

Socio-Political Issues in The Select Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract

In the post-independent era, Indian drama has undergone some significant changes with the changed social system, values and export-import of views. Cultural, political, socio-economic, and moral changes of society have introduced different scopes of theme and style to Indian Drama. From the forth decade of twentieth century the sense of realism came into the Marathi drama as a reaction of the problems those have been faced by the modern society. In this period new additions to themes with various new experiments on style, Vijay Tendulkar has prolonged the area of Marathi Drama. Vijay Tendulkar, the well-known Marathi playwright has received a national reputation for his thought provoking plays. Specially, Tendulkar tackles the issues of politics in several of his plays. This study is an attempt to analyse the Socio-political issues in three major political plays by Tendulkar.

Keywords: Gender Issues, Women Oppression, Suppression, Politics, Contemporary Issues

In *Kanyadaan*, the protagonist Jyoti, a girl of 20, belongs to the upper class and her decision to marry Arun Athavale, a Dalit boy is appreciated and encouraged by her father Nath Devalikar. Jyoti is shaped by her father's ideal of 'uprooting caste system' and the dream of 'casteless society'. To Nath, it is an opportunity to put his ideals to test. But Seva, his wife warns him of the practical difficulties Jyoti would face in future. But Jyoti's marriage with Arun is an experiment for Nath. Jyoti spoiled by her father's ideals, gives her consent to marry Arun. Arun is doing his B.A, and is working part-time in 'Sramik Samachar'. He has to support his big family financially instead of accepting Jyoti's love and appreciating Nath's broad mindedness. He verbally and physically abuses Jyoti because of his psychological torment. Arun fails to reconcile himself to the contemporary and fears about the humiliations his community had undergone for

generations. He suffers from inferiority complex and tries to settle his score against the upper caste by his verbal and physical abuse of Jyoti.

Nath thinks Jyoti's marriage will act as a catalyst to transform the society. But as a wife what she receives from Arun is brutal beatings. Nath spends sleepless nights agonizing over the future of his daughter. Nath and Seva feel disturbed on seeing the injury upon her arm. Jyoti experiences all kinds of violence-physical, verbal and Psychological. Arun uses abusive and filthy language against Jyoti's parents. She is taunted by him by being born in a high caste; She is beaten mercilessly by him and then is compelled to make love.

Encounter in Umbugland is completely different from other Tendulkar plays. In this play, one can find the protagonist Princess Vijaya metamorphosed from an innocent girl into a cunning politician. Vichitravirya, the king of Umbugland, aims at immortality and at his sixtieth coronation ceremony, he advised his Cabinet ministers to serve the people of the country so that he can rule them for a hundred years. He thinks principles and honesty are inappropriate terms in politics and he considers politics as a profitable game of skullduggery (Five Plays, 273). His sermon about "power" to his five experienced statesmen-Vratyasom, Bhagadanta, karkashirsha, Pishtakeshi and Aranyaketu is like Satan preaching scriptures. Power is a crown of thorns. Power is a sword hanging over you. Power is the bread you ate the stake. Power means responsibility. Power means problems and painful decisions. There is no headache like power. There is no trouble like power. (Five Plays 279)

The sudden death of Vichitravirya makes the statesmen fight among themselves to usurp the throne. Since the Kadamba tribes have broken into fierce riots in the North, West, East and North-East of Umbugland, the Cabinet is left with no choice except to make the king Vichitravirya's daughter Vijaya, a small girl to rule, we'll be the rulers." (Five Plays 293)

In the beginning, Princess vijaya is very innocent and playful and not matured enough to understand practices of court. As a motherless child, she depends upon Prannarayan (eunuch), the attendant in the harem of Vijaya for her emotional support. It is Prannarayan who teaches her 'power game' calmly. He advises her how she has to behave in the Cabinet meeting. Prannarayan says, "Insult them, but don't wound their

egos. And diplomatic language.” (Five Plays 229) Gradually, she learns the game of politics with all its nuances. With her indomitable will, she decides things on her own. She cannot be the puppet in the hands of the Cabinet Ministers. The Cabinet Ministers get irritated on seeing Vijay’s photographs in the newspaper, “Queen Vijaya in Kadamba settlement.” (Five Plays, 311) When the Cabinet ministers desire to crush the Kadamba tribe’s riots, Princess Vijaya’s concern to them make the ministers become wild with her. The Cabinet is irritated by her free mingling with the tribal people.

The Kadamba tribes are original inhabitants of that island. Since they are continuously ignored by the rulers, they have become the victim of exploitation. They are straightforward people with no conceit and they keep their heads high. Princess Vijaya plans for their upliftment. To put his into practice, she has to get the approval of Cabinet Ministers. But her proposal is rejected by the Cabinet. When the Cabinet passed ‘No confidence motion’ against Princess Vijaya, she used absolute power to get the assent of the Cabinet. She took this as a prestige issue.

She gradually becomes ambitious and wants to rule without restraint. (Five Plays, 325) This is how the politicians who begin with democratic ideals are transformed into autocratic rulers in the end. She feels herself that she undergoes a change gradually: “Something in me is changing greatly, Prannarayan. I feel afraid of myself, very afraid.” (Five Plays 326)

An urge to acquire power is inherent in every human being. If he attains power, he tries to execute it blindly without knowing the consequences. In the patriarchal society, man always enjoys more power than the fair sex. In his attempt to execute power, he ignores the fellow being’s freedom and human values. Foucault sees power as a major force in all relations in the society. To him, “power is a strategy, something which has to be constantly performed...a set of relations dispersed through the society.” (Foucault 2003)

Sakharam in Sakharam Binder is a tyrant but appears to be fair in his deal with the women he has brought. The way he introduces himself to Laxmi in the beginning of the play shows that he is autocratic. Love, emotion and passion are strange words for him. He declares, “I’m the master here.”(127) Laxmi deserted by her husband has to yield herself to Sakharam’s despotic ways. Without becoming his legal wife, Laxmi

fulfills all his needs but in turn she receives only rebuke and blows. He never lets anyone to boss over him. He says, "I had six before you. I disowned my own father. I wouldn't let anyone boss over me." (148) He is the master of the house and he treats the woman he has brought worse than slaves. He is a self-styled man and is not even afraid of God. He says, "This Sakharam Binder- he's a terror--- He's not scared of God or of God's father" (126) Unlike Laxmi, Champa is physically strong, plumb and looks bewitching. Both Laxmi, and Champa are forced by destiny to live with Sakharam. Sakharam exploits both the women and squeezes them for the food and shelter he provided for them. He demands more from the women than what he actually provides for them. Though Sakharam boasts of his honesty and straight forwardness, he behaves like a tyrant master. He calls her a slut, a bitch and a niggling bit of a cast-off woman. His ego is hurt because Laxmi dares to raise her voice against him. He couldn't digest Laxmi bossing over him. Laxmi who suffocates all these days bursts out:

I've never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders. Curses. Oaths. Threatening to throw m out. Kicks and blows. [Wipes her eyes with end of the sari] There I was in agony after I'd been belted, and all you wanted me to do was laugh. Laugh and laugh again. Here I am on the point of death and I'm supposed to laugh. Hell must be a better place than this. [Whimpers] If I die, I'll be free of this once and for all. (148)

For Sakharam, it is easy to rule cast-off women like Laxmi and Champa as they cannot claim their rights. He wants to enjoy all luxury of family life without the bondage of marriage. His infatuation for Champa reduces the intensity of his tyrannical nature. His lust for her body weakens him. Laxmi who has come back to Sakharam couldn't bear her place replaced by Champa. Innocent Champa permits Laxmi to say with them against the will of Sakharam. Laxmi who has lost her hold on Sakharam is waiting for a chance to throw Champa away from home. Champa submits her body to Sakharam by force. She shocks Laxmi by her secret affair with Dawood, Sakharam's friend. Champa is very stubborn and gives her body to Sakharam only after taking alcohol. Moreover, the presence of Laxmi in the kitchen makes Sakharam impotent. Champa shouts, "Stop that" Champa

– 'you're not a man – not since she came. She's made an impotent ninny of you. Don't

have the guts to take me before her. You turn into a corpse- a worm.” (193) Unlike Laxmi, Champa is able to overpower Sakharam because of his lust for her body. Her affair with Dawood is out of her own will.

Innocent and meek Laxmi becomes villainous and reveals Champa's unfaithfulness to Sakharam. This provokes Sakharam to murder Champa. Sakharam loses all his power and becomes weak with his murder. Laxmi makes use of this situation and turns the wind in favor of her. The Power construction changes at the end with Laxmi assuming more power to lead Sakharam.

In Sakharam Binder the issue is sexual power. When that power is threatened, the protagonist is confused and lashes out viciously, taking a life. The equations change in an interesting round of musical chairs that tilts the balance off and on, and each character seems to reflect the role of another. (Agarwal 199)

GhashiramSavalDas in Ghashiram Kotwal is not basically a power monger. His arrival with his wife and daughter to Poona is to seek his fortune. But the humiliations he has undergone there make him feel hungry for power. His attempt to get Nana's favour is prevented by Poona Brahmins. Power and violence are inseparable. Gulabi, the courtesan snatches the necklace from Ghashiram by using thugs. That necklace was given to him by Nana Phadnavis, the chief Minister of the Peshwa of Pune in the 19th century for helping him when he sprained his leg while dancing with Gulabi. All Brahmins including Nana are enchanted by her and are willing to surrender themselves at her feet. She exhibits her power by taking the necklace from Ghashiram by force. In the great dakshina ceremony at the foot of the holy hill of Parvati, there used to be a great feast. Moreover, Nana will honour the Brahmins. With hungry eyes, Ghashiram is standing in the queue. But he is accused of stealing a Brahmin's prize money. He is mistaken for a thief. He is beaten and then put in the cell. This insult forces Ghashiram to voh, "I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of Pigs." (377) Ghashiram uses his young, beautiful and

innocent daughter Gouri as a bait to acquire power and fulfill his oath. He decides to sacrifice his daughter to Nana in exchange of Power.

Since Nana is infatuated with Gouri, Poona comes under the reign of Ghashiram. People are whipped, sued and arrested. Any sin can be committed with the permission of Kotwal. Power makes Ghashiram insensitive to the sufferings of people. Sutradhar says, "Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules" (387) without Kotwal's permission nothing can be done. Kotwal's permission is necessary even to walk on the road at midnight and to call a midwife to attend a delivery. People of Poona shudder at the thought of Kotwal. Sutradhar comments: "Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you lay a hand on Ghashiram, Nana will smash you. If you don't, then Ghashiram will get you anyway. Ghashiram Kotwal..." (392). Gauri's sexual power fetches Ghashiram a chance to reign Poona as Kotwal.

Tendulkar is a creative writer with a fine sensibility. He exposed alienation of modern individual to contemporary politics. He also exposed men's dominance over women, his portraiture of overt and covert violence in human-beings and above all his deep and abiding consciousness of women's vulnerability in Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern is the relationship between individual and society. In play after play, he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man. All of his plays have direct, one to one relationship with reality with an extraordinary mixture of violence that is so much omnipresent yet invisible in real lives of people. Most of his plays deal with the individual placed against the backdrop of society and explore the tensions between the two. His creativity has a prismatic quality, myriad potential and a multitude of colours.

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