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The Interplay of Society and Politics in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays

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Review Article

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Abstract

Aims: This paper aims to examine the socio-political issues represented in the major plays of Vijay Tendulkar, one of India's most influential modern playwrights. The study focuses on how Tendulkar's dramatic narratives reflect the complexities of social hierarchies, gender inequalities, caste discrimination, and the corruption of power structures within Indian society. It seeks to highlight Tendulkar's role in shaping contemporary Indian English drama through his sharp social critique and realistic portrayal of human behavior.

Methodology and Approaches: The study employs a qualitative and analytical approach based on textual analysis of Tendulkar's major plays—particularly *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Critical frameworks from postcolonial and socio-political perspectives are applied to interpret his treatment of social injustice, gender bias, and moral decay. Secondary sources, including journal articles, books, and critical essays have been consulted to contextualize Tendulkar's work within the broader landscape of post-Independence Indian drama.

Outcome: The analysis reveals that Tendulkar's plays serve as mirrors to Indian society, exposing the manipulation and oppression inherent in systems of caste, patriarchy, and politics. His dramatic realism transcends regional boundaries, offering universal insights into human exploitation and power dynamics.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The study concludes that Vijay Tendulkar's theatre remains a vital tool for socio-political reflection and reform. Future research may explore comparative analyses of Tendulkar's work with other Indian dramatists or examine its adaptation in modern Indian theatre to understand its evolving relevance in contemporary discourse.

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Vijay Tendulkar was an important figure of Indian English theatre with his multidimensional contributions, viz. a well-known screen playwright, T. V. writer, sensitive commentator, and a famous journalist of modern age. Being a journalist, he came in contact with various people and derived materials from the newspaper reports. Tendulkar complained against the old tradition and became a famous playwright of the present age. In the area of Indian English drama, he portrays violence on the stage and appears as a thought-provoking experimental playwright. The themes and specific style of his writing increased his popularity among the audiences but he was far from money, publicity, fame and honors. His plays deal with various pressing problems in post-modern style that capture the evolution of Indian society over time. The legacy of Vijay Tendulkar and the study of Indian English drama enhance our knowledge to understand India's cultural heritage, social challenges and power of literature to engage with the complexities of human existence. Indian English theatre emerged as a significant form of artistic expression during the colonial era when English became the medium of communication and it has evolved responding to the changing socio-political landscape of India.

However, Tendulkar was always in contact with theatre and film personalities like Ketan Mehta, Girish Karnad, Neelu Phule, Govind Nihlani, Jabbar Patel, Mrinal Sen, Kumar Sahani, Mani Kaul, and many more. He was equally popular both in our country and abroad. In America, Tendulkar festival is celebrated in which the people are requested him to write a drama in English. As per suggestions, Tendulkar wrote his *Fifth Women* a prequel to *Sakharam Binder*. Being a journalist and getting the fellowship of the Nehru memorial fund committee in 1974, he travelled all over the country and minutely observed the lives of common people. As a prolific writer, Tendulkar wrote thirty full-length plays, seven one-act plays, six collections of children's plays, four short stories, two novels and seventeen film scripts. He has not translated his plays himself. Naipaul has considered him India's finest dramatist while Arundhati Benerjee attributes. "Vijay Tendulkar has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre almost forty years."

He resumed his career in the field of drama with his important play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, in which the dramatist represents that cruelty is

exhibited through the system of law court. This play was written about a middle class educated family which came to village from city to perform a progressive play where members spent much time and performed a mock trial. The central character of this play, Leela Benare is seduced by her maternal uncle and Prof. Damle during her childhood. She is an intelligent, economically independent and very young member of a group of amateur theatre actors known as Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association where she makes fun of all the members of this group because they do not achieve their goals either personally or professionally. Therefore, she feels proud that she can shape her life according to her own wish and presents herself as an introvert, not circumscribed by the norms of Indian womanhood. All the members of the above group know about her illegal affair with a married man had having five children prof. Damle is not accepting the responsibility of her pregnancy. Women are exploited and not recognized as equal as the male in Indian patriarchal society but there are many goddesses in our religion whom we worship as mothers like Maa Kali, Maa Saraswati, etc. In Indian society, females are not better in comparison to the West. But we had Lopamudra, Apala, Gargi, Maitrayee in Aryan civilization but the situation changed according to the time when Muslim started ruling in India. Women were sent behind the curtains; they were even banned from taking any decisions about themselves. They became “role bound possessions whose sacrifices preserved the sanctity and well-being of the family.” (Chatterjee- 42).

However, the traditional view of women in literature is that of domesticated commodity. Her sanctioned role by the patriarchal society is that of an ideal daughter, wife and mother. Benare wanted a free life- free from patriarchal dominance and the conservative norms of the society. She displays self-determination, self-assertiveness and cynicism. The character of Miss Benare reminds us of Ammu, the protagonist in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai also portray the same kind of characters in their works. They have also exposed the naked realities of women suffering at the hands of male dominating society. It is only at the end of the play, Benare revolts back in her own defense but that too seems very weak. Mr. Kashikar looks down upon this new woman as “A sinful canker on the body of the society.” (Tendulkar-67).

Here, Tendulkar exposes the hopeless condition of women in the Indian context. Both Mrs. Kashikar and Miss Benare are victimized. They are not free to act independently, not free to speak out their mind independently, their voices are throttled and silenced. The irony of Benare's mock trial is that she is accused in the court without the presence of Damle. This depicts the condemnation of the Indian society and the prejudices of women. According to Veena Das, in her *Women Characters in the dramas of Tendulkar*. "It is important here to note that these characters became verbalized only in the absence of Prof. Damle"(Dass-10). According to C. Coelho: "In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egoistical man and equally self-centered society." (Coelho-34).

The very title of the play suggests a violent suppression and free vibration. His another, play *Ghashiram Kotwal* creates a chaos and clash. Tendulkar, himself explained that being a historical play it is not based on historical fact so it is an unhistorical play. The strong of this play belongs to a Brahmin family from kannauj, Ghashiram Savaldas, who moved to Pune with his wife and young daughter, searching for a better life. The story setting of this play is against the backdrop of late 18th century, Pune. In fact, it is a political satire, written as historical drama and comments on the socio-political situation we live in. According to history Ghashiram was appointed as the police prefect of Poona where he rendered his service till his death 1791 under violent circumstance. By his faithful service, he took in confidence to Nana Phadnavis who had made him the Kotwal of the city and enjoyed the full trust and also earned his name and fame.

Undoubtedly, this play is a harsh satire on contemporary society, police administration and power politics. It portrays the poor degradation of society, the mannerism as well as the conduct of the citizens. It shows how Maratha society has fallen from its exalted position during Shivaji's rule and subsequent Maratha rulers. Moreover, the present play also focuses on erosion in values. The society has degenerated so low that certain shameless happenings are tolerated without any protest. Mainly in this play the dramatist throws his search light on Brahminary thus:

Night comes

Poona Brahmins go
To Bavannakhani
They go
They go to the cemetery
They go to the Temple- as they have done everyday
The Brahmins go to Bavannakhani.

Here, Tendulkar poor Brahmins women whose men go to the prostitutes, Gulabi's place, the women call other men and thus a vicious circle grows up which shows that the moral depravity and degeneration are visible everywhere. Thus, Tendulkar represents that even the priestly class are going down morally so much which shows a little difference between a courtesan's house and Krishna's garden at Mathura.

Did he Fall?
Tumbled down.
Slipped down or did he put foot wrong?

The above lines show Nana's low morals and Brahmin's depravity when they assemble outside the Park where royal honours are being bestowed upon them. Ghashiram was thrashed, though he was not involved at all. The play explains how sex, greed, lust for power and money have a corrupting influence on human beings. It is a revenge play in which in the beginning Ghashiram gets a shameful treatment from the Brahmins and he comes back to humiliate them. Ghashiram Kotwal takes revenge on them by harassing them after he becomes the Kotwal of Poona. Apart from the diplomacy of Nana; it is normal to see the cruelty in Ghashiram.

The next play *Sakharam Binder* has been written on Indian middle class, society's deep-seated, unchecked, and malignant depravity and perversity. In this play dramatist smartly depicted human intrapersonal connections in the distant past as well-as today's socio-political environment by divining deeply into their complexities. The play starts with the arrival of a bookbinder Sakharam and a lady Laxmi based on modern society, patriarchal hegemonic power structure. Sakharam does not work in a high cast occupation; at that time, there are several cases of Brahmins ruling as kings where his job was binding book which are the

repository of knowledge so title of the play indicates but does not prove high or low Varna.

He lives “old red-tiled home, the kind of one sees in the alleyways of small district towns” aside from his menial job (*Sakharam Binder*-125). At the very least, his vocation is linked to books, so title of the play indicates but does not prove high or low varna. Tendulkar was a great propagator of a basic caste system vision created a higher caste protagonist, Sakharam openly criticizes the caste rules where God religion, and moralities associated with man woman sexual relationship according to his upper caste’s rules. The great epic Mahabharata emphasizes that birth ancestry, sacrament, or study alone cannot determine whether a person is a Brahmin; only character or behavior may do so. M. K. Gandhi, a modern thinker and reformer, thinks that an individual’s karmic account and behavior determine his Varna.

The *Kamala* deals predicament of women. Jaisingh Jadhav brings Kamala from the fresh market of Bihar but he is not interested in her pathetic condition. He is interested only in his promotion and publicity. Sarita is his wife and her condition is also same like Kamala. Her duty is to attend the calls and make a list which tries to show the exploitation of Indian women by male. Her husband treats her simply as a ‘lovely bounded labourer’. He adds: “They sell human beings at his bazaar... They have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages.” He continues, “The men who want to bid handle the women to inspect them ... How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and...”(*Kamala*). He arranges a press conference where Kamala is treated like an object or a thing. Jadhav says: “Just let this evening’s Press Conference get over. It’s very important.” (*Kamala*-18)

Here Jadhav wishes to prove that newspapermen never tell lies. For the sake of Press Conference only, Jadhav was deceptive in his conversation with Kamala as quoted below:

Jaisingh: How do you like it here, Kamala?

Kamala: Very much, Sahib.

Jaisingh: Kamala, this evening we’re going out together.

Kamala: Oh, I’ll see Bombay! They say it’s a very big city. (*Kamala*19).

Kamala refuses to accompany Jadhav in her rags, but he compels her to be with him at the Press Conference. She is completely confused about the present place because at present, physically she is in Delhi but mentally in Bombay. The dramatist shows the contrast between journalism in the vernacular and in English. Media can bring socio-political change in the society. At last, in Act i the Press Conference letting a great relief to Jadhav and Sarita.

In Act ii, one of the most ironic episodes in the play is as follows:

Kamala: Can I ask you something? You won't be angry?

Sarita: No, Go on.

Kamala: How much did he buy you for? (*Kamala,34*)

Here, Sarita feels that there is no difference between her own identity at home and Kamala whom her husband bought her to exhibit at the Press Conference. Kamala is very simple and illiterate lady. She understands how a woman suffers a lot in her married life by her mother-in-law, a husband and society.

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Dr. Devendra Kumar Yadav did his Ph.D. from Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar, India. His doctoral research, titled “The Plays of John Millington Synge: Reassessment in the Context of the Irish Dramatic Movement,” critically explores Synge’s contribution to modern Irish theatre and the Irish Literary Revival. He is presently serving as an Assistant Teacher at U.M.V. Darawan, Nawada, Bihar, where he continues to guide and inspire students in the field of English language and literature. His academic interests include modern drama, Irish literature, postcolonial studies, and comparative literature. Dr. Yadav remains dedicated to fostering critical thinking, creativity, and literary appreciation among his students and peers.