

DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *THE VULTURES***Dr. Pankaj Dwivedi**Ph.D from University of Allahabad
Allahabad**ABSTRACT**

Since the Independence – since 1950, to be precise- the name of Vijay Tendulkar has been in the forefront of the Marathi drama and stage. His personality both as man and writer is multifaceted. Tendulkar's creative writings are based on the assumption that violence is integrated in human self and it seeks its outlet in the various forms expressing man's helpless defence against the adversity of the life conditions. He perceived the violence in the functioning of police, judiciary, politics and personal relationship. The play *The Vultures*, published in 1971, stands apart from the other plays of Tendulkar. This play displays the unmitigated violence arising from selfishness, greed, and sinfulness. The play is a ruthless dissection of human nature as it depicts violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality, and sheer wickedness inherent in man's life. The title of the play *The Vultures* itself indicates the unpleasant subject-matter of the play. The characters belong to the middle-class family. Ramakant's and Umakant's greed and viciousness, their father's degenerate nature, and their sister Manik's sensuality throw a glare of light on the baser aspects of human nature.

Key Words: Theatre, Reality, Violence, Avarice, Family, Relationship

Indian English drama has made an impact through a circuitous route, with the drama of regional tongues being translated either by the playwright or by others into English. Indian English drama has registered a remarkable growth and maturity through English translation of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannad plays in 1970s and after. Writers like Dharmavir Bharti and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannada brought to Indian dramatic literature, once again after centuries, the status of creative work. With the emergence of the trio of Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, Indian English drama saw the new light of humanism and realism against the philosophical creed of Tagore and Sir Aurobindo. Tendulkar made his place as a Marathi writer but he had modified the shape of Indian drama with the power of his pen to represent the issues that are temporal as well as timeless. With the transcreation of the works of Tendulkar in English and other Indian languages, he has been acknowledged as a potent force in contemporary Indian English drama. In his plays one experiences a new kind of freedom both at the level of theme and technique.

The play *The Vultures* was originally written in Marathi, under the title *Gidhade*. In this play the dramatist manipulates various types of violence, emerging out of drunkenness, greed, sexual aberration and immortality, anticipating a complete collapse of value system, sanctity of family and familial responsibility, man's disobedience to the social orders and moral principles. Tendulkar through fractured images of the characters makes a profound analysis of the growing sickness of modern man who is morally invalid and mentally disabled. It is said, "*The Vultures* is about the inborn

violence due to self alienation as well as due to selfishness and avarice” (Babu 53). In the play *The Vultures*, it is the dramatic excellence of Tendulkar that he sustains the atmosphere of violence and conflicting pull of ideals up to the very end of the play and this consistency of tension contributes to a tremendous and concentrated effect of drama on the audience. After the first production of this play Girish Karnad wrote that the staging of *Gidhade* could be compared to the “blasting of a bomb in an otherwise complacent market place” (Notes 575).

The plot of the play *The Vultures* revolves round the family of Hari Pitale who has been addressed as Pappa in the play. He has two sons and one daughter. Ramakant known as 'Rarnya' is his elder son and Umakant known as 'Umya' is the second son. Rajaninath is the youngest son in the family but he is illegitimate and therefore his identity is hardly acknowledged. Sakharam is the younger brother of Hari Pitale. There are two female characters in the play— Manik and Rarna. Manik is Hari Pitale’s daughter and Rama is Rarnakant’s wife. Hari Pitale becomes a successful businessman by cheating his own brother Sakharam. Both of his sons Ramakant and Umakant inherit the selfishness and inhuman qualities of their father.

The central action of the play takes place in a drawing room full of “Knotted and born out furnitures”. There are only a few patches of light at the rear. Ramakant and Rama both are ready to exit. When Ramakant and his wife have

disappeared, there are echoes shrill 'screeching of vultures'. Gradually there descends silence and darkness all around. The entire stage setting in the play is arranged to give an insight into the chaotic conditions of the mental spectrum of the characters.

After initial stage direction, the play *The Vultures* moves with an unconventional theatrical technique. There is a long song written by Rajaninath. It is unconventional mode of theatrical presentation but it echoes the reflections of the tradition of Greek play. The song presented by Rajaninath becomes a prologue to the play. The analysis of the song reveals the position of Rajaninath as a super observer who makes a presentation and critical evaluation of the motives of different characters. First of all he comments on the nature and personality of Rama. She was like a 'statue of emotions' and could not conceive her own life beyond the directives of her husband. The idea of 'statue of emotion' suggests that Rama lives in perpetual domination of her husband. He defines:

A statue of emotions chilled to stone alive, she

followed after

That living death, her master.

With dogged loyalty. (202)

He forecasts that Rama and Ramakant would not secure any relief because they are 'lost'. He seems to have an insight, into the plight and suffering of Rama who had never enjoyed freedom and dignity in Pitale's family. It is a consolation for him that Rarna's departure will ultimately bring peace and freedom. He sings:

It still remains,

To breathe once, freely,

Breath with freedom -

Such a freedom -

After that living impotence

of twenty two endless years (202).

In spite of his sympathy for Rama, he makes ironical comments on her passivity because she had never thought of living according to her choices. He further comments;

She was like a doe,

An innocent doe, Untouched.

As loving as Earth.(203)

In his appreciation, he makes comments like a passionate lover and praises her as “a tender hearted idol to adore”. In this observation there are explicitly two aspects of the personality of Rama as well as that of Rajaninath. From the appreciation of Rama’s passivity, he shifts his attention to recreate the atmosphere of the household of Hari Pitale. In this family, she never got love and freedom. He defines it as a shelter house of 'Vultures'. It gives an insight into the animal like instincts governed by greed and terror among the members of the family. It is a consolation to Rajaninath that finally Rama had stepped out to cross the boundaries. In his depiction of Pitale’s house, he indicates how the future events would take place:

Then she stepped over the bridal measure,

And crossed the threshold

of her new home. But it was no home

Not a home but a hole in a tree.

Where vultures lived

In the shapes of men.

A haunted burning-ground

Surrounded by evil ghosts.

What that a home? (204).

Along with the story of Rama, he makes a confession of his own resentment and anger in that house of 'Vulture' who had inflicted all sorts of pain on him. Rama is the only consolation in his life and she expresses her sympathy and love to him. Rajaninath in his song highlights two contradictory treatments in the family—on the one side there was the neglect and humiliation of all the 'Vultures' and Rama shared his anguish with all tenderness. In spite of his aversion for the pleasures of life, he was fascinated by the silent sensation and uncompromising tenderness of Rama. He reveals:

Their torture, their neglect of her,

Their cold despising, her tormented struggles,

I surveyed (205)

He also reveals that Rama is barren and she has not been unable to conceive a child. She seeks the fulfillment of her unfulfilled quest of being a mother in the company of Rajaninath. All her hopes are neglected and she has been denied of the right of motherhood, “The need to swell with fruit, a soft fulfillment. Each womb-bearing woman’s right by birth” (205). In the family, she had all hopes of self survival and she was given only to feed the whims of five vultures. It is said,

Five Vultures,

On the swinging branch... of her rotted hopes...

Five... Vultures. (206)

In the background of the song of Rajaninath, the consistent 'loud screeching of vultures' is suggestive of the atmosphere of hostility, violence and inhumanity. In one of his conversation Tendulkar reveals that life is dark and cruel. The realization of the reality of life is uncomfortable but it is essential to see the truth. Samik Bandopadhyaya in his 'Introduction' to the collected volume to Tendulkar's plays admits that Tendulkar adopts "the emerging pattern of violence" (82).

Rama is innocent like a 'deer' and is dedicated to her 'prayers'. Manik, a 'hysterical type' appears in 'disordered clothes' with smoking 'cigarette'. Manik imposes her authority on Rama who was supposed to manage all household activities like a bonded labour. She uses abusive language for her brother. From the very beginning in Manik's manoeuvring two aspects are remarkable—her arrogance and her greed for money.

In Pitale family all the members survive in their distinctive space with their private cruelty without any bonds of personal relationship. Tendulkar admits that it is the passion for money that governs the fate of them. The following desperate confession of Pappa anticipates the future course of events in the play:

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, become a ghost. Sit on your chest! I won't let you enjoy a rupee of it. I earned it all. Now these wolves, these bullies ...(209).

It is not only hostility between father and son, but also a conflict between the power of money and the power love. Tendulkar presents a sharp contrast between the two—Ramakant and his wife Rama. This apparent contradiction between the natures of the two, besides bringing an expression of male and female binary existing in personal relationship, works as a dramatic device to enhance the effect of the situation. Ramakant is even contemptuous towards his mother and considers his parents as “a bloody burden to the earth”. Amid this irritation, his act of snatching toast out of Pappa's hand further signifies his indiscipline and shameless behaviour. There is no filial affinity existing between Pappa and Ramakant and all their affinities are expressed only in terms of the calculation and transactions of money and property matters. Contempt, greed and revengefulness are the key note of Ramakant's character. Instead of having a realization of his weakness, he shamelessly condemns his father for his misdoings, “Pappa, Pappa. As the seed, so the tree. Did we ever ask to be produced?”(21). He does not tolerate the interference of his father in his personal matters. From Ramakant, Tendulkar shifts to Umakant who is ‘flabby’ and ‘shapeless’ with a comic and mournful appearance. From father and son, the attention shifts to sister

and brother relationship. Ramakant makes use of derogatory comments for the beauty and character of his sister Manik. Rama's use of courteous expression 'Bhaiya your breakfast' seems ridiculous in contrast of the contempt, competition and cruelty existing in the mind of two brothers. Like his elder brother, Umakant also does not acknowledge the presence of his father. The social irony is intense and poignant in the play *The Vultures*. The Scene II of the play *The Vultures* is an elaborate exposition of the individual nature of each character with an emphasis on the 'cruelty' and 'absurdity' existing in their nature. In the Scene III there is a late night episode where Pappa, Umakant and Ramakant are with all the stuff of drinks around them. Tendulkar highlights the basic-crime Pappa committed fifteen years ago swindling the entire business and pushing his brother Sakharam out. The crime is recalled dramatically introducing the corpse like drunken Sakharam lying on the sofa, and the comments made by the characters.

RAMAKANT: Bosh! (*Tries shaking the body.*) He's had it ! Look at this...abs'lute corpse! (*Laughs*) Uncle Sakharam's corpse. (*Laughs*) To bloody death! Damn bore! Drunk t'death! (*Staggers over Uncle's body and stands by it.*) Long live Uncle!...

UMAKANT: How'd Uncle... get here, Ramya? Pappa cut his-er-throat! Pushed him out'f business! Ruined'm! Turned'm out of house, Fifteen years ago (217-18).

The discussion additionally uncovers how Sakharam had wanted to assume control over the business which Pappa discovered and cheated in kind. Both were equivalent swindlers kept on being passed on to Pappa's three children. They are altogether vexed that the uncle has come to

remain in the house. In Scene IV Rama gives early morning tea to Rajaninath in the garage. The dramatist depicts their hidden intimacy and relationship in contrast to the five vultures. Their secret relationship is the only human element in the play which is one of brutal familial discord and destruction by avarice. Scene V shifts to drinking time where the family circle has come to enjoy after having driven out Sakharam, their common enemy. As they make Pappa drink more liquor, he shows his joy almost caressing Ramakant: “ It was bloody fun today... Sakharam’s gone. Gone for good...Ramya my child... you worked wonders...One needs cleverness. Like yours. Bravo!” (225). Pappa was overjoyed having sent away his brother empty handed.

His children, like vultures, continue to hover around him, expecting their shares of the remaining wealth of the old man. As they are all drunk, they huddle around Pappa, who in his drunkenness suspects them trying to murder him. He threatens to become a ghost and haunt them day and night. He refuses to give the little money left to them. They keep harassing him to confess in which bank he has his account. Finally he confesses under duress that he has rupees seven thousand. He begs for his life, but refuses to transfer the account. But they keep forcing him to sign a cheque. He bleeds in the ensuing scuffle and keeps calling Rama to save him, “They’re killing me, they’re killing me! Bahu!” (231). In Arundhati Banerjee’s view:

The beating up of the father by his own sons, the two brother's forcible abortion of their sister’s child, the mutual hatred among the members of family underline the fundamental evil inherent in human nature.(77)

Ramakant, Limakant, Manik, and their father represent wickedness, whereas Rama and Rajaninath represent love and tenderness. Through the character of Rama, the playwright creates a naturally kind, tender-hearted and good-natured individual.

As the scene fades out to open Scene VI, Rajaninath makes his comment on the development of the story ending Pappa's life .

This is the story of the venerable

Father-culture's hallowed end.

...

The oldest vulture,

That stubborn ghost

With death in his desires.

Hiding his ugly maw,

Trailing a wing,

Departed from the hollow of a tree

Where he lived

Drawing tracks of hopelessness

Upon the dust,

With the dragging

Of his corpselike,

Hideous,

Dangling limbs (232).

Rajaninath further comments on Pappa's meaningless tears that never dry, unlike human tears.

And his vulture-children continue to torment the innocent victim Rama, escalating her sufferings.

Act II brings together the three children further plotting to overthrow each other in the course of their card game. The episode reaches the climax with Manik screaming and crawling down the stairs, one leg in plaster, as Pappa keeps laughing at the turn of events.

In Act II, scene IV, Rama informs her husband about her pregnancy. A delighted Ramakant advises to take all precautions to nurse the foetus growing within her. Ramakant tells her his difficulties in running the business. However, when Rama suggests him to give it up and take a job instead, he fumes and tells her to keep off from the world of men.

In scene V the two brothers hatch their conspiracy to divide Manik's share between them. But their bargaining leads them to a bitter quarrel. Both want take possession of the house. Umakant strikes discord by revealing the secret love relationship between Rama and their bastard brother. "Call the brat your own, go on! Put him on your head! Lick his piss! Let that smart-arse have fun. You be the bloody father. Bloody fool. Not a paisa's worth of sense. Bloody dupe!... Bringing shame on all of us!" (255). The revelation disrupts the relationship between the couple, and it eats into the psyche of Ramakant, who indulges in more and more drinks.

Meanwhile a new twist enters the when Pappa visits Rajaninath to cooperate with him to spoil the plans of his other children.

PAPPA: I'm telling you. So you're my true son. You stayed in this garage, rotting away like a beggar...I can't endure this, Rajani. Nor would you. This must be changed...By us... I have made a new will...In this will, I've divided the whole estate between you and Manik. So you file a suit. Say the will's genuine. Say the deed of division of the property was got by threats. I'm there to back you up. I'll say it in the court. Get it all changed! Teach those pimps a lesson...Don't say no... You're my only true son (259-60).

But Rajaninath shows his disgust towards his father and tells his to get out of his sight. In the meantime, Rama is heard screaming, since Manik has done some superstitious ritual, casting spell to abort her foetus. She is heard muttering, "I've done it... I've done as I planned... I cut the lemon... I rubbed the ash. Seven times, on my loins and stomach! It's going to abort – sister-in-law's baby's going to abort – Ramya's brat's going to abort – it won't live. It won't live!" (260).

Scene VII is a soliloquy of Ramakant in an intoxicated mood cursing his brother determined to take possession of the house. He curses his wife having his step-brother's kiddie. He moans in anguish: "I'm a useless fellow, brother. Absolutely bloody good-for-nothing. Futile. A bloody bitch. Son of a swine! I – I let my wife ... go... go..." (263). He is driven mad and runs around singing and dancing and uttering that he would abort his enemy's bloody son. As he raves in his fury, the rain continues to rage as if in consonance with his wrecked mental condition.

The scene fades out to the screeching of a single vulture as the human vulture in Ramakant has to surrender to his own evil design. The play ends with the final scene with a poetic summing up of the events like an epilogue by Rajaninath: "The tale of the five vultures/ Had this end./ The

story of men accursed” (265). He speaks of their lives as utter failures with no hope as they burn in the burning ghat “Where the sinful soul/ Burns off its being” (265). They have no escape from their misery like the growing howling wind.

To a certain extent, *The Vultures* may be compared to Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* which presents a satire on greed in society, built on Machiavellian principle. It is a disease which is the cause of all evils. Vijay Tendulkar in the creation of *The- Vultures* has poured out the best of his creative imagination to extract the inner-most cruelty existing within the collective unconscious of all individuals. To define it as a play of domestic violence is to avoid the real message integrated in the text. The play *The Vulture* has a complex structure with the intricacy of diverse issues that are prevailing at the core of this universe. It is a dramatic representation of the complex social issues like the collapse of the value system, the triumph of sexual sadism, disintegration of the institution of family, menace of mercenary drugs and the prominence of crime and violence. The cumulative influence of these creeping elements is producing a generation of blood thirsty individuals expressed in the brutality of Manik, Ramakant, Umakant and Pappa. Tendulkar’s *The Vulture* is a threat to the entire civilization where man is alienated from society, family, relationship, professional commitments and worst of all, with his own inner self.

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