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Studying Vijay Tendulkar in Reference with Foucault's 'Power Theory'

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Abstract:

My effort in this paper is to do a critical scrutiny of the aspects of 'power' in our society through proper observations done in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar, a Marathi playwright whose works have been translated into English and other languages worldwide, owing to the universality of their theme, straightforwardness of their characterization, innovation of their dramatics, controversialist nature of their subjects, critical approach towards 'old-established institutions', such as, marriage, family, patriarchy, man-woman relationship and above all, his concerns for 'power-structure' inbuilt in Indian society. This paper's content is of threefold; the first introductory portion deals with a theoretical study of concepts related to 'power', its ramifications in social and political mechanisms, and its employment as a 'tool'; the second part of this paper is a genuine critical overview of 'power-game' and 'power-politics' displayed by Vijay Tendulkar in his plays (through story, character and dialogue) with help of 'power-tools', such as, caste in Kanyadan, media in Kamala, family in The Vultures, State in Ghashiram Kotwal and mock-trial in Silence! The Court is in Session; and the third section of this paper tries to find out some decisive conclusions by which the current problems of the society can be resolved. Thus the present paper, in a way, establishes the fact that 'power' as a social, political, economic and cultural phenomenon, rules the whole world; it reigns the conscious and unconscious psyche of the people; it plays a crucial role in determining the colour and texture of the policies created by the nations for its people as well as for the other nations; it prevails everywhere.

Keywords: Power, Power-mechanism, Power-structure, Power politics, Power dynamics, Power-conflict, Power game, Patriarchy, Violence.

INTRODUCTION:

The globalisation and technological development have changed not only the outlook of political, economic and social gesture of the world but also the perspectives of identifying to any individual by others and perceptions of taking seriously or easily to any community by others, and understanding of importance to one country by other. This ramification of 'power-structure' is the most crucial reason of many current burning crises which the world is facing, such as, the global warming, thrust of supremacy of super-power countries over others, terrorism, worldwide corruption, revolutions against totalitarian government, aggression against old established institutions and racism. In such conditions the study of

‘power-mechanism’, its ways to over spread, and its interruption in common day life, modes of operation and methods to manage it for sustainable development of each and every individual become necessary.

My effort in this paper is to do a critical scrutiny of these aspects of ‘power’ in our society through proper observations done in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar, a Marathi playwright whose works have been translated into English and other languages worldwide, owing to the universality of their theme, straightforwardness of their characterization, innovation of their dramatics, controversialist nature of their subjects, critical approach towards ‘old-established institutions’, such as, marriage, family, patriarchy, man-woman relationship and above all, his concerns for ‘power-structure’ inbuilt in Indian society. This paper’s content is of threefold; the first introductory portion deals with a theoretical study of concepts related to ‘power’, its ramifications in social and political mechanisms, and its employment as a ‘tool’; the second part of this paper is a genuine critical overview of ‘power-game’ and ‘power-politics’ displayed by Vijay Tendulkar in his plays (through story, character and dialogue) with help of ‘power-tools’, such as, caste in Kanyadan, media in Kamala, family in The Vultures, State in Ghashiram Kotwal and mock-trial in Silence! The Court is in Session; and the third section of this paper tries to find out some decisive conclusions by which the current problems of the society can be resolved. Thus the present paper, in a way, establishes the fact that ‘power’ as a social, political, economic and cultural phenomenon, rules the whole world; it reigns the conscious and unconscious psyche of the people; it plays a crucial role in determining the colour and texture of the policies created by the nations for its people as well as for the other nations; it prevails everywhere.

‘Power’ as a Theory: A Critical Study

Thanks to Foucault’s statement, “Power is everywhere....because it comes from everywhere.” (Foucault 1979:194) thinking about ‘power’, which for many years was ponderous and predictable, has become fascinating and full of surprises. C.C Maxey in Political Philosophies highlights role of ‘power’ and beginning of its theories since human civilization in different nations especially in India: “The closer and fuller acquaintance with civilization of remote millenniums which we now enjoy reveals an astonishing abundance of Political ideas among the people of those vanished eras and show that north in thought and practice they anticipated paralleled and to some extent laid foundations for ideas which subsequently appeared in European Political consciousness. It was in those ancient Political Systems that the human mind first came to grips with problems of government and first attempted to formulate ideas to account for the phenomena of Politics and systematise the exercise of Political authority and power” (Maxey 1990:8). From ancient time political philosophers and thinkers have not neglected the concept of power. It is true that their perspectives were conservative and their interests were more on institutional study and the discovery of historical development in origin of state but they provided base for further studies.

Commenting on the importance of ‘power’ and its mechanism in human society Alvin Toffler remarks figuratively: “Despite the bad odour that clings to the very notion of power

because of the misuses to which it has been put, power in itself neither good nor bad. It is an inescapable aspect of every human relationship, and it influences everything from our sexual relations to the jobs we hold, the cars we drive, the television we watch, the hopes we pursue. To a greater degree than most imagine, we are the products of power.... Yet of all the aspects of our lives, power remains one of the least understood and most important--especially for our generation” (Toffler 1991:3). The dynamics of ‘power’ has been a subject of great interest since ancient times. The Japanese legend tells of *sanshu no jingi*--the three sacred objects given to the great sun goddess *Amaterasu-omi-kami*,—which to this day are still the symbols of imperial power. These are the sword, the jewel, and the mirror (Toffler 1991:503). The word ‘power’ derives from the old French word “*poeir*”, which means “to be able to act”. Defining the concept of power in uncontroversial manner has proven to be difficult for centuries and “there are as many definitions of power as there are cherry blossoms in Japan, and all are fraught with difficulty” (Toffler 1991:13). Generally, ‘power’ is defined as the ability or capacity to perform or to act effectively, including the situation where not to act is most effective. But every field of human life has different connotation of it: in democracies, ‘power’ is typically divided against itself, for instance in the classic tripartite division of power in legislative, executive and judicial power but in contemporary, pluralistic democracies the divisions of power go much further and power is not limited to the realm of formal politics. Issues of ‘power’ pertain to markets, technologies, science, discourses, designs, fashion, self-improvement etc. “In the private sphere, a parent can slap a child (use force), cut an allowance or bribe with a dollar (use money or its equivalent), or the most effective of all mold a child’s values so the child wishes to obey” (Toffler 1991:3).

‘Power’ as a Practice: A Critical Study in Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

‘Power’, what Michel Foucault defines as ‘the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of other’ (Foucault 1979:194), and violence, described as consciously hurting someone, physically or psychologically (Tendulkar 1997: 120), as the natural instrumentality that ‘power’ brings into action have provided the general space in which writers, throughout the generations, such as, Shakespeare, Milton, G. B. Shaw, Osborne and Eugene O’Neill have authored their works. Vijay Tendulkar, a radical dramatist in modern Indian literature, originally writing in Marathi, too has shown “a curiosity about ‘power’ and violence in his plays- not as something that exists in isolation, but as a part of the human milieu, behaviour and mind” (Tendulkar 1992:147).

Vijay Tendulkar, a journalist, novelist, short story writer, and a radical dramatist in modern Marathi literature has made a mark as a prolific playwright with twentyeight plays, twenty four one-act plays and eleven children’s plays. His significant plays with innovative themes and structures have been into English and modern Indian languages, highlighting his modernist vision in modern Indian drama along with that of Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali and Girish Karnad in Kannad.

A strong ethical concern exploring and critiquing the relations of power in all their complex ramifications is the hub around which Tendulkar’s major plays evolve. As a matter of fact, Tendulkar chose ‘the emerging patterns of violence’ as his theme for his project when

he was awarded the Nehru Fellowship. In an interview soon after the completion of the project, he said that for two years had 'moved around the country alone, trying to look into the situations ranging from individual violence to the political movement; covering 'criminality, the functioning of the police force, the judiciary, jails and the political aspect of the violence and power'. At the end it he was left with a fact that:

"Violence has become an obsession. Violence is something which has to be accepted as fact. It is no use describing it as good or bad. Projections of it can be good or bad. And violence when turned into something else, can certainly be defined as vitality which can be very useful, very constructive. So it depends on how you utilize it or curb it at times." (Tendulkar 1992:147)

Ashis Nandy called Vijay Tendulkar, "one of the most distinguished social theorists of violence". Tendulkar studies 'power' and violence in political, personal, sexual and social contexts through various established institutions of society and exposes the ethical devastation and essential loneliness of mankind in his plays. The institutions that are exposed with their power mechanisms include media (Kamala), performance (Silence! The Court is in Session), the family (The Vultures), the state (Ghashiram Kotwal and Encounter in Umbugland), society and morality (Kanyadan), sexual mores (Sakharam Binder and A Friend's Story).

Tendulkar's Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe (1967), translated from Marathi into English by Priya Adarkar as Silence! The Court is in Session locates its heroine at the point of conflict where as aggressive transgressor of the sexual mores of community, she challenges the executors in so-called game of performance or 'power' in absentia. A fierce psychological violence becomes evident against its protagonist Miss Leela Benare in this play.

Tendulkar's Dambadwipcha Mukabala (1968), translated from Marathi into English by Priya Adarkar as Encounter in Umbugland unveils the essential nature of the game of politics as basic craving for 'power' in human being through the intricate intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the corruption involved in holding on to them. The indomitable ruler Princess Vijaya faces the physical violence successfully, plotted against her by malicious ministers.

His play Gidhade (1970), translated from Marathi into English by Priya Adarkar as The Vultures is a ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness by showing the degeneration of human individuals- Ramakant, Umakant, Pappa, Manik and Rama belong to middle class milieu.

His play Sakharam Binder (1972) presents the conflicts of power through medium of violence, challenging the sexual mores of society in both manner- explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, it is a power-game between man- Sakharam Binder as exploiter and woman- Laxmi and Champa as exploited. Implicitly, it is conflict between 'power of purity' and 'power of physical pleasure', both in the mind of Sakharam Binder.

In Ghashiram Kotwal(1972), ‘power’ is defined ‘horizontally’ in terms of individuals; from humiliation to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; Ghashiram Kotwal becomes the subject of his own instinct of revenge, ‘power-hungry heart’ and violence against Poone’s gentry and her daughter Gauri, and Nana’s deputationist political cruelty.

In Kamala, Tendulkar has shown the ‘power-conflict’ between dominator class inform of both ‘man’ and success-hungry journalism, presented through Jai Singh Jadhav, and dominated class in form of both- ‘woman’ – Sarita and Kamala, a tribal woman bought from market and socialist press, presented through Kakasahab.

Tendulkar’s Mitrachi Gostha (1981), translated into English as A Friend’s Story discusses the stigmatisation of lesbian love and an evident protest and hatred against it in Indian contexts.

Thus this description clarifies that Tendulkar was always against the establishment and remained a keen observer of human behaviour. He was like a lighthouse in the rough seas for younger generation. Tendulkar ‘s genius was undoubtedly in the league of Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and John Osborne creating so-called ‘ Angry Youngman Movement’ with the presentation of violence and patterns of ‘power’. But it will be more illustrative to discuss Tendulkar’s play in detail to understand his stand for ‘power-structure’ and ‘power-game’ in social, political and cultural scenario. For this purpose, here, I take up his two renowned plays-Ghashiram Kotwal and Silence! The Court is in Session.

‘Power’, Gender, and State in Tendulkar’s Ghashiram Kotwal:

According to Girish Karnad, in Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar deals with the theme of “emergence of demons in public”, created by political leaders for the fulfillment of their aims (Babu 1997:72). Vijay Tendulkar’s Ghashiram Kotwal depicts a very realistic picture of the political and moral decadence due to indulgence in vulgar sexuality and power politics of its main characters- Nana Phadanavis and Ghashiram Kotwal; both of them put the modesty of a young woman Gauri to attain their objectives- Nana, for his satisfaction of lust and Ghashiram, for his grabbing of power. This power game is ‘played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power’ (Bandyopadhyay 2003:3). In this respect, this play seems to be the most perfect instance as the commentary on gender discrimination and inequality prevalent in Indian society where a woman is an article of selling and buying; an object of sexual gratification for man and a prey in the hands of dominant male. When Nana looks Gauri praying in the hall for the first time, he, in blind lust, ‘tries to grab her.’ When she pulls away and runs ‘like a frightened deer’, he chases her ‘like a fox’. When Nana asks for her to Ghashiram in grab of a servant, his answer-‘If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found. (Tendulkar 1972:379)’- reflects the mentality of man who always considers a woman an object for his benefits, not an individual having her own will. The urge for vengeance and grabbing of power is so overwhelming that Ghashiram sacrifices his only daughter and in return, he demands the power in form of post of Kotwal of Poona from Nana. Smitten by the blossoming beauty of Ghashiram’s daughter, the lustful Nana yields to his conditions:

Ghashiram: All right, Sir, to shut people's mouths, make me the kotwal of Poona.

Nana (jolted): What! Kotwal! But the Kotwal guards the whole city of Poona.

Ghashiram: If you don't agree, forget it. I'm not itching for it.

Nana: Suggest something else.

Ghashiram: This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again.

Nana: No! send her. I'll make you Kotwal. When will you send her?

Ghashiram: After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand!

Nana: Bastard. You've got me in narrow pass.

Ghashiram: Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter. (Tendulkar 1972:383-384)

Here the female character Gauri becomes the victim without any fault of her own and will of her own. Her role in this politics of power is limited only to submission, subjugation and subsidiary; if she tries to retaliate, she is considered to be threat to male hegemony and must be punished; in a way that affirms the patriarchal norms of gender.

Gender discrimination in society is obvious in this respect also that woman is always considered to be only 'the body', not a complete personality; subject to be used by the man for own lustful purposes. She does not have any right on her own body. Nana in the play Ghashiram Kotwal reflects this gender bias many times:

Nana: Oh, can we? Can we find her? How beautifully formed! What a lovely figure! Did you see? Erect! Young! Tender! Ah, Hoho! We've seen so many, handled so many, but none like that one. None her equal. (Tendulkar 1972:379)

Nana: What a bosom! Buds just blossoming.....We'll squeeze them like this!

Thus Vijay Tendulkar in the play Ghashiram Kotwal tries not only to comment on power politics but also on miserable condition of women who are controlled by the men to promote patriarchal norms of society.

'Power', Gender and Society in Tendulkar's Silence! The Court is in Session:

In Introduction to Collected Plays in Translation, Bandyopadhyay comments on Silence! The Court is in Session by highlighting the fact that it is, "the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as the protagonist and victim, locates its heroine Benare not at acquiescent receiving end, but at point of conflict where as aggressive-transgressor of the sexual mores of her community, she challenges or power in absentia" (Bandyopadhyay 2003:xliv). This play is about a middle class Urban theatre group who goes out on a picnic and starts a mock trial to while away time. Things start taking an ugly turn when an unmarried female teacher is put in the dock and vicious questions are put to her about her personal life and whether she has had an abortion. Eventually, even those people who baulked from the situation start enjoying it. This mock-trial 'offers Tendulkar ample scope to dissect and lay bare the dormant ills of discontent in the psyche of these urban hypocrites' (Dharan 1999:52-53). The central character Miss Benare, a school teacher, never cares for social norms and traditions and always tries to live on her own terms and conditions. In the beginning of the play she expresses her rebellious temperament to Samant: "Who are these people to say what I can or can't do? My life is my own- I hav'nt sold it anyone for a

job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those-no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life! I'll decide...." (Tendulkar 1967:58)

While being asked by Samant about importance of life, she declares in preaching tone: "Forget about the sage Tukaram. I say it- I, Leela Benare, a living woman; I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It's a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious." (Tendulkar 1967:61)

Her dynamic personality seems to be threat to male hegemony. So, in the mock-trial, she is charged with infanticide and having illicit relations with a married person Professor Damle and in this way her personal life is exposed. All the other characters like witnesses Mr, Ponkshe, Mr.Karnik, Rokde, Samant, Counsel for the Defence and Counsel for the Crown Mr.Sukhatme and judge, Mr.Kashikar and his wife Mrs.Kashikar behave in a way of mockery which is reflected in the statement of Sukhatme while leveling the charge against Miss Benare:

"Milord, the nature of the charge against the accused, Miss Leela Benare, is truly dreadful. The woman who is accused has made a heinous blot on the sacred blow of motherhood-which is purer than heaven itself....Her conduct has blackened all social and moral values...if such socially destructive tendencies are encouraged to flourish, this country and its culture will be totally destroyed....The charge against the accused is one of infanticide. But the accused has committed a far more serious crime. I mean unmarried motherhood. Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our religion and our traditions.....Milord, infanticide is a dreadful act. But bringing up the child of an illegal union is certainly more horrifying. If it is encouraged, there will be no such thing as the institution of marriage left. Immorality will flourish. Before our eyes, our beautiful dream of a society governed by tradition will crumble into dust...Woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. Na striswatantryamarhati. 'Woman is not fit for independence....With the urgent plea that the court should show no mercy to the accused, but give her the greatest and severest punishment for her terrible crime...."(Tendulkar 1967:115)

Here the patriarchal social system recommends the way and patterns for women but does not care about the men's deeds. This approach increases only the gender bias in the society.

Again in this play Tendulkar points out that woman, in the eyes of man, is not more than the 'body'; she is worshiped as goddess in myths and traditions but indeed she does not have will of her own; have no right on her emotions; have no identity of her own to decide, to act or even to think and to love. If she goes beyond of this hardcore reality of the patriarchal society she is beyond to be punished, subjugated and marginalized as victim. This harsh situation of Indian society is reflected perfectly when victimized female character of this play, Miss Benare, breaks down to say a lot to the men in her life and to the society at large:

“Again, I fell in love. As a grown woman, I threw all my heart into it; I thought, this will be different. This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It isn’t love at all- it’s worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering- and went his way. He didn’t want my mind, or my devotion- he didn’t care about them! [Feebly.] He wasn’t a god. He was a man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body! That’s all. Again, the body! [Screaming.] This body is a traitor!” (Tendulkar 1967:118)

Thus through this utterance it is clear that woman is socially conditioned in such manner that she cannot overrule the social norms created for her by the patriarchy; even her body is controlled to make her feel that she is placed secondary in the society; and she does not have any right on her body; if she crosses the limit, she is punished; in the words of Kashikar: “Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.”

More than this Tendulkar’s this play unfolds the dualistic faces of the men of the society who coerce and repress the women to attain their entity. That is why at the end of the play Kashikar, playing the role of Judge in the mock-trial, affirms the social restraint on the women by saying:

“Prisoner Miss Benare, pay the closest attention. Your sin must be expiated. Irresponsibility must be chained down, Social customs, after all, are of supreme importance. Marriage is very foundation our society’s stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure. This court takes a serious view of your attempt to dynamite all this.....And, what is more, the arrogance with which you conducted yourself in society, having done all these things, that arrogance is the most unforgivable thing of all....Moreover, the future of posterity was entrusted to you. This is very dreadful thing. The morality which have shown through your conduct was the morality you were planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow.....Hence not only today’s, but tomorrow’s society would have been endangered by your misconduct. By the grace of God, it has all been stopped in time.” (Tendulkar 1967:118-119)

In true sense this play of Tendulkar seems able to voice the unheard cryings and lamentations of women which are always kept in background: ‘from somewhere unseen, her own voice is heard singing softly.’

And the wound that’s born to bleed
Bleeds on for ever, faithfully.
There is a battle sometimes, where
Defeat is destined as the end.
Some experiences are meant
To taste, then just to waste and spend.

Here through this song Miss Leela Benare expresses not only her own zeal to live fully and chase the dreams of her own but also the aspirations of Indian woman to face the world and its challenges, in spite of knowing the consequences.

CONCLUSION:

By going through the illustrations of 'power-game' and authority presented in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar, we come to know that 'power' is a complex phenomenon with these following features: Firstly, 'power' is exercised rather than possessed (for instance, by individuals in the state of nature, by a class, by the people); hence, 'power' must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never placed in anybody's hands and never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Secondly, 'power' should be analysed as coming from the bottom level of society up. What this means is that 'power' does not flow a centralized source from top to bottom (for instance, law, the economy, the state). Thirdly, 'power' is not primarily repressive, but productive. It is quite possible that the major mechanism of 'power' have been accompanied by ideological productions. There probably has been an ideology of education, an ideology of the monarchy and an ideology of parliamentary democracy. But according to Foucault, power produces much more and much less than ideology. Power, above all, is an effective instrument for the formation of registration, procedures for investigation and the research and apparatuses of control (Foucault 1994:26; Kelly 1994:37).

With these conclusions we can understand the structures and functions of many current problems such as corruption, criminalization of politics, global warming and so on. Indeed corruption is nothing but a 'power-game' between a person who accumulates money and property and a person lacks the minimal needs of daily life. Corruption occurs where the power is given any one without any restrictions. The recent cases of corruption, such as 2G scam are originated out of over ambition to gain more and more power through money. The reaction against such repression can be seen in the form of movement such as India Against Corruption. In the same manner the degradation in environment all over the world is an outcome of power struggle between human beings and Nature. The human beings are always trying to get development at the cost of catastrophic decay of their surroundings. The nature reacts in form of various environmental calamities such as tsunami.

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