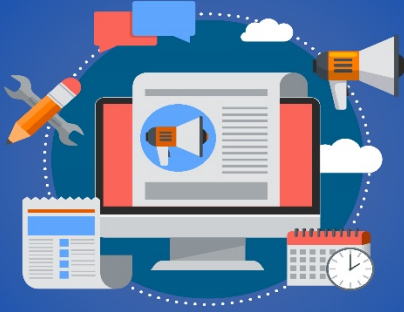


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## Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures*: The Dark World of Human Mind

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### **Abstract:**

In the post- independence Indian drama, Vijay Tendulkar has been credited to have brought a sea change in the world of theatre. He startled the sensibility of the conservative audience leading us an insight into the stark realities of life, relationship and existence. He presented the modern society with its real worth, predicament, challenges, difficulties and complexities in true colours. The characters he presented are drawn on the canvas of originality without any attempt to moralizing. 'The Vultures' which is a social play finds out violence, sexual lust and evil deeply rooted in human nature, as it reveals the degenerated society, fractured selves and problems of living with compassion and cruelty. Even the title of the play signifies the unpleasant atmosphere. The play revolves round the Pitale family. The words and actions of all the members of the Pitale family except Rama and Rajaninath are full of savagery. The sole objective in their life is to search inhuman tricks to cheat people. This article aims to show an acute awareness of the loss of traditional and ethical values and the resultant tendency towards cruelty and violence in modern times. As a playwright, Vijay Tendulkar unravels this social sickness in his dramas.

**Keywords: vultures, violence, revenge, cruelty, immorality.**

'The Vultures' (originally Gidhade in Marathi) though published in 1971, was first staged at Tejpal Theatre Bombay on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1970. In fact, it was written fourteen years before its presentation on the stage. Tendulkar's name came into limelight with sensationalism, sex and violence only after the production and publication of Gidhade. This play won instant success and controversies at once. As Jabbar Patel says in an interview – "He first depicted violence in his earlier work, 'Shrimant', that way 'Gidhade' turned out to be a turning point. For the first time Tendulkar came into his own terms and projects his explicit writing through his characters for the first time". The title of the play 'The Vultures' itself indicates the unpleasant subject matter of the play. Tendulkar quotes in response to a

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question asked by Makarand Sathe about cruel behaviour and ridiculous incidents in today's world- He says : " There is no doubt that the instincts of animals still exist in a human being. They not only exist , but are deeply rooted in human being and are preserved in their pure form". Here Tendulkar is somewhat clear about human beings violent nature. In the play, Hari Pitale and his brother Sakharam jointly establish a business firm but the former cheats on the latter and becomes the sole possessor of the firm. Shakharam could not believe the thought of his own brother deceiving him. It came to him as a blow. Hari's sons, Ramakant and Umakant and daughter Manik inherit his culture of loveless individualism. They too like their father are ever ready and do not hesitate to kill one another to get more shares in property. Hari Pitale also throws floods of light on the character of his own children when he himself talks about them :

' If I die, it'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 enjoy a rupee of it. I earned  
it all. Now, these wolves, these bullies!

The famous saying-" As you sow, so shall you reap," fits here completely. His sons and daughter inherit his wickedness, cruelty. greed etc. According to the principle of natural justice, it is said that a man has to pay heavy price for the sins and for his wrong doing in his life. It is also believed that when you dig a pit for other, you are bound to fall into it. It is crystal clear from the words of Ramakant when he says to his father, " As the seed, so the tree. Did we ever asked to be produced?" Though, Hari is cunning and crafty and earns money, he has to suffer insults, misery and stress in the last phase of his life. Umakant, his younger son, a bachelor with loose morals and a person without any brotherly feeling in him for Ramakant, grabs a good share of his father's property at Lonawala. The two brothers do not have good relation with their sister, Manik whom they rebuke and ridicule her. They don't even respect their blood relations. Ramakant and Umakant tell frankly about their sister's love affairs. Umakant says :

"Good victim she's speed out this time ! Before this.....that  
cycle- shop owner. The film- company cameraman. And  
in between, that stall- keeper from the market. Used to  
roam round town with him. On his motorbike. Arms round  
his waist."

Manik is also a different type of girl. She behaves like a man. She appears to be a hysterical type. She smokes cigarette and drink liquor. Her attitude towards money and other members of the family reveals her character. Manik is an embodiment of materialism. No Tendulkar's woman character is so uglily portrayed as Manik's character does. Tendulkar reminds through her character how the meaningless pursuits for pleasure makes her of easy virtue. This shows that the relationship between Ramakant, Umakant and Manik is like vultures. They behave rudely, vulgarly, cruelty and suspiciously. Ramakant uses obscene language, words and calls her 'whore, bitch and rascal' in the play. The following instance is apt to show the crassness of relation between them—

**Manik** : You bastards! You've no shame! Bloody ruffains!

**Umakant** : (mincing about like a woman , one finger on his cheeks). We don't go for picnics with anyone...

**Ramakant** : Or stay the night with them, either!

**Umakant** : (picking up the bottle from the side- table). Nor do we keep those pills in our purse.

**Manik** : (snatching the bottle out of Umakant's hands). You've been dipping into my purse, you swine!

They drag out her illicit relationship with the Raja of Hondur. They decide to publish their sister's love affair in the papers. When they come to know about that Manik is pregnant, they conspire of blackmailing the Raja of Hondur and thus to extort huge sum of money from him. But when Manik ruins their plans, they fracture her leg. When the Raja of Hondur dies due to heart attack, their plan to blackmail him goes in vain. They target poor Manik. Ramakant crosses all limits of indecency. He kicks her deep on the belly and blood – aborts her :

**Ramakant**: An idea, dammit! Lets abort him! Lets knock him bloody out! Lets kick him out. A bastard breed, dammit – come on brother. Come on! Lets finish off the Raja's bloody offspring. First come on! Let little Manik scream till she bloody bursts! How she'll scream dammit. What a bloody riot! Know him out! Hides the Raja in her belly, bloody Manik! Come on! Bastard bloody breed! Traitors brat! Knock him out! Finish him!

**Umakant** : (Stopping him forcibly). Stop.( Drinks a little). I've no football practice. You'll be able to kick. ( Laughs in his throat)

**Ramakant** : Come on. I'll give such a kick, he'll fly up to the bloody skies.... Come on.

In the traditional Indian society, brothers take vows to protect their sisters from any danger and difficulty, but in this play, the brothers are bent upon taking life of their sister to satiate their corrupted and contaminated ego. Through the members of the family, Tendulkar exposes the inhuman face of the city dwellers who hardly care for the relations. They don't even respect their blood relations. When Tendulkar was asked why there are scenes of atrocity and bizarre sadism in some of his plays such as kicking a pregnant woman in the belly. Tendulkar reacts – “ In *Gidhade*, the cruelty is great because it deals with an exceptional family. As for what you call perversion, let us accept that human existence is full of it. We shut our eyes to it..... I Know many people who enjoy torturing their wives, it can be physical or mental. They are outwardly decent folks and you don't suspect they have this dark side. So, when I deal with masochism or homosexuality, I am drawing your attention to something near you.”

However, Rajaninath and Rama are the two innocent lambs among the wolves and vultures. Rajaninath is the illegitimate son of Hari Pitale, while Rama is the wife of Ramakant. In the play, she is introduced indirectly in the opening scene of Act 1 through Rajaninath's long song. He gives true picture of Rama's life in the last twenty two years. He introduces her and says she is like a doe, an innocent doe. She is as untouched and as loving as the earth. Rama and Ramakant have been married for long but Ramakant, a severe addict to liquor has not been able to impregnate his wife who is earnestly longing for a child. Her husband fully knows his inability to impregnate her yet takes away to various doctors, saints, swamiji's etc ---

“ Lets see this evening what miracle the swami will perform.  
Eh? Keep some... you know... about you. I mean....I don't  
have any today. The bloody bank was shut yesterday.”

Rama is fed up with such useless visits as she knows the reality. She says :

“ Everyday a new mystic, a swami, an astrologer, a doctor...rubbing  
your head at the feet of every lump of stone he tells you to stretching  
out a begging hand to them.”

Rajaninath is the only man in the family of Pappa who understand Rama's feelings. He criticizes all the members of the family in his song and calls them as “ Five Vultures”:

“ Five Vultures  
On the swinging branch.....  
Of her rotted hopes.....  
Five.... Vultures.”

The relation between Rama and Rajaninath is cordial. She declares to him her intention of immolating herself. Rajaninath is the only person who understands her emotional needs and holds her in embrace. As a result, Rama becomes pregnant. 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.

But Umakant informs Ramakant about the illicit relation. Ramakant becomes furious and wants to abort the child. Rama’s longing for the child remains unfulfilled as Manik, her sister in-law in a fit of revenge aborts her child and Rama becomes childless again. This is the most shocking incident in the play. Through the incident, the playwright exposes the sickness that comes to characterize the Indian society in the modern times. K.V. Surendran observes, “Tendulkar frowns at the society around him which is known for its hypocrisy, lack of sincerity, promiscuity, dishonesty and a host of other ills. Tendulkar’s world is one where sex and violence have an upper hand”. As I. K Hemilla has rightly said -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 disease and Tendulkar successfully defined the dreadful deformities that form our culture. In the contemporary times, due to the spread of education, a man is supposed to be more cultured and civilized. Education differentiates humans from non-humans. Moreover the gift of thinking makes a man superior from other beings. He is supposed to think not only of himself but also the welfare of the society. But in the modern materialistic society, man is so much obsessed with physical appetites that he does not give any importance to social and spiritual aspects of life. Outwardly, he seems to be a healthy human being but internally he is rotten on emotional, cognitive, and spiritual level. In true terms, modern civilization increases the desires and instincts that jeopardize individual as well as social health. It is taking him back to primitive stage where from he develops into a rational and cultured being. He is going to be a creature sans social and spiritual consciousness. As a playwright, Vijay Tendulkar unravels this social sickness in his dramatic oeuvre. He portrays this malaise through the action, attitude and behavior of the dramatic personae. He seems to suggest that the loss of human and moral values in the face of increasingly materialistic mode of life is responsible for social sickness.

As Tendulkar confesses, we are always denying the presence of animal inside us, but the reality is that animal instinct has never ever been gone away. Tendulkar himself mentions in his own words: "I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of socio-economic background. I am curious to know what the mental status of Hitler or Stalin is. And so I wanted to meet them personally." It is clear from the above statement that Tendulkar was curious about the cruel behavior. He doesn't want to hate the person who carries cruelty but his concern is more psychoanalytical towards that behaviour. He finds violence and the exploited relationship as natural and eternal. It is the prominent need to subjugate, an expression of raw power exercised over the one without. Sin, sexuality, and savageness dominate the plot of "The Vultures". Pappa Pitale, Ramakant, Umakant etc. are the scum of the society sunk in immorality. As M. Sarat Babu observes, "It seems that these human vultures get as much intoxicated through resorting to violence as through drinking liquor." Of course there is intriguing violence in the play, and the root cause of this violence is money—money unlimited.

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