

Physical and Verbal violence in the Select Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract: Theatre is the mimesis of reality. It is also one mode of representing reality. As it is a representation of reality performed in the public it has some limits. It is a powerful medium which reaches wide public. Drama has to be performed under some constraints and religious taboos because of the pressure of ethical notions. Hence, violence was not directly shown on the stage at first. In Greek theatre, there was the use of dictum that violence should not be shown on stage because of the fear that it could affect the audience. So violence is only reported. During the Elizabethan period some of the violent deeds were shown on the stage, but still it is not a free stage. Jacobean theatre used some liberty in dealing with violence but once again after the Restoration prudery was restored. In 20th century because of the European influence violence came back. The Indian theatre has also been revolutionized and revised with the passage of time. Vijay Tendulkar, a versatile human being is well-known for his realistic plays. Through his Marathi plays he portrayed the themes like violence, sex and the baser aspects of human life.

Key Words: Physical Violence, verbal violence, Mutilate, violate, humanity.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 1943 the Marathi theatre celebrated its centenary. The younger generation were nurtured on the new-literary taste lost interest in both Sangeet-Natak and the prosaic theatre. They were in search of a new dramatist who could give an entirely new form to drama. At this juncture Tendulkar entered the Marathi theatre in 1955. When he came on the scene professional drama which was turned into commercial drama was dying out slowly. In Marathi theatre many social problems were tackled and also written from the reformist point of view and the whole matrix was middle class and no radical analysis was available. With the emergence of Amateur theatre new techniques were introduced. Dramatists began to experiment. Tendulkar is one among them. His first play is *Gruhastha* and then came *Shrimant* in 1955. He wrote for young amateur theatre groups and most of these works are on act plays. At that time he was a journalist, not much recognized. But he had interest in the new theatre. It helped both the theatre groups as well as Vijay Tendulkar, because at that time the theatre groups did not have a dramatist of their own. Tendulkar believes in direct dramatic imagination and therefore he discarded the narrative logic. In his days there was a wave of idealism and ambition in dramatic writing. There was a rich stream of translations and adaptations from foreign plays. He used this liberal theatre to deal with violence. He rejected the idea of reporting, and opted for visual presentation of violence. He has his reasons such as the desire to shock the audience. Violence is not just a metaphor but is a reality to him. He used a variety of styles and forms. With growing experience, he broke away from the three-act plays and chose lengthy ones. His play *Silence! The Court is in Session* written in 1968 depicts interplay of perceptions like surface reality and the psychological reality. *The Vultures* written in 1971 depicted the baser aspects of human life. This paper is intended to analyse many facets of violence that have been discussed in Tendulkar's plays. In fact he has made people awe-struck by the open display of sex and violence in his plays. He was also a controversial figure with the production of plays like *Silence The Court is in Session*, *The Vultures*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghasiram Kotwal*. I am mainly focusing on the three plays of Tendulkar which are much performed and controversial also. *Sakharam Binder*, *The Vultures* and *Baby*, chiefly *Sakharam Binder* which can be treated as a critique of patriarchy. I also tried to throw light upon the narrative technique, historical introspection, characterization and the critique of socio-religious practices of the writer.

2. DISCUSSION:

Violence, probably the most familiar word in human life has become a part of every individual's life these days. In spite of man's progress in improving his material conditions he has failed to free himself from barbarism of the heart. N.P. Rao writes of human aggressiveness in his book *Terrorism Violence and Human Destruction*:

Man is the only animal that kills members of his own species. It is not an animal instinct, but only human rather an inhuman instinct. Interaction of his needs and hostile environment causes this aggression often transcending the limits of decency as he is driven to seek adventure and excitement. (N.P.Rao, *Terrorism violence and human destruction* 3)

Physical violence implies the use of physical force with intent to harm the other person. Generally women are weak in physical strength due to the way they are brought up. Society gives scope and opportunities for the physical development of males only. Woman's individuality is not accepted as a fact. Hence male dominance in everyday life is associated with fear, conflict and strife. Men go to extraordinary lengths to acquire power and attempt to neutralize and nullify the power in woman by banishing it to invisibility. To nullify the power in woman men use different kinds of physical violence. The extreme form of physical violence is rape. It is the fear of rape that is curtailing women's freedom; other forms of physical violence inflicted upon women are forcible abortion and infanticide.

3. The depiction of violence in Tendulkar's plays:

In the play *The Vultures* Manik suffers such physical violence. Her own brothers exploit her. The cruelty and hypocrisy of males is evident in the acts of these two brothers. They can go to any extent and become so vulgar to get money. Money is the prime element in their life and for that they don't even spare their father. Manik deviates from the role of traditional woman of Indian society. She is jealous and avaricious like her brothers but dares to live life in her own way. She has the courage to oppose her brothers but when it comes to physical strength, she fails. Her brothers are such sadists that they enjoy her suffering. Ramakant and Umakant make plans to black-mail Raja Hondur, which is possible only when Manik stays at home. For this they use their physical force and fracture her leg. Humanity means nothing to these people. They torture their own sister for money, and turn it in to an accident. Ramakant says; 'Accident! How d'you like that, brother? We'll manage it. Supposing Manik breaks her arm...or bloody leg? Then how'll she go out? Not with a leg in plaster! If her shank's in plaster how can any-romance-take place?' (Tendulkar, *The Vultures* 244) But when their plan fails because of Raja's death, they forcibly abort Manik's child and as if it is not enough for them to derive pleasure, they abuse her with foul language. When Raja dies, they become very desperate and to take revenge against him they abort his child but it is Manik who becomes the victim.

Ramakant says:

Let's abort him! Knock him bloody out! Let's kick him out. A bastard breed, dammit-come on, brother. Come on! Let's finish off the Raja's bloody offspring. First come-on! Let little Manik scream till the bloody bursts! How she'll scream, dammit. What a bloody riot! Knock him out! Hides the raja in her belly, bloody Manik! Come on! (Tendulkar, *The Vultures* 247)

Not only this they force their father to transfer the account to Ramakant. When he refuses, they torture him and force him to sign the cheque and after that Ramakant snatches it and not worried about his papa's hurt, he simply says: 'Damn blood's still flowing' They quarrel over a trivial matter like whose share was the mirror in. (Tendulkar, *The Vultures* 214)

In the play *Baby*, after cunningly sending her brother to the mental hospital Shivappa rapes her continuously for 7 days. Nobody was there to help her. Mutilate and violate a woman's body is a terrible thing. It is humiliating and agonizing. She is torn physically and mentally to such an extent that rearranging all the threads of her life anew is not only difficult but traumatically long and needs much effort which finds no support in this society. When Baby became destitute society turns deaf and dumb towards her. She has no food to eat, nowhere to go; people only become dumb spectators to witness her miserable life. Nobody is ready to take risk by providing her food and shelter. Now she is an unchaste woman who has lost her virginity. When after seven days Shivappa stops visiting her, then people persecute her with harsh comment. They begin to call her Shivappa's girl. Baby being helpless starves for two days. After that she decides to go to Shivappa and live with him as his concubine. The ultimate fate of a woman raped by a man is to live with him. Here Baby is blamed; people get vicarious pleasure by torturing her, calling names, throwing stones and writing names on the door. She is made an out-caster and her own community disowns her. Many argue that provocative dresses worn by women are responsible for molestation. But the statement is absurd and ridiculous. Most women of the poorer classes who usually not dressed attractively were molested and raped.

Whenever there is a fight between men, vengeance is taken on the enemy's wife, mother and sisters, because women are considered as the property of men, she is treated as an object which could be claimed easily by men. Baby is also a victim; Shivappa is a sadist who derives vicarious pleasure in torturing Baby. He forces her to drink and when she bursts out into cough he enjoys her plight. She barks like a dog. Walks like a dog. She does all the gimmicks only to please Shivappa. He forces her to give poses which resemble the poses in the newspaper he has brought; he makes her to dance till she is exhausted and tired. In her pain he seeks amusement. He commands and orders her to dance though she is fully tired. She bears all this inhuman cruelty only because she needs a roof over her head. Certain cultural and psychological conditions encourage Shivappa's aggression as his reward and encourage acceptance of female passivity as her own reward.

In the play *Sakharam Binder*, Sakharam in the guise of providing shelter for destitute women forces all types of exploitation. The public generally tends to consider assault by a spouse as a family problem rather than a crime. Sakharam beats Laxmi with his belt. When she first arrives at his house, Sakharam like a master gives commands to his slave he says: 'No free and easy ways here, see? I'm hot-headed. When I lose my temper, I beat the life out of people. I've a foul mouth You'll get two square meals. Two sarees to start with and then one in a year. I like

everything in order here..... If you're careless, I'll show you the door. Don't ask for any pity then. I'm the master here." (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 125) Laxmi bears all torture of Sakharam, when coal accidentally burns Laxmi's feet, Sakharam is not worried a bit: 'Good! I hope these coals roast your feet-roast them. Nice and brown. I don't feel a bit sorry'. (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 140) in the night he woke her up and orders her to laugh:

Sakharam: You laugh for the ant. But you won't laugh when I ask you to. I'll twist that foot of yours, you get me? Now sit up. You're not to sleep. Wake up.

Laxmi: Honestly, I can't. Let me sleep. (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 141)

But Sakharam goes on forcing her, he doesn't have any pity towards her, she goes on pleading him;

Laxmi: Oh, God I'm so tired. I can't laugh any more. Please let me sleep. My foot is throbbing.

Sakharam: Where? Let me see. Look I'm warning you. If you're clumsy again. I'll break that leg of yours. All you women, you're worthless lot! (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 141)

Laxmi is so committed towards Sakharam that she refuses to leave him even in a crucial situation. Though he throws her out, she begs again and again to be taken back. She says; "I'll stay here now, and die here, too. I don't want to go away. I'll live here, die here.' But Sakharam is so rude that he never cares for this woman and is so cruel that he beats her to death. When she comes back he refuses to open the door and admit her into the house. The stage directions indicate that from the dark kitchen the sound of blow upon blow is heard; Laxmi's agonized moans indicate the sheer physical violence. He makes her laugh in such a pain that his sadism astonishes us.

Laxmi: My whole body is throbbing with pain. Such gnawing pain. (Moans) you'd think my flesh was on fire.

Sakharam: So what? You have to laugh. You hear me? My orders must be obeyed in this house. What I say goes. Are you going to laugh or shall I throw you out? (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 145)

When Laxmi says she will die if Sakharam doesn't let her go, he says laugh and then die. Champa, another character in the play is a rebellious one yet she becomes the victim. She is sensuous and courageous wife who beats her husband. The two women, Laxmi and Champa fulfil the basic needs of Sakharam. One fulfils the domestic and the other sexual. Both suffer at the hands of Sakharam. The use and approval of physical violence in the middle class can be explained in terms of 'culture of poverty'. For them physical violence is a normal and socially transmitted behaviour pattern. Sakharam uses physical force against women in order to give vent to his frustration. But when a woman is frustrated she has to suffer at her master's hands for speaking the truth. Laxmi is also fed up with the beatings and torture of Sakharam and sometimes she dare to retort: 'A dead hen doesn't fear the fire! Nothing more terrible can be happen to me now. I've been through everything in this house. The whole world knows what goes here.' (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 147)

But it ends up only in the beating of Laxmi. He also warns her: "Stay if you're ready to put up with all this, or else go your way'. (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 148) Sakharam who beats women very easily cannot take it when Champa beats her husband. He is shocked and calls her a strange woman. He asks her 'Haven't you a heart?' But Champa knows what kind of men these are, she had suffered a lot since her childhood. She has developed contempt towards the men of the society. We can notice this in her words:

No. I don't have a heart. He chewed it up raw long ago. He brought me from my mother even before I'd become a woman. He married me when I didn't even know what marriage meant. He'd torture me at night. He branded me, and stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things. I ran away.....He tore lumps out of my heart. He drank my blood. (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 167)

Sakharam boasts of himself as an honest and different form other men, but he himself turns into a traditional and conventional who believes in the rigid norms and taboos of the society. He says;

He kicks you out of the house: he is out to squeeze the life out of you. But he's your God; you ought to worship a god like that with shoes and slippers! He should be whipped in public. You women, you're all the same. Suckled by dead mothers! Corpses! That's what you are, you get kicked by our husbands and you go and fall at their feet! (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 133)

But when Champa talks about her husband with contempt, Sakharam says: 'In this house the woman must always speak with restraint. I won't put up with bad language.' When Champa asks for a cup to tea he says; 'That's a woman's job'. Sakharam proudly admits that he has sinned but does not care for people. When Laxmi objects about Dawood, a Muslim singing in an aarti in a holy Dassera, Sakharam beats Laxmi and invites Dawood to sing, but when Champa goes on drinking on Dassera day, he says:

Drunk so early in the morning? What's wrong with you? This is not right, Champa, you should not drink on a holy day like Dassera, what did I tell you before I left for the Press? You haven't even had a bath. And you've been drinking. On a holy day the woman of the house should look all clean and tidy. What will people say? Go on inside. Go Good-for-nothing! Doesn't care for either feasts or fasts damn her. Not right for a woman to behave like this. (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 174)

He boasts of himself as a man who is much liberal when compared to the husbands of battered women. But when he learns the illicit relationship of Champa and Dawood, he cannot take it, he cannot act like as he said, "If you've had enough, if she's had enough, you can always part. The game is over. Nothing to bother you after that"

(Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* 133) he doesn't let Champa to go. He murders her as she becomes a threat to this master ship. Sexual jealousy and form of insecurity is also a cause for the eruption of violence. Though Sakharam has had many women it doesn't seem to him a sin but when he learns of Champa's relationship with Dawood since he himself can longer satisfy her, it becomes a big blow to his virility and it seem a big crime to him and as though to prove his masculinity he kills her. The battering males induce guilt in their victims in order to justify the use of coercive power. Victims like Laxmi believe and admit the contention of their aggressors. They assume responsibility and suffer from the guilt that they provoked their men to be violent.

4. The Indian culture and women:

The Indian tradition believes a woman should be a virgin before marriage. After marriage she shall not have any sexual relations with any man except her husband, but men have no such restrictions. When Sakharam discovers Champa's relationship with Dawood he murders Champa. Laxmi, a blind follower of the rituals also supports it. The women in these plays vulnerably succumb to the tyranny of men. Baby earns her bread and is economically independent but she is dependent on Shivappa for social security and support. To retain that support she gives her earnings to Shivappa. For a short period she revolts against Shivappa. In her conversation with Raghav she reveals that she has no fear of death now, because now she has got freedom and is going to achieve something. She says that she has the inner-strength to face Shivappa because of her untouched soul. When Shivappa appears suddenly her soul and her strength are shattered and once again she regresses to her original position of a loyal animal serving its master. Baby being a woman is not secure in society. She could not think of being alone living by herself because she is a woman.

5. CONCLUSION:

Tendulkar, being a realistic writer tried to portray the hegemony of patriarchy that prevailed in our society. The social structure has a strong inbuilt discrimination and oppression which exploits women. It causes psychological, physical and emotional injury to women. As men control the majority of institutions, women become the victims of violence. The girl-child learns her role directly through differential treatment, rewards and punishments. This notion not only supports male dominance but also encourages and nourishes violence on women. The incidents of verbal or physical aggression are most likely to occur in the home. "The family is the prime locus of the battle of the sexes and the generation gap." (*The Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1993) The home should be a real home where one can get love, comfort and the sense of security, it should not be a mere shelter where women can only be a refugee. Tendulkar supported this thinking through his works.

STATEMENT: (Acknowledgement)

I have read the submission guidelines, I agree to the policy of the Journal and the submission is original and does not contain plagiarized material.

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