



Tendulkar's *The Vultures (Gidhade)*: Reflection of Greed and Selfishness

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most influential playwrights writing in Marathi Particularly. His plays have been rendered into English by Priya Adarkar and Samik Bandopadhyay. He received several national and international awards including padma Bhushan, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Filmfare and Saraswati Samman. His plays have variety and deal with various burning issues of the then society which are prevalent in the modern era. His women characters are bold, revolutionary and submissive as well. They represent the modern women raising voice against injustice done towards them.

Key Words: Vultures, harmony, selfishness, greed, lust,

I. INTRODUCTION

The Vultures (Gidhade) by Vijay Tendulkar is very important play which deals with social aspect of woman. The title of the play itself is symbolic and suggests the dirty attitude of different people working in different areas. Today also, we see around us the vultures in society and politics that are destroying the communal harmony of the nation. The following four lines show the impact of vultures in the society:

^^ nwj mMkyh dcqrjs uHkkrwu
loZ= fx/kkMkaps jkT; ektys vkgs-
;sFks nwtZu xktforks lÜkk dkj.k]
;sFkhy lTtu Hk;xzLr vkgs-**

The *Vultures* is chronologically next play and, is published after *Mukabla*. It was actually written fourteen years before. The entirely different nature of the work puts before us varied range of creative talent of Tendulkar, the dramatist. After the first production of the play, Girish Karnad, himself a dramatist, opined- "The staging *Gidhade* could be compared to the blasting of a bomb in an otherwise complacent marketplace. It was with the production and publication of *Gidhade* that Tendulkar's name became associated with sensationalism, sex and violence. There ensued a long war with the censors who condemned the play as obscene and in bad taste". Karnad's opinion, though an outspoken one seems to be beyond disagreement. The play depicts the gross-sensuality of Manik and Rama, Ramakant's wife. Conservative section of Maharashtrian society was stunned by the open display of illicit sexual relations and scenes of violence that constituted the plot of the drama. Today, twenty years later, it is possible to judge the play with objectivity. The play is a

ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies such as violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness. It does not have the redeeming humour of *Shantata*. It is intensely morbid in the portrayal of women and action. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, reveals Virmati's secondary position in the male dominated society and deals with her problems with insight and authenticity. Hers is a complex character to be studied as her suffering raises some issues of modern women and their problems like Manik and Rama who are torn between families.

The degeneration of human individuals belonging to a middle class milieu is exhibited through the interaction among the members of a family. Ramakant and Umakant, the real vultures, their greed, viciousness, their sister Manik's sensuality all jointly result in depiction of the baser aspects of human existence. In fact, a spectator in the auditorium staging this scene, would like to close his eyes instead of witnessing the brutality personified. The play gained popularity with this theme that it was staged all over India in different versions. The horizons of Marathi drama widened considerably and this started a healthy exchange of drama in different languages. The father, Mr. Pitale is mercilessly beaten up by his own children. They also force Manik to make abortion, the mutual hatred among the family. In the character of Rama, Tendulkar seems to have created a sensitive, naturally kind and good hearted individual. She is like a helpless, submissive, tender little bird among the vultures. Her illicit relationship with her half-brother-in-law, Rajaninath, who is a bastard and an outcaste from the family, may raise a few conservative eyebrows and evoke questions of morality, but one has to admit that it is the single genuine and humane relationship in the context of the whole play. In the opinion of N. S. Dharan, the evil, horrifying and abhorring scene brings to our mind John Webster's revenge tragedy of horror "*The Duchess of Malfi*", 'which envisages evil in its most extreme form in the character of Duchess. Similarities in both of these plays are stressed by their fiendish characters and lurid imagery. The virtuous characters here undergo incessant sufferings. In fact, Tendulkar does admit that *Gidhade* was born out of a personal crisis in his life, that it poured out of him within the short span of four days and he himself was shocked that he could give expression to so much violence and low status of women. It was, one must say, a cathartic process in the life of a creative writer. Soon after *Gidhade*, he commented that he did not think he could write such a play, wrought with violence and sex but he ventured.

The very intension of the playwright to produce this drama was to expose the vulturine nature of Ramakant and Umakant which was the burning issue at the time of Tendulkar. The same tendency does exist today and, given in the present societal condition, would continue to exist. They both now plot against their father as well as the Raja of Hondur, who has illicit love affair with Manik. The Raja impregnates Manik. As Cardinal and Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Ramakant and Umakant want to blackmail their father and the Raja to extract money. Later on, they are frustrated to know that the Raja died of heart-attack. Therefore, they abort the unborn baby by kicking the womb of Manik as Duchess is tortured and aborted by her selfish brothers. Rama's disappointment at her childlessness has been poignantly divulged in her soliloquy in Act II, Scene II. Her tormented life in the house of "vultures" is -"Every day, a new death. Every minute a thousand million deaths. A pain like a million needles stuck in your heart". (Tendulkar, Vijay 'Vultures', P-240) The same melancholic note runs in *The Duchess of Malfi* when the Duchess says: "It seems she was born first; you have bloodily approved the ancient truth that kindred commonly do worse agree, than remote strangers."

Meaning is very clear that it seems that she was born first. By shedding the blood of your sister, you have proved the old saying that blood relations quarrel among themselves more bitterly than remote strangers. The same thought is given in *Macbeth* also "The near in blood, the nearer bloody". (Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, P-60) Ramakant and Umakant are always on Manik's way like a spy to bring her secret illicit love in the

limelight. The opinion of Ferdinand in *Duchess of Malfi* is very relevant in that sense. He says “You may think that a secret marriage is the best course to be taken, but it is not so. A crab thinks that it is going forward but actually it goes backward. Similarly such secret marriages are not celebrated, they are executed. They lead to misery and death instead of happiness.” (Webster, John ‘The Duchess of Malfi’, P- 116)

Women are oppressed and exploited more than men in our society as it remains culturally patriarchal in spite of democracy. Women bear and bring up children; do all the house work and some of them do jobs additionally. Yet they are considered a debit to the family and are given shameful, inhuman and secondary treatment. For various reasons, they are ill-treated by their husbands and in-laws. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar points out in this connection, “A woman under the laws of Manu is subject to corporal punishment and Manu allows the husband the right to beat his wife.” (Manchi, Sarat Babu, Indian Drama Today Prestige, P- 32) Indian society which has accepted the laws of Manu denies women their birthright to education and consequently their all-round progress. He says “Women have no right to study the Vedas.” (ibid, p-33) But the scenario is changed to a large extent and in modern India women are allowed to study so that they may become sophisticated slaves like Benare, Kamala, Sarita, Manik and Rama etc. M. K. Mishra, a critic of Mahesh Dattani remarks, “Dattani reflects on the predicament and plight of Indian Women in the past and contrasts their position in the present scenario”. *Tara* by Dattani reveals the plight of woman of traditional attitude to their passive resignation to patriarchal dominance and their adherence to tradition and old value. Tara is a victim of social prejudices and animosity against women. The position of women in Indian society has been jeopardized to clash of traditions, concepts of value and sexual bent of mind. Again Dattani’s *Where There is Will* throws light on the character of Hasmukh who thinks his wife, Sonal as an object of sexual gratification only.

Having sexually oppressed, the women are reflected in the concept of chastity, a patriarchal value. It is one of the most powerful yet invisible cultural fetters that have enslaved women for ages. There has been enough literature, both oral and written, glorifying this enslaving value and deifying the women characters who observed it faithfully. Even Sita in the Ramayana undergoes the fire ordeal to prove her chastity to Rama who has been the cultural guide to India for more than two thousand years. The question is ‘If men can have extra-marital relations then why not women?’ Like *Vultures*, Badal sircar’s *Stale News* relates the social status of woman regarding inequality, oppression and exploitation which have not changed even a little till today. For this, he narrates the Santhal Revolt that took place more than a century ago when the British were ruling India. And he juxtaposes the gross atrocities of oppression and exploitation of colonial India and those of post colonial India. *Gidhade* portrays the unmitigated violence arising from drunkenness, greed and immorality. Furthermore, it is a play built on contrasting situations. On the one hand, there is gruesome portrayal of man’s greed and on the other; there is a portrayal of tender-love. We know that when the agents of these opposing qualities meet, a conflict of great dramatic significance results. In fact, Vijay Tendulkar, in this play, displays a rare genius of mixing the absurd-as evident in the cruel and curious relationship. The play, on the whole, does not offer any relief to the reader-audience. The ferocity, ruthlessness, avarice and cunningness of the vulture are inherent in all the members of Pappa’s family. As one turns over the pages one cannot but feel shocked at the way they behave towards one another.

So far as Shakespeare’s plays are concerned, the tragic hero is responsible for his doom. But in *The Vultures*, the characters are originally bad without having a single good quality. Yet, we feel sympathy for them rather than terrors as all these characters appear to be the victims of their own wickedness. In their unceasing efforts to inflict miseries on others, they make their lives more miserable as evil thoughts come home to roost. When the agents of those opposing qualities meet, a conflict of great dramatic significance results. Benare, Rama, Laxmi,

Champa, Jyoti are the characters of Vijay Tendulkar who sail in the same boat becoming the objects of lust and violence. Vijay Tendulkar's plays are modelled on Jean Genet and Artaud which also project the issues of sex, cruelty and violence. Edward Bond's *Saved* reveals the tragedy of stoning of the baby in a perambulator by a hostile crowd of teenage hooligans. Such plays lay bare the unbridled violence of the human spirit let loose in murky dehumanized environment as to view extreme cruelty with almost total apathy.

Thus, *The Vultures* is, indeed, the most violent of Tendulkar's plays. It is replete with violent imagery, immorality, consisting of blood, eeriness and mad raving. Vijay Tendulkar invests his female characters with a resoluteness of heart and spirit, so unlike the wishy-washy women who had become the rule in middle class drama. In an interview about *Vultures*, Dr. Lagoo says, "It mercilessly exposed the ravaging beast that lay waiting in every human being. There was no question of the play pandering to the audience's sensitivities. On the contrary, its aim was to hit the audience where it hurt most." *The Vultures* by Vijay Tendulkar is a play of sexual exploitation and violence which exposes the evil tendencies inherent in human psyche that render people blind and transform them from human beings into loathsome animals. The play is intensely morbid in the portrayal of its characters and action. It, indeed, throws lights on the society's greed, violence, selfishness, sensuality and wickedness inherent in men since ages. Except Rama and Rajaninath, almost all the characters of the play are leading a kind of life that is comparable to that of vultures only. They inherit the mean and baser qualities from their father who deceives his own brother in business and becomes affluent. As "ill got, ill spent", the sons and the daughter imitate and follow the track of their father. Consequently, they all belong to a flock of vultures. Like their father, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik are always involved in cheating others and extract as much money as they can. Even to get the share of their father's property, they are ready to seek each other's lives. Each one is doubtful of the other and, in the course of time, loses the real treasure of life, that is, peace of mind. The greedy fellows Ramakant and Umakant beat their father when he denies giving them information about his secret account in a bank. When they could not get money from their sister's lover, the Raja of Hondur, they conspire to abort her child in anguish by beating her inhumanly. This violent scene resembles John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, where Bosola is kicked in her womb to get abortion by her selfish brothers. However, Manik successfully tries to abort the babe in the womb of her sister-in-law to avenge the wrong done to her by brothers. The entire actions of characters i. e. the beating up of Hari Pitale by his sons, the forced abortions of Manik's and Rama's by Ramakant and Umakant and by Manik, respectively, the hatred that family members have for each other underline the fundamental evil inherent in human psyche.

II. REFERENCES

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