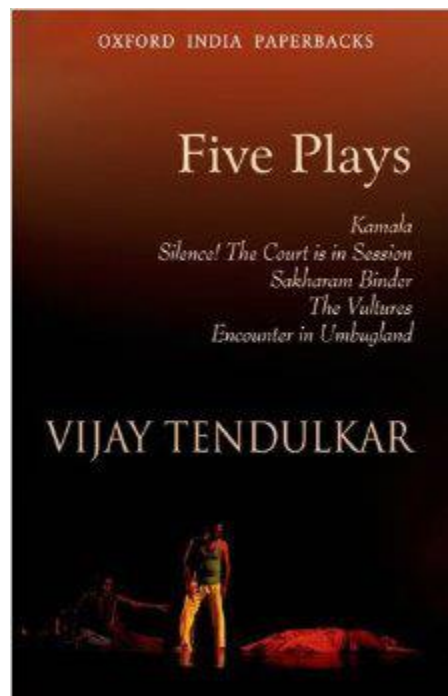


Harshness, Aggression and Sensuality in Vijay Tendulkar's Works

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar deals with harshness, aggression and sensuality in most of his plays. The endless decay and harshness in the social mores inexorably impinging upon the man-woman relationship, as well as sex and ethics seem to create a sense of fate out of which there is no escape for man and woman. They are trapped in their helpless condition, left to the battering of cruel and creational forces beyond their control. No rebellion, not even acquiescence is possible. They are subject to a sense of self-destruction and dissipation bordering on despair. No dramatist may find it a proper subject-matter for his plays, for he knows he will inevitably fail to present the tremendous stress involved in this human condition. He may find both logical discourse and literary symbolism inadequate to effectively present the shameless seeking after power, the raw-

violence and the festering social lapses. Harshness is noticed everywhere in Tendulkar's plays - in the aggression, in the cunning game in the form of a mock-trial in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, sexual lust of the protagonist in *Sakharam Binder* in the rude, brutal interactions of the members of the family in *The Vultures*. Therefore, "all these plays, in fact, are spectacles of harshness, overt or covert". (N.S. Dharan, *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, 107).

Key words: Vijay Tendulkar, aggression and sensuality, logical discourse, works of Vijay Tendulkar.

Tendulkar's Charisma



Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008)

Courtesy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijay_Tendulkar

Vijay Tendulkar deals with harshness, aggression and sensuality in most of his plays. The endless decay and harshness in the social mores inexorably impinging upon the man-woman relationship, sex and ethics seem to have created a sense of fatalism, out of which there is no escape for man and woman. They are trapped in their helpless condition, left to the battering of cruel and creational forces beyond their control. No rebellion, not even acquiescence is possible. They are subject to a sense of self-destruction and dissipation bordering on despair.

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No dramatist may find it a proper subject-matter for his plays, for he or she knows they will inevitably fail to present the tremendous stress involved in this human condition. They may find both logical discourse and literary symbolism inadequate to effectively present the shameless seeking after power, the raw-violence and the festering social lapses. They will find them at once crude and anti-literary.

Evolution of the Characters

The crudeness and anti-literary character of this subject-matter impinging upon the willing susceptibility or readiness of the creative imagination of the plays such as *The Vultures* (1959), *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), and *Sakharam Binder* (1971) seems to have evolved their own forms: and hit upon an anti-literary, apparently illogical, absurd anti-theatre which is similar in many respects to the forms practiced in the West as the *Theatre of the Absurd*.

Depiction of Harshness against People – Garden Crossings and Gender Crossings

Harshness against people is part and parcel of the day-to-day life in a certain section of society in India. It is a routine matter with Dalit men as well as women. Vijay Tendulkar probes the operations of power, the hidden seams of violence in Indian history and obstacles that stand in the way of social change and modernization. By examining Tendulkar's plays, *The Vultures*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! and The Court is in Session* let us illustrate the concept of 'garden crossings', of 'gender crossings', of masculinities and femininities, in the context of caste and family structures pivotal to the deconstructive dramatic axis of Tendulkar.

Unmitigated Harshness and Selfishness: *The Vultures*

The play *The Vultures* displays the unmitigated harshness arising from selfishness, greed and sinfulness. It depicts harshness, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness, inherent in man's life. It is a realistic naturalistic play. The title of the play *The Vultures* itself indicates the unpleasant subject-matter of the play. The characters of the play are drawn from a middle class family. The greed and viciousness of Ramakant and Umakant, the degenerate nature of their father, and the sensuality of their sister Manik throw a glare of light on the baser aspects of human nature. In the view of Arundhati Banerjee: "The beating up of the father by his own sons, the two brothers, forcible abortion of their sister's child and the mutual hatred among the

members of the family, underline the fundamental evil inherent in human nature” (Arundhati Banerjee, ‘Introduction’, *Five plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, xii).

Language and Harshness

The play is extremely morbid not only in the portrayal of its characters and their actions but in the setting and language also. The scenes of harshness, the open exhibition of sexual relations, and the abusive language shock the sensibility of the conventional audience. Never has such harshness been depicted nor experienced before in the Indian theatre. It has stunned the audience and made them introspective. The lighting technique also helps to make the characters appear violent and blood-thirsty from the play’s beginning to its end.

The language, the setting and the stage directions make the harshness vivid and the play alive. In the background, there is a huge tree having curved, crooked branches and a big hollow, a drawing room consisting of old, unpolished, worn-out furniture, a small country-yard having a *tulsi-vrindavan* (basil plant on a shrine for god Krishna), and an old garage. When the play opens, there is a constant sound like wind howling over a plain and a shrill screaming of vultures for some time. When the curtain is raised, the lights on the garage and the *tulsi-vrindavan* are green and those on the bedroom and the drawing room are dirty gray, almost black.

The language used is coarse and roughshod. All the characters except Rama and Rajaninath are foul-mouthed. However, as pointed out by Dr. Shriram Lagu, “It is the language of the vultures, not of civilized, cultured people. They have to speak only in such abusive language” (Shriram Lagu, “Gidhade, censorship animee” Narendra Dabholkar (Ed), *Sadhara: Diwali Special*, Pune, 2001, 55).

Representations of Violence

In the play, “The Vultures” Tendulkar reiterates the importance of a range of individualistic representations drawing on ideas of violence, greed, lust and spiritual and cultural erosion. He presents the psychodrama of crude realities of family relationships in *The Vultures*. Jaganmohan Chari and E-Ranuka point out, “This play enacts the goriest of the family relations existing in our society today”. (*The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar, New Quest*, Jan-Feb, 1928, 29).

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We have also witnessed volcanic eruption of violence that normally exists in each of us. It comes to the surface level and beyond only when we are trapped in the cobweb of the post-modern tendencies of fragmentation, frustration and aggression. “Ye dil manage more” encapsulates many of the deadly disease hidden beneath our endless desires from which we are all suffering. The difference lies only in degree. The characters of *The Vultures* are all vulnerable in this disease and Tendulkar has successfully defined the dreadful deformities that form our culture. A crude domestic realism which is an integral part of the cultural milieu of Indian society is portrayed in *The Vultures*. In this play an acute atmosphere of lovelessness and hopelessness is caused by “Violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness” (Arundhati Banerjee, “Introduction”, *Five Plays*, XII).

Drunkenness, Greed and Immorality

The Vultures is a play which displays the unmitigated harshness arising from drunkenness, greed and immorality. Furthermore, it is a play built on contrasting situations. On the one hand, there is the gruesome portrayal of man’s greed and on the other, there is a portrayal of tender love. When the agents of these opposing qualities meet, a conflict of great dramatic significance results: In this play Tendulkar displays a rare genius of mixing the absurd as evident in the cruel and curious relationship obtaining in the relationship among Pappa the father, his two sons Ramakant, and Umakant and Manik his daughter; and the tender but possessive relationship between Rama, Ramakant’s wife and Rajaninath, Pappa’s illegitimate son.

Vulture Psychology

“The Vultures” deals with vulture psychology, which is man’s natural inclination for the macabre, the pervert and violent. No amount of social conditioning can actually hide the vulture hidden in the recesses of a man’s personality. There is harshness in the play not just in terms of content, but also in the use of bold and explicit language.

Operations of Power in *Sakharam Binder*

Vijay Tendulkar’s plays persistently probe the operations of power, the hidden seams of harshness in Indian history and the obstacles that stand in the way of social change and modernization. The play *Sakharam Binder* explores complexities of human nature: “Through the

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character of Sakharam and those of the two women Laxmi and Champa, Tendulkar reaches into the depths of physical lust and harshness in the human being”.

<http://www.chennaionline.com/events/sakharam.asp>

A Three-Act Play Exposing Hypocrisy, Jealousy, Masochism, and Lust

The play consists of three Acts: The first Act depicts the relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam; the second one, that of Champa-Sakharam; and the last one, that of Laxmi-Sakharam-Champa. Sakharam, the protagonist is at the pivot of the situation. Laxmi considers Champa as her rival in Sakharam’s love; the one is a foil to the other.

The play “Sakharam Binder” exposes hypocrisy, jealousy, masochism, and lust of the middle class people. Sakharam Binder, born in a Brahmin family, ill-treated by both his father and mother, runs away at 11, fends for himself and at length finds a job in a press. The bitter experiences he faces in his life leave him rough and tough and foul mouthed. But he is honest. In Tendulkar’s words he is “A coarse but impressive personality”. As he does not believe in the institution of marriage, he brings home helpless, deserted women in the society, not with a view to improving their lot, but to exploit them in the fulfillment of his sexual passion. It is a kind of contractual relationship based on mutual convenience. He does not keep them with him for long. Thus, he spends fourteen years with six women. The play begins when the sixth woman has left him and when he brings the seventh woman, the typical Indian woman, Laxmi to his house. Wine and women are his obsessions.

Aggressive Ego

Sakharam Binder is aggressive in his manner. He projects his ego in order to escape from his super-ego. He always talks of himself as a self-made man who has no respect even for gods. In his own words: “This Sakharam Binder - he’s a terrorHe’s not scared of god or of god’s father”. (126) on seeing Laxmi looking for framed gods he says:

“We’re not saints. We’re men. Worship and prayer can’t satisfy the itch. If you want a thing, well, you’ve got to have it. What’s there to hide? And from whom? From our Father?” (127)

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The relationship of Sakharam and Laxmi cannot last for a long period, as they are totally in contrast with each other. Laxmi is very sensitive, generous, calm and tender-hearted. Sakharam is very aggressive, violent, and sensual. Laxmi fails to fulfil his excessive physical lust and Sakharam remains blind to her expectations. Both cannot satisfy each other, either physically or psychologically.

Laxmi - A Scarecrow

Excess of work and sex make Laxmi a scarecrow of a woman. One day Sakharam explodes and decides to send Laxmi out. In spite of Dawood's intervention, he does so. He does not pay heed to Laxmi's warning:

Sakharam: Then what did you expect me to do?

Be your slave and lick your feet?

Laxmi: You'll know that once I'm gone. (148).

Thus the play *Sakharam Binder* treats varied aspects of sex and harshness. According to Tendulkar:

“Even in the plays of *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures*, the theme is not harshness. Harshness comes as a way of life - a natural way of life if you consider the background of the characters. It is there as a part of functioning of a character” (Vijay Tendulkar, “Interview”, *The Indian Express*, March 27, 1983, Magazine section, quoted in Manchi Sarat Babu, *Indian Drama Today*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1997, 93).

Harshness is an inevitable aspect of their lives, nature and culture. Therefore, Manchi Sarat Babu is quite justified in stating: “The inhuman violence of the human characters in these plays is only the result of the physical deformity”. (Manchi Sarat Babu, *Indian Drama Today*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1997, 93). Harshness characterizes the play; it is inherent in the very lifestyles of the characters.

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Silence! The Court is in Session – A Social Satire

The *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a social satire on the male-dominated society. In this play “a woman can neither get a sympathetic response nor win a man to give legitimacy to her child” (Asha S. Kanwar *Ghashiram Kotwal, A Study Guide*, New Delhi: IGNOU, 1993, 1). The theme of the play revolves round the idea of the game in which Benare, who is in the offensive in the beginning, finds herself entrapped in the game towards the end of the play.

Benare and the Fake Charge

The play begins with a group of artists planning to stage a play in a village. A rehearsal is arranged to acquaint Sumant, a local chap, with the court procedures. At the beginning of the mock-trial, Benare is accused of the charge of infanticide (actually, it is foeticide). Surprisingly at the end, this fake charge turns into a verdict, into a punishment.

Benare, a school-teacher, is sincere in her teaching work and so she is a favourite with her pupils. She also works in the amateur theatre group along with Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar Balu Lokde, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, Prof. Damle, and Mr. Rawte.

Benare is the protagonist of the play. All the characters, except Sumant, fail to achieve their most cherished goals of life. They seek a vicious pleasure in making others unhappy. In their verbal onslaught on Benare, who is by nature, a jolly teacher, their sadist tendencies come to the surface. All the members in the group, including Mrs. Kashikar have come together to expose the private life of Benare.

In this malicious and spiteful attitude towards Mrs. Benare, their fellow companion, one notices the inferiority complex reflected in their frustration and repressed desires. However, they themselves are not united and share nothing but hatred for one another. While calling upon his first witness Mr. Ponshe, Sukhatme remarks: “My first witness is the world famous scientist Mr. Gopal Ponshe. Well, Ponshe are you happy? I’ve suddenly prompted you to world fame, eh?”(80)

A Symbol of Simplicity, Innocence and Straightforwardness

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The character of Benare symbolizes simplicity, innocence, and straightforwardness and the character of her fellow-companions symbolize meanness, crookedness, and cruelty. Her tragedy reveals the fact that, in the male dominated society, woman's innocence is punished and man's violence goes unpunished. That is why Prof. Damle, despite the fact that he wholly disowns his responsibility, is summoned merely as a witness while,

“Benare remains the prime accused principally because contemporary Indian society with all its roots grounded firmly in reactionary ideas, cannot allow the birth of a child out of wedlock” (Arundhati Banerjee, “Introduction”, *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, Bombay: OUP, 1992, viii).

Usually the theme of ‘raw’ harshness is rampant in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. But *Silence! The Court is in Session* is an exception. No doubt, Tendulkar throws light on the evil tendency, the violence inherent in human nature, in the play. The educated and civilized people become aggressive and violent against the fellow-companion and that too, a female. The play deals with the issue of social morality and shows how a young and attractive woman school teacher is trapped and coerced into making a confession about her illicit love affair. Sumit Mitra seems to have voiced the general critical opinion when he said that “the raw brutality and lewdness of Gidhade make a triumphal return in the post - Shantata! Phase, particularly in.....*Sakharam Binder*” (Sumit Mitra, “Vijay Tendulkar: India's Master Playwright”, *India Today*, December 16-31, 1980, 61). It is evident here that *Silence!* is free from the naturalistic theme of harshness, unlike *The Vultures* and *Sakharam* “(A. Jagannathan Chari and E. Renuka, “The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar,” *New Quest*, 67, January-February 1988, 33).

The Central Theme

The central theme of the play is the plight and predicament of a woman whose feminine wealth is plundered by a gang of selfish men.

The play also deals with the latest harshness and prejudice towards women in the middle class psyche. Kashikar and Sukhatme in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Jaisingh Jadhav in *Kamala*, Ramakant and Umakant in *The Vultures* represent the harshness and disgruntled

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characters. They turn harsh and deviated because of their respective failures in life. In the *Silence! The Court is in Session* the worst sufferer is a woman, Miss Benare who has to be the victim of men's lust and prejudice. Her incestuous relation with the maternal uncle creates a sense of life-long trauma in the psyche of the heroine. She recalls:

“I was in love with my mother's brother. But in our strict house in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. He praised my bloom every day. He gave me love....how was I to knowIf you felt that, just being with him gave a whole meaning to life and if he was your uncle, it was a sin! I did not even know what sin was....I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dream openly”. (74)

The harshness of *The Vultures* is softened in this play as it is enwrapped with music, dance, movies and such other techniques.

Harshness in the Plays

Thus harshness is noticed everywhere in Tendulkar's plays - in the cruel, cunning game in the form of a mock-trial in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, sexual lust of the protagonist in *Sakharam Binder* in the rude, brutal interactions of the members of the family in *The Vultures*. Therefore, “all these plays are, in fact, spectacles of harshness, overt or covert” (N.S. Dharan, *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, 107).

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