

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.1., 2018 (Jan-Mar)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *THE VULTURES*

I.K.HEMILAA

M.A English Literature, Kongunadu Arts and Science College
Bharathiyar University, Coimbatore
Email: isaacarulraj1965@gmail.com



I.K.HEMILAA

ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is a leading contemporary Indian playwright. He is the author of thirty full length plays, several of which have become classics of modern Indian theatre. The play *The Vultures* (Gidhade) (1971) occupies, among his works, the highest place in the nature of violence and sex. The theme is built on a middle-class milieu, through interactions in a hopelessly divided family. Violence and evil tend to become an end in itself. The scenes of violence, the illegitimate sexual relations, and the abusive language shock the sensibility of the conventional audience. Ramakant and Umakant greed and viciousness, their father's degenerate nature, their sister Manik's gross sensuality—all add up to a naturalistic depiction of those vulture aspects of human character. The beating up of the father by his own children, the two brothers' forcible abortion of their sister's child, shows the fundamental evil inherent in human character. Never has such violence been depicted nor experienced before in the Indian theatre.

Keyword: Vultures, Domestic, Violence, Exploitation, Torture, Psychological

INTRODUCTION

The Contemporary tradition of urban realist predominately domestic drama appears in several influential plays of Vijay Tendulkar which forms a significant dramatic genre. In fact, by virtue of the urban settings, and the preoccupation with Contemporary middle class life, the dramatists like Vijay tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar set their realistic works in the middle-class milieu in the realistic naturalistic mode. Shifted in the private space of middle-class urban home, Tendulkar's *The vultures*, 1970 (originally "Gidhade" in Marathi) also sets into the group of realistic naturalistic play.

The Vultures tendulkar stresses the importance of a range of individualistic representations drawing an idea of violence, greed, lust and spiritual and cultural decadence. He seems to be conforming to the Marxian theory that the economic aspect of society is the ultimate determinant of other aspects. Marx further argues that what we call 'culture' is not an independent reality but it is inseparable from the historical conditions in which human beings create their material lives. The relation of exploitation and domination which govern the social and economic order of a particular phase of human history will in some sense 'determine' the whole cultural life of the society.

The vulture enacts all these devilish and satanic qualities and crudities existing among the members of the family of Hari Pitale. Hari Pitale deceives his own brother Sakharam in business to satisfy his draconian greed for money. Initially they had jointly started a firm "The Hari Sakharam company" but when the

business flourished, Hari Pitale, a cunning brother grabbed all the joint property in such a clever way that Sakharam failed even in the court of law. He turned sakharam out of house and he was rendered penniless. Ramakant and Umakant try to locate the centrality of betrayal Motif in a drunken state and reveal how Hari Pitale and shakharam were traitors each with a difference of degree. Umakant considers that their Pappa is a worse scoundrel than their uncle.

The foundation of edifice of Hari Pitale is corrupt and deceitful. Obviously the house has to collapse and it collapses terribly. All his means of grabbing property have been foul and disgraceful. His unbound greed for money creates a complex moral and spiritual emptiness among his sons and daughter. His sons Ramakant, Umakant and his daughter Manik also inherit the culture to cut-throat and loveless materialism and individualism. Justifying tendulkar title of the play, they all form a family of vulture .these vulture in habit the "interior of abuse a house that reminds you of the hollow of a tree". It is the same interior of the house that remains the scene of never-ending and grotesque confrontations between Pappa and his three adult Vultures. The flood of hatred has engulfed everyone. Ramakant and Umakant hate each other and they both hate their only sister Manik. And the three hate their father. They all prefer money to a man.

Among the pack of wolves and vultures, these lives a 'cuckoo' like Rama, wife of Ramakant who finds temporary solace in an illicit relationship with her half- brother-in-law Rajaninath is a man of poetic sensibility and like a chorus, he comments on the characters and incidents through his poems. Rather the play, the Vulture begins with "light in the garage" and Rajaninath is sitting writing a poem, evoking a deep sense of pity and pathos.

The barren beast is the issueless Rama and the leper is Rajaninath the illegitimate son of a mangy dog (Pappa Pitale). Rama has been a true companion to him all along as both of them are failures in life as well as the neglected lots there in the family. Both of them are a doomed lot on the road to hell. For them their future is lost and they cannot hope to redeem it. Death alone will bring them the much needed relief.

Rajaninath deftly manipulates the animal imagery sometimes metaphorically presenting the disgusting 'mangy dog' for his lewd father Pappa Pitale and then 'an innocent doe untouched'. As loving as the earth for the docile Rama. But unfortunately her home is 'not a home, but a hole in a tree/ where vultures lived/ a haunted burning-ground/ surrounded by evil ghosts". Rajaninath is rendered into a mute Spectator helpless and hopeless. He observes Rama's tortured life like "a living corpse, a watchful stone, like a worm for twenty two long years" and let all her hopes, her expectations being "scorched and uprooted where they grew". Throughout the play, the condition of victimization prevails upon all the inhabitants of home who are trapped by cultural constraints and economic circumstances into an impossible coexistence. Consequently all sorts of treacherous, corrupt and deceitful ways coupled with frequent verbal and physical violence stem equally from the old father and his three children, while Rama and Rajaninath with their unprotesting moral selves fail to assert themselves. Living in an air of complete disbelief, all the family members except Rama and Rajaninath, ever ready to cheat one another to get a large share of their father's property. These prevails an acute crisis of Perfect love, duty, obedience and respect between the two brothers, sister, father and children their snowballing fury and frustration all into the share of poor and docile Rama.

Deviating from the prescribed norms of cultured language, the play beings with the words "ungrateful bastards" abusing a manhandling the poor and innocent family gardener jagannath by Ramakant early in the morning. And then the whole play is littered with such abusive and abrupt insulting terms as part and parcel of day to day language. The father and the children are drunkards and they smoke and bandy vulgar abuses among themselves. The daughter Manik is a slut of a woman having illicit affairs with the men of the town and consumes contraceptive pills to prevent her pregnancy.

The relationship between brother and sister is simply discussing. Manik, the Paranoid sister, sarcastically remark think its human beings that live here? For her, brother Ramakant is the swine and the hypocrite and brother Umakant is that miser that lick penny: bloody ruffian. She complains of insecurity in the house to her sister- in-law Rama. She is afraid of keeping the door of her room open for she is afraid that her brothers will kill her to appropriate her share of their father's property. She also tells Rama that she survived death from the hands of her brothers while she was laid up with typhoid by her alertness. Quite

painfully manik tells Rama: but who wants a sister around here? Since the division your husband even charges me bored and lodging!

Nothing can be more indecent that this when Umakant threatens his sister Manik to break down the bathroom door inside which she is bathing. However, when she comes out furious and taunts her brother; he strips her off the bath towel around her shoulders and leaves her exposed with her blouse and petticoat. Later he hits her on her buttocks and challenges: you... a woman? And asks her what proof there is for calling her woman .we can never even dream of such obscene remarks full of sexual overtones from a brother to his sister in our wildest imagination especially in Indian context.

When the two brothers and manik play a game of cards, Umakant violently demands of manik to shell down her dues to him in the game calling her as "light- skirt". These are many more obscene remarks smell of incest as well. So much of Perversion, barbarity and crudity make their horrid eruptions from the foul mouths of the character of the play. It is truly hellish and appears to be case of psychological malady. Their law language accompanied by verbal and physical violence reveals their mental rot borne out of their frustration and inability to find their own identities in their wild goose chase of dross materialism combined by murderous and deceitful means to achieve it.

To cap it all, after burning their share of money in seeking pleasure in liquor and gambling, Ramakant and Umakant decide to blackmail the raja of Hondur by demanding twenty- five thousand rupees from him for having illicit affair with their sister manik and making her pregnant: "otherwise bloody publicity! Uproar in bloody newspaper". To prevent manik from informing her lover about their foul plot, they go to the extent of breaking her leg. However the moment they learn about the sudden death of the raja because of a heart attack, their extreme frustration drives them towards a diabolic act. They decided to abort the raja's brat in their sister Manik's womb by kicking her belly of manik and sent raja's brat off the air. The task is assigned to Ramakant as he is an expert at football and he finishes it as decided. Poor manik with her leg broken and plastered and with her white sari stained with blood comes down limping from the staircase making an agonized cry. As she leaves the house in agony and despair, he father Pappa Pitale watches her with devilish laughter.

Such gruesome spectacles are dreadfully ironic but as the play progresses one barbaric act of violence is followed by another with still greater venom and vehemence. The ruthless retaliation of manik has been horribly presented as she rubs the mixture of lemon and ash on her belly seven times and tries to abort the child by resorting to black magic. After taking revenge, she erupts with a devilish glee reminding us of the frenzied maenad of bacchius. "I've done it. I've done as I planned. Ramaya's brat is going to abort it won't live". The gradual collapse of the family is led towards a definite crisis because of the extreme antagonism felt by the two sons towards their Pappa and that of Pappa towards them. Brought up under the aura of betrayal and deception, Ramakant and Umakant do not have any modicum of respect towards their Pappa. They are abusive words like "crafty old swindler, scoundrel, rascal" for their father. Once Ramakant raises a flower vase to hit him and later joining with Umakant and manik, he trips his father down and makes him suffer a bleeding injury to extract his secret store of money in a bank without their knowledge. In utter despair Pappa regrets 'my stupidity yes to produce bastards like you. Ramakant retorts to him saying "as the tree, so the seed". We have again the crude comment of Umakant about his father that "A mangy dog would have made a better father" gives a clue to their tainted relationship. The father curses his utterly disgusted with their conduct. "i will see your pyres burning, you pimps!" he further abuses them in disgust giving a clue to their base nature when they recklessly talk about his death while he is very much kicking and alive.

If i die, it we'll be a release! They're all waiting for it. But I'm your own
 Father, after all! If i die, I'll become a ghost. I'll sit on your chest! I won't
 Let you enjoy a rupee of it. I earned it all. Now these wolves, these
 Bullies! (209)

The theatrical effect has been excellently built by the recurrent screeching sound of the vultures. Against the background of the harsh screeching Vultures, Ramakant, Umakant and manik plan to kill their father when they realise that he still has some hidden funds. First they flatter him by hosting him a drinking party and then start manhandling him asking for the money hidden in the bank so far. They demand him to

write a cheque or else lose his life. Gripped with fear and pain caused by his head injury he prays to them pathetically. "Please don't kill me; I am your father, your pimps! Your father". Ultimately he yields and writes a cheque for seven thousand rupees. Ramakant seizes it from his hand and Umakant and manik enjoy their father's embarrassment and suffering and gloat at the success of their plot.

The devilish trio are creatures whose hearts are barren of love and filled with Gall instead of the 'milk of human kindnesses. As he was totally disenchanted with his natural sons, Pappa turns to his illegitimate son, Rajaninath to take revenge on his natural sons Ramakant and Umakant. Like a chameleon, he changes his colour and flatters Rajaninath you are my only true son to me, Rajini. I used to feel such a respect for you. Even when i saw you from far off, my chest uded to swell. Then he promises Rajaninath by making a will in his favour by backdating it. He says that he has divided the whole estate between Rajini and manik. He wants Rajini to file suit against his stepbrothers and he will back him in his court. He wants to teach his degenerate sons a lesson, let them go and beg. Once this is done, he will be happy to leave this world in peace. Rajaninath, detesting the very idea of inheriting the property, mercilessly asks his Pappa to get out. In the last scene of the play, the benevolent Rajaninath reveals his compassion even for the harsh and merciless vultures:

The tale of five vultures had this end.

The story of men accursed.

Or else of vultures cursed

To live their lives as men.

Oh, show them some compassion!

Show a path to them

Hold out of them

A merciful hand

That will bring release. (265)

Judge from the angle of sexual aspect the tender love between Rama and Rajaninath is a clear case of incest but critics have shown uncertain opinions about it. Banerjee in her introduction to the five plays states that it merely an extension of their love which is the only redeeming feature in the morbid and claustrophobic atmosphere of the family. "To me they are cold-blooded Machiavellian, cunning-characters". In Fact Rama calls Rajaninath Bhaiya and Rajaninath knows that she is his sister-in-law. Still they cross the limit and develop incestuous relationship. However, a feminist view and a psychoanalytical analysis see unavoidable. For Rama, living among the horrible vultures devoid of any kind of sympathy are nothing short of a living death.

She pours out her hither to painful feeling tormenting her heart with indescribable agony in a rare long speech during her second meeting with her brother-in-law Rajaninath.

The mother could have consoled herself in such an adverse situation but unfortunately Rama is childless. She has become tired of "sacred ash, ash of incense" given as blessings to bear "a child by a mystic, a swami an astrologer, a doctor". She also realises that it is not the fault of these holy men and healers but the fault lies squarely on her husband who has been rendered impotent on account of consuming liquor excessively. She pours out the agony of her heart in clear and uncertain terms for she is conscious of her fertile womb and the defect lies with her husband who poisons the seed making her suffer premature abortions. The womb's healthy and sound. I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil is rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root.

The sympathy of a neglected half-brother-in-law suffering from the agony being an illegitimate child ultimately turns into that kind of spontaneous love for poor rama which is most often expected in the given circumstances. He comes as a happy welcome spring shower over the long awaiting dreary desert. This relationship which has been interpreted as a case of adultery verging on merely physical passion by some critics may also be sympathetically viewed as a natural outcome. The arid zone becomes wet as Rajaninath makes her conceive.

Rama tells Ramakant about her pregnancy but hides the role of Rajaninath in It.ramakant becomes very happy. He hopes that their child will usher in luck to them. He starts dreaming about a life in style, he

hopes to groom their son properly educated and equipped and succeed him to become the managing director of Hari Sakharam Company. The top ranking construction firm in India! Ramakant ask his brother Umakant to leave the house as he is unmarried. However Rama pleads with her husband to leave that “over powering house” and “go far away” as “no one at all can live happily here”. Ramakant blinded by stupid egoism and male chauvinism fails to understand the wisdom of his wife’s advice. Rejecting her humble request, he boasts of his superior wisdom and capacity to manage his affairs without the advice of a woman. Lastly, Ramakant’s dreams are shattered, like an egg-shell when his brother Umakant tells him that the child in the womb of his wife Rama is not his but “it’s that bastard rajaninath’s. It’s your half-brother, that son of a whore!” this sudden disclosure enrages Ramakant so much that he vows to abort the son of a swine in his wife’s womb and madly rushes towards her.

The vultures, tendulkar show how each character is responsible for the breakdown of the joint family system. In this postcolonial perspective, the age-old concept of home is fast collapsing. The home is turning into several houses and houses into a number of scattered flats and flats carry the burden still fragmented, alienated souls of those materialistic machines whose minds are badly occupied with an unending fierce competitiveness and power games. We have also witnessed a volcanic eruption of violence that lies normally dormant in each of us. It comes to the surface level and beyond only when we are trapped in the cobweb of the postcolonial tendencies of fragmentation, frustration and aggression. The characters in vultures are all vulnerable to this decease and Tendulkar successfully defined the dreadful deformities that form our culture.

Rama in the play the vultures become miserable for being the daughter-in-law of a degraded family having people with vulture like tendencies. It is through her character that Tendulkar intends to show that, virtue if associated with vice, also suffers. Her long lecture to her half-brother-in-law Rajaninath reveals the torture that she has been undergoing in the house of her father-in-law Hari Pitale on account of her husband’s drunken love-making unable to nurture the seeds in her womb because they are poisoned. She has been made to visit holy men, astrologers, doctors and so on day in day out for the past twenty years ago by her husband so that she will convince a child. She is conscious of her fertile womb which thirsts for nourishing seeds. She longs to have a child which is the birthright of any born woman.

It is a boon given even to a whore. She experiences life-in-death and every day she says that she dies million deaths on account of the torture of her husband. She is tired of her husband’s unethical and murderous dealings both in his professional and personal lives. She advises him to mend his ways by starting a fresh by quitting that horrible house which she is afraid will devour her. She requests him to listen to her only once that time only. After that she will remain with her ‘head bent’ and ‘mouth shut’ as she has been used to all these days. Ramakant’s male ego does not allow him To take her sensible advice.

He chides her not to be over smart and try to teach him. No one in his family has ever been hen pecked as to advise by his wife. Rama is got in the cross-fire if male egoism and female vengefulness. She becomes a victim to both and loses her child in the womb owing to the machinations of her sister-in-law manik. In addition to the man’s atrocities against women, they also suffer from female viciousness, jealousy and rivalry.

Tendulkar and Dattani see women primarily as exploited and marginalized subjects but the commonalty ends there. Tendulkar’s plays fall into two broad groups. The political satires and allegories and the social plays. The disturbing fact about Tendulkar’s treatment of women particularly in the latter group is the world view that gets projected. Very often one gets the impression that the driving force is sensationalism and not social commitment. Sakharam binder’s gross physicality and aggression may be inevitable in a repressed conservative society, but how does one explain the verbal and physical violence that gets projected in the vultures. Two brothers maim their sister manik in order to blackmail her lover and when that fails, perpetrate more violence on her, Manik’s scream and her coming down the stairs, half-crawling, one leg in plaster, her white saree covered with blood is perhaps one of the most ‘repulsive’ scenes in indian theatre. Consciously or unconsciously they reinforce the power of patriarchy.

Pappa, manik and Umakant, one by one are turned out of the house. They are all victims of their own evil designs.ramakant become a pauper in the end. Pappa wants to make one final effort to regain his

wealth. He had never accepted the responsibility of Rajaninath all his life but he seeks out his help so that he can avenge his venomous sons and get back his property through a law suit. He offers to write out a fresh will in favour of Rajaninath and manik and make him argue in the court that the will was signed by his Father under duress in the early age. He tells Rajaninath that how they support him in the court of law. But Rajaninath, however, refuses to have anything to do with this and so it fails. Thus the house of Hari Pitale collapses owing to the wickedness and murderous deceit coupled with violence by Pappa, Ramakant, and Umakant and manik. As they saw, so they reap.

Conclusion

To sum up, the plays of Tendulkar explore effectively the themes of love, sex, sensuality, lust for power, violence, man woman relationship, matrimonial relationship, human relationship, and exploitation and oppression of women in the society. Vijay Tendulkar's plays, not only revolutionized the regional theatre but they have also opened fresh vistas for experimentation in Indian English Drama through the translated versions. He shows the position of women in contemporary Indian society through his woman characters. In this play, he depicts women as loyal, docile, hardworking, and tender hearted. He deals with the existence of human being, human mind, human psychology and human relationship through his plays. The issues of violence, sex, illicit human relationships, power, stability in the society and social issues point out in all his plays in English translation. In this context, C.Coelho rightly points out: "In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egotistical man and equally self- centred society. He liberated Marathi stage from the tyranny of conventional theatre with its mild doses of social and political satire for purpose of pure entertainment."(34)

Work Cited

- Madge.V.M. *An Anthology of recent criticism*. New Delhi: D.K.fine arts press, 2007.print.
- Tendulkar, Vijay. *Gashiram Kotwal*. Trans. Jayant Karveand Eleanor Zelliot. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986.print.
- Coelho, C. *The cult of violence and Cruelty in Modern Theatre: A Study to Athol Fugard and Vijay Tendulkar: Indian Literature Today*. Ed. R. K. Dhawan. Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994, Vol. I.
- Tendulkar, Vijay. *Collected Plays in Translation. The Vultures*. Translated by Priya Adarkar. New Delhi: OUP, 2003.print.
- Sonalkar, sudhir. "*Vijay Tendulkar and metaphor of violence*", the illustrated weekly, 20 Nov, 1983. Print.