

Vijay Tendulkar: A Champion of Protest and Social Justice

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Abstract – Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is the master of ‘The Theatre of Cruelty’ in the Marathi Theatre and also known as ‘the Champion of Social Justice.’ He is one the earliest playwrights of Indian languages who has transformed the regional theatre into national theatre. Like Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sarkar in Bangoli language, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi Language, transformed the traditional Marathi theatre into modern naturalistic theatre and adopted certain trends of western drama in his plays. After the independence of India, Tendulkar is one of the leading figures of the theatre of protest in Marathi Language. His plays deal with the problems of Indian society. He uses the stage for the reformation in the attitude of the people. Women who have been given the secondary status in the society from the beginning of the civilization always remain in the centre of his play. Most of his plays are centered on problems of middle class society particularly women, downtrodden. He depicts the scenes and situations happening in the social and cultural life of India.

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The issues of gender inequality, self-alienation, social inequality, sex and violence are prominent themes of his plays. He raises his voice against the orthodox Indian society which is divided on the basis of caste creed and social status, where the weak and subaltern are neglected and forced to pass their life in misery. But the way Tendulkar provides the situation in his plays shows that he is not an escapist. His plays are,

“Engaged with the presentation of the problems of social inequality, the anguish and the disillusionment of the modern life, and the place of the individual in the society that is becoming hostile increasingly to the individual aspirations.” (Kanwar 12)

His plays are centered in the middle class society. Tendulkar gives the real picture of Indian society without the layer of imagination as most of his plays are based on the real life incidents. As Shailaja B. Wadikar in the book *Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright* critically observed:

“A remarkable feature of Tendulkar’s plays is that they give us not an idealized but an actual portrayal of life with all its baser aspects that are an integral part of nature.” (25)

In the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar deals with the problem of unmarried motherhood and shows how a woman named Leela Benare, being individual, became the victim of male dominated society though she also protested against her co-actors who expose her private life. Benare is a self-

determining character who fights against the old tradition and customs. She is a school teacher who is very dedicated to her work. She has been praised by children in the school but her affair with Prof. Damle gave a chance to the people of the society to raise the finger on her. She has been dragged to the mock court. They charged her of infanticide, the crime she never thought of. On contrary to that she is trying to save her child from these male vultures who don’t want that her child should survive. Ironically the decision of court is opposite to that. Kashikar says, “Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.” (119) Here Tendulkar also attacks on corrupt judicial system and highlight the crisis the human values in Indian Society

In *Ghashiram Kotwal* he deals with the issues of women in the game of power and politics. How women are bartered and used as an instrument to win the game of the power politics. Gauri who is the daughter of Ghashiram has been barter by him to get the position of Kotwal. She has used by Nana as a sex object. When she became pregnant, she was killed by him. Tendulkar highlights that the women in the game of power politics are used as an object. They are always treated to gain the power and when they became useless they have been thrown out by those. Ghashiram himself becomes the victim of cruelty of the people of Poona and he decided to take revenge from them. When he gets the position of kotwal, he starts to exploit theme. Tendulkar criticizes the violent ways of the powerful people who

won the certain position in the government and treats the people like animals. Politics and power have exploited Ghasiram Kotwal. Women always remain in the receiving end in the game of the power politics. They are used and exploited like Gauri. "Tendulkar embraced political radicalism and courageously exposed political hegemony of the powerful and the hypocrisies of the Indian Social mindset." (27, Devulapally)

His play *Kamala* depicts the condition of women in so called modern and cultural society and in contrast the play also shows the condition of women who belongs schedule and tribal community of Indian. The Two central characters, Sarita and Kamala who are exploited and treated as an object. Kamala was bought from Luhardaga market and used for getting promotion in his professional life while Sarita was treated as a bonded laborer in his house and for social reputation. Tendulkar protested against the flesh trade that was prevailing in India. Apart from that he also gives a glimpse of true journalism. Kakasaheb represents the old school of journalism whose purpose is to give the true news; Jaisingh represents modern journalism which runs after the sensational news. Tendulkar criticizes the materialistic form of journalism that has become a business and the reporters are only the sales man. Tendulkar puts a question mark on the role of the media which is known as the fourth pillar of democracy. But now a days the agencies of media are running after TRP. And working for the politicians who want to remain in power. Tendulkar through Kakasaheb represents the true spirit of journalism which is still alive in the journalism of regional languages.

Kanyadaan deals with inter-caste marriage of Jyoti and Arun, a Dalit Poet. Tendulkar shows how a girl became the victim of her father's obsession with idealism and husband's obsession with caste consciousness. Jyoti was inspired by the social works and consciousness of his father and decided to get married with a dalit boy Arun. Arun was obsessed for his caste. Though he got married with Jyoti but he beats her, abuses her. He never took her as his wife but he always thought her as a symbol of upper class and decided to take revenge from her. Jyoti was innocent and she has nothing to do with caste politics but she was crushed in between the caste politics.

In *Sakharam Binder* Tendulkar deals with the problem of those women who were thrown out of their house as they did not gave birth to boy child, as they are childless. On other hand he also deals with the problems of sexual exploitation in their family and outside of their houses. Sakharam is the one who gave shelter to those women but he exploits them sexually. One side he himself declares himself as the protector of the rights of women but on other hand he exploits them.

Encounter in Ubugland is a political allegory as the character represents historical figures but the story represents the political situation of India in the late 60s

and early 70s. It deals with the dangerous game played in the power politics by Princes Vijaya who emerges as a 'New Women.' According to Manchi Sarat Babu, "*Ubugland* intensifies the idea of hypocrisy. Princes Vijaya stands for the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.... The play draws parallels between the rule of Vijaya and that of Indira." (109) The ministers thinks that they can use her as a puppet and they would rule the country but she is very rebellious woman who is capable to control nation's destiny. She adopts the treacherous ways to win over her ministers to gain the position of authority. Prannarayan guides her to win the power game, and teaches her how to suppress her humanity. In this political situation she wins over her enemy ministers who want to guide.

"The playwright very minutely depicts the changes in her character from a self-willed and politically inexperienced princess into an intelligent, victorious ruler.... In her transformation from the princess to a ruler, she learns that hypocrisy leads a politician towards great success and achievement." (Wadikar, 49-50)

Tendulkar portrays the negative and positive aspects of the lost generation that is culturally, morally and mentally crippled. Tendulkar protests against the monarchal system that prevails in Indian democracy. After the death of the king, how all the ministers want to become the king by any means? And in this power game, how the common people and subalterns become the victim of the power tussle among them. Tendulkar also represents how Vijaya tames the dominant and powerful males.

Tendulkar devoted his life to the world of the theatre that helped him to analysis the life and pains of others that gives him the insight and the vision to raise his voice in the support of women and the downtrodden that made him a champion of protest. When we read his plays, most of his plays are centered on the problems of the society particularly the problems of the women. Most of his plays are written in Naturalistic tone. "Tendulkar successfully bring out the ugly cultural deformity of our society through his plays. He depicts gender deformity in *Kamala*, political deformity in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, physical deformity in *Sakharam Binder*, mental deformity in *Encounter in Ubugland* and *Kanyadaan* and spiritual deformity in *The Vultures*." (Babu, 151) His plays raise voice against the class discrimination, violence, sexuality, and other social evils that makes him the champion of social justice and protest in Marathi Theatre.

His fame and popularity was all over India, even though the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in a condolence message to Tendulkar's Family said, "his Strong espousal of Women's empowerment and the empowerment of the downtrodden has shaped public consciousness in post independent India." And Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan called him 'a strong and fearless writer and a great mind.'

As he takes a committed stands for the weak and downtrodden.

WORK-CITED

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