namely Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Badel Sircar, Tendulkar deals with the theme of social deformity, perversion in values and its evil impact on human life. However, he is equally concerned with gender deformity, political deformity, physical deformity, mental deformity and spiritual deformity and perversion in all of these values. He depicts gender deformity in *Kamala*, physical dehumanization in

Sakharam Binder, political degeneration in *Encounter in Umbugland* and *Kanyadan* and spiritual debasement in *The Vultures*.

Most of the characters in *The Vultures* are presented as defeated or frustrated ones since they are spiritually deformed personalities. They have apparently a tragic dimension. Deformity is perceptible in Tendulkar's characters who are shown life-like but at times they are presented worse than what they really are. In the play *The Vultures*, Rama, Rajaninath, Papa, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik are such examples. Hari Pitale, the papa of Ramakant, Umakant, and Manik prospers in his business by cheating his brother. The two sons and the daughter inherit his treacherous ways, and ultimately they form a family of vultures.

Tendulkar's modern themes and craftsmanship impress the metropolitan elite. In his famous and highly controversial play, *The Vultures* he explores the perversion in human values. He deals with human relationships within a family, which turns explosive and violent to a great extent. The father and his children grow violent against one another. The brothers use bad language towards their sisters and vice-versa. They develop distrust on one another and want to usurp the ancestral property. It is Tendulkar who dares expose the brutal reality employing equally brutal language which shocks the audiences.

Most of Tendulkar's plays are controversial because of their theme of perversion in values either at individual or social or political or ethical level. In *Sakharam Binder* he makes an attempt to expose

'immorality'. It challenges the very foundation of the sacred institution of marriage. The protagonist Sakharam is 'dangerously a real man'. Tendulkar presents him as a man whose life choice stands the institution of marriage on its head and shows its irrelevance to those who do not care a fig for public opinion. He believes that man needs woman to keep house and for sex, while woman needs man for security. According to him, marriage is only a way to legitimize their needs. Like a taskmaster he orders his wife that if a visitor comes home, she will neither raise her head nor speak. She should cover her face with her sari and talk only if necessary. "I am the owner of this place. You remember that ... You'll have to live here like a married wife." (Act I. Sc. I.)

Sakharam, a full blown credible character, is a womanizer, a whore-monger and a drunkard. Lakshmi a kind, gentle, God-fearing but destitute woman needs shelter and security. Sakharam provides her with all her requisitions. But she leaves Sakharam and goes to live with his nephew, setting her morality at naught. Another woman in play Champa takes liquor, swears and often hits her own husband who requests her to return. Surprisingly, Lakshmi comes back and plunges the audience into a moral dilemma again. However, she defends herself asserting: "Everyone must suffer for the deeds of their previous birth." (Act III, Sc.I) But it is only a lame excuse to defend her unchastity.

Tendulkar depicts stark realism about how women are sexually exploited, when Lakshmi returns to Sakharam. He beats her ferociously to drive her away. She clings to his feet. Champa watches for a while, takes pity on Lakshmi and intervenes. But Sakharam shouts at her not to protect Lakshmi, Champa gives voice to the grievances of a woman, "Why did I meddle? I'd have had to take to the streets looking for a new customer everyday to fill this one-span hole of a stomach with food. One animal clawing at you is better than ten every day." (Act. III, Sc.I.)

Tendulkar exposes the fact that gentle, religious and dutiful Lakshmi is kicked out of the house once again but a drunkard and unfaithful Champa is defended by Sakharam. Champa drinks hard and goes every afternoon to meet her Muslim lover. Lakshmi reveals the fact to Sakharam, who listens to her only casually and in a fit of

fury shouts at Lakshmi, "What? Mussalman? Which Mussalman? What Mussalman?" and Lakshmi says "to Dawood...." (Act III, Sc. VI.) As Shanta Gokhale writes, "The play offered (its) theme the most convenient handle for protest. It was overtly about violent sex, Sakharam and Champa used obscenities freely in their speech. Champa was shown beating up her husband and there was constant drinking of liquor."¹

Tendulkar attempts to indicate the significance of every movement going on the stage because movement carries force to reflect the perversion in values. In the play *Ghasiram Kotwal*, the human curtain of a dozen rhythmically – swaying Brahmins is not merely a theatrical device. It is integral to the creation of an environment of intrigue, hypocrisy, greed and brutality. In these movements, the story of Nana, Ghasiram, Lalita Gauri and the hypocrite priests unfurls. Movement, gestures, sound and music have meaningful roles to perform. Shanta Gokhale writes ; " If a content analysis of the play's script were done, one would discover that more than half of it consists of instructions for movement, expression and gesture....."²

Tendulkar's use of language is always precise and telling. It is expressive of human feelings and gestures. At times it is his language that reveals the violent emotions and brutality. The dialogue going on between the *Brahmin* and the *Sutradhar* reflects the cruelty inflicted on the common people by those who are in power or close to powerful persons. In *Ghasiram Kotwal*, a Brahmin priest rebukes the sutradhar using obscene words and phrases: "Oy,Oy, Who are you, which mother's son. Have you no eyes or ears... You ape. Is this the Peshwa's land or the Mogul's? You bump straight into a holy Brahmin?"³ (Act I)

Nana Phadanvis' speech addressed to Ghasiram "Go Ghasya you bastard, we've made you, we've made you kotwal..... But you have clue to Nana's moves. Both barrels of this political gun are loaded full. With the first shot I'll lay your Juscious girl. With the second, Nana'll set this Pune city awhirl,"⁴ (Act I) and thereafter "We will do the deeds; our Kotwal will pay for them," reflects the cultural and political degradation. Similarly Ghasiram's statement after offering her tender – aged daughter to the over – ripe Nana evinces his moral

depravity: “ I am in full control now as a kotwal. Not a soul dares lift his eyes to look this Ghasiram straight in the face not a tongue will wag in malice against my daughter.”⁵ (Act II) Thirdly “The Brahmins have gone to Bavannakhani” The words are full of sacrilegious juxtapositions. Bavannakhani is the red-light district where the Brahmins have gone. Nana too joins the dances in the courtesan’s room.

A close study of Tendulkar’s plays brings out various dimensions of man’s cultural deformity which results into degeneration of human body, mind and spirit. To begin with gender role causes gender deformity. Human beings biologically divided into two classes – men and women, play two roles. However, they inevitably make a family – man governs and control all its affairs while woman carries out household duties. It is here that the concept of master – servant relationship develops. He becomes the oppressor, and she, the oppressed. Simone de Beauvoir goes to the extent of asserting : One is not born but rather becomes a woman It is civilization as a whole that produces this culture which is described as feminine.⁶

Tendulkar seems to believe that an ideal era of human life existed in the distant past. Gradually the societies began to decline generation after generation from a natural, blissful, innocent state to the present state of

increasing complexity, artificiality, selfishness, greed and anxiety etc. Truly speaking primitive man was better than his present day counterpart. Similarly, primitive life must have been superior to the modern so –called civilized life. There has erupted from material advancement a certain kind of deformity which reflects the established norms of life with the march of progressive civilization. Obviously, the natural ways of life has come to an end. We can say that culture has distorted human personality as a result of which most of us have acquired deformed personality.

Dimensions of crudities and injustice, exploitation and immorality can be noticed in various forms in the modern society. However, their causes are different such as discrimination made between man and man on the basis of gender, caste. Color, creed, poverty, prosperity and justice/oppression, cut throat competition for money and power. Gender deformity, division of society complexes, dehumanization are the outcome of these causes. Their effect cripples man’s soul and makes him insensitive and loveless. One should realize that the process of perversion finally culminates in man’s spiritual deformity. It leads man to self–destruction and self–animalization which is totally unacceptable. Let this world be transformed into a place of better and more civilized human beings than it is today.

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3. *Five Plays*, Vijay Tendulkar, Oxford University Press, Delhi
4. *Ibid*
5. *Ibid*
6. *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir