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Dysfunctional Family and the Theatre of Protest: A Critical Analysis of Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder*

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Abstract:

The well-known Indian dramatist Tendulkar utilises plays as a medium to discuss the complexities of relationships in Indian society. His plays, notably *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures*, highlight the complexity of interpersonal interactions, such as seclusion, loneliness, and the repression of defenseless individuals. His characters are likeable and confront conventional religious and societal mores, provoking introspection and raising hell over social ills. His plays portray important issues, including violence, dysfunctional relationships, and the breakdown of the joint family system. Additionally, he criticises the social abnormalities in Indian society, such as the westernisation or dispersion of cultural norms, which undermine Indian ethical standards and cause a cultural crisis. In contrast to Ibsen, Shaw, or Galsworthy, his plays do not provide escape but rather portray the societal, political and cultural truths of humanity. In addition to addressing the defects and shortcomings of society, people, family institutions, gender inequity, and the loss of family institutions, his plays show the frustration of the helpless and abandoned.

Keywords: Indian theatre, Theatre of Protest, Society, Family Relations, Societal Norms.

Introduction

The drama does not occur in a vacuum or isolation. It is a byproduct of the social and political context in which it exists, and it also impacts that context. Without some understanding of the environment outside the theatre, no theatrical endeavour can be fully appreciated. Tendulkar illuminates the connections and intricacy of the relationships inside and outside the

family. Isolation occurs from disobedience to social norms, authorities, and other people. It leads to secular individualism, psychological seclusion, and an isolationist self-image that is essentially romantic. Relationships and loneliness are prevalent themes in contemporary literature. Tendulkar expresses his displeasure against this notion and protests through his plays. He never tries to instil false ideals, feelings of nationalism, or patriotism in the hearts of his audience or readers. His characters are relatable people who fiercely challenge accepted social mores or religious beliefs. They demand a place in society that we are hesitant to give them. Tendulkar's plays elicit deep reflection. They ignite the audience's minds and raise hell over social evils and vices. Tendulkar cleverly employs the drama as a platform to speak out against injustices and the oppression of innocent people. Tendulkar falls victim to the horrible spell of mistrust, animosity, aggression, and sex fixation due to this process.

Tendulkar expertly manages the challenging situations. Significant life challenges, including psychological, sociopolitical, existential, feminised, and humanitarian, are realistically outlined. He protests against violence, warped relationships, the dissolution of the joint family system, adultery, hypocrisy, dual personalities, vulgarity, harshness, narrow-mindedness, and subjugation of women and society. He is aware of how drama serves as a passive form of protest against human and social injustices. His plays cannot be categorised as problem plays like those by Ibsen, Shaw, or Galsworthy since they portray the social, political, and cultural realities of humanity in their rawest form. Through the complex scenarios and situations, he does not offer any escapism; instead 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)

The playwright rebels against traditional settings and longs to create a new civilisation with fresh laws. He highlights the frustration of the helpless and abandoned, who go on to enjoy and forget their suffering by causing it to others. No matter a person's caste, creed, or status, this form of politics is widely available in Indian society. Drama, the most realistic form of art, is what he employs to portray people and their interactions. He gives the viewer a variety of ways to perceive what is going on in front of him.

Tendulkar is objecting to social anomalies in Indian society. He demonstrates how cultural diffusion or westernisation causes Indian ethical principles to erode, creating a space for a cultural crisis. Tendulkar registers numerous protests against the flaws and deficiencies of society, people, and family institutions, including the caste system, class system, gender inequality, man-woman relationships, adultery, female feticide, and female sex slavery. He denounces the shortcomings and annoyance of interpersonal connections. It fights gender norms and social exclusion, patriarchy and gender dominance, and sexual oppression and social marginalisation. It goes against the way that men should treat women. It fights against the institution of the family, gradually losing its allure. Tendulkar's protest against dysfunctional family relations, with particular reference to *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures*, will be discussed in this paper.

Critical Analysis of Dysfunctional Family Ties *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder*

Due to the impact of Western society, the current generation has grown far from its familial roots. They want space, privacy, and freedom. As a result, the joint family system can be replaced by the nuclear family system. Men's gaps have widened due to the generational gap, which has caused social and familial bonds to sever. Unhappiness is percolating in all spheres of life, and the rapid population expansion, materialism, and unemployment add fuel to the fire. Both husband and wife are now expected to split domestic responsibilities due to the massive increase in the cost of living in cities. Western influences and foreign media promote the degradation and depravity of Indian culture. Drug abuse and problems with premarital sex are already there, but they are exacerbated by moral failings and lack of self-control. The current generation does not uphold conventional ideals or act morally responsibly. Lack of respect for one another, rudeness, violence, and promiscuity seem to be the hallmarks of modern city life. Indian city dwellers have fallen into a hole of hopelessness. Nepotism and corruption exacerbate the issues and conflicts in our society. Women, kids, and seniors are the most at-risk populations in the country. All of these things unnerve the younger generation of today.

Rising prices and the high cost of living in cities are further effects that contribute to the dissolution of the joint family system and disrespect for elders. Money seems to be the new generation's driving principle, which results in man's exploitative attitude. In the commercial cultures of cities, selling and purchasing defines human life. To make money, modern man

employs various tactics to exploit the environment, other people, and his own family. Tendulkar's plays *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder* touch on these touchy issues.

In the play, *Sakharam Binder*, the abused children born to impatient, immature parents are represented by Sakharam Binder. He is mistreated by society, and in return, he treats others unfairly. The lower middle class and the oppressed are portrayed in this drama. He is aware of people's necessities and the interactions between men and women who are helping those in need. The ways and mannerisms of the underprivileged are prominently noted in this drama. The main character, Sakharam, becomes a legendary person through acting unethically. He pretends to be their master while abusing and torturing his so-called wife. The distorted human relationships in an urban, industrialised culture are the focus of *The Vultures*. The dramatist uses relationships, the nuclear family, and society to demonstrate the detrimental effects of an urbanised, industrialised culture. He gives examples of how individualisation is to blame for the dissolution of the nuclear family. Westernisation and modernisation have a negative impact on Indian society and the family. Hence, Shailaja B. Wadikar rightly comments that Tendulkar's plays "deal with smallness, pettiness of man along with anxieties and complexities that characterise the contemporary Indian society. The predicament of an individual in society constitutes, by and large, the thematic structure of his plays (Wadikar81)."

Tendulkar portrays the diversity of human character while demonstrating the brutality and sexual lust, deeply ingrained in human nature in the play *Sakharam Binder*. His criticism of society focuses on the breakdowns in interpersonal relationships, formerly considered the lifeblood of a civilisation that is rapidly eroding. The competitive spirit of society and the mania for comforts and status have quickly taken over its face. The harmony of marriage and the family, which are the most complicated human interactions, is being destroyed by this transformed face. Despite appearing crass, hostile, and violent, Sakharam has his own set of ethical standards. His line of work is bookbinding. His mother is a Mahar, and his father is a Brahmin. The playwright illustrates the results of intercaste marriage and how it affects kids. He makes an effort to draw attention to the risks associated with the dismantling of caste divisions, which stand in for Indian society's customs and standards of behaviour. As a result of his parents' repulsive character, Sakharam musters the strength to rebel against the established institutions of society. He endures horrendous abuse as a child at the hands of his father, and at the age of

eleven, he runs away. His father's violence and the difficult lessons of life are passed down to him.

He views interactions between men and women as merely casual and transactional. He does not think marriage is a valid institution. With the woman he brings home, he uses the barter system. Because he does not believe in marriage, he takes in abandoned women and maintains them as long as they are helpful. He gives the ladies clothing, food, and shelter in exchange for their satisfaction of his macho demands. He is a wholly agnostic individual who seeks to live as fully as possible. He behaves in an aggressive manner. He frequently describes himself as a self-made man with little regard for God. He says,

“This Sakharam Binder—he’s a terror.... He’s notscared of God or of God’s father (*Sakharam Binder* 126). Sakharam advises Laxmi,—We’re not saints. We’re men. I tell you, worship and prayer can’t satisfy the itch. If you want a thing, well, you’ve got to have it! What’s there to hide? And from whom? From our Father?” (*Sakharam Binder* 127).

Laxmi is taught the standards of reciprocity and relationship by Sakharam. He knows that a relationship is a two-way process in which both parties must contribute their sentiments and emotions. He believes that whatever he does is always correct. He frequently ignores the value of relationships in one’s life, as critiqued by Renuka:

“Though Sakharam keeps on repeating time and again in the play that he is no husband to forget common decency, he wants that the woman who lives with him shall have to be a wife to him. So, while he poses to be a saviour, he presents the picture of a brutal perpetrator and wretched victim of all that is bad in society regarding the man-woman relationship” (Renuka 34).

The difference in the attitude of Champa and Laxmi is also observed by Shailaja B. Wadikar when Laxmi;

“... claims for herself virtue and loyalty but finds nothing wrong about her relationship with an unknown man Fouzdar Shinde. Laxmi confronts nothing less

than a hell in Sakharam's house, she informs the latter of Champa's intimate association with Daud" (19).

The source of conflict in families and marriages is these extramarital or illicit relationships. They expose unquenchable passion in both men and women. Tendulkar objects to relationships that show the animal nature of people.

Sakharam finds Champa alluring and feels helpless in her presence. She leaves her husband, policeman Fouzdar, despite the fact that they are married, because of his harshness due to intoxication. Fouzdar Shinde's drinking habit affects his profession and family life. The women who must deal with their husbands' violence and cruelty because of their drug addiction are represented by Champa, who protests against alcoholism. Later, when they begin to beat their spouses, they transition from victim to perpetrator. Champa succumbs to circumstances and starts drinking to scratch Sakharam's itch. She is shown as possessing macho traits, such as drinking, hitting her spouse, and making men look helpless in her presence. Through *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar portrays the attitudes of society's men and women about traditional forms of marriage and family.

The interconnectedness and complexity of relationships both inside and beyond the family are exposed by Tendulkar. *The Vultures* reveals how family members' wild and crazy behaviour is caused by their financial avarice. They aim to rob other family members of their part and defraud each other. Pappa The Hari Sakharam Company, a construction company, is a sizable corporate enterprise founded by Hari Pitale and his brother Sakharam. To attain their goal, they have put in a lot of effort. Hari Pitale defrauds his brother, forces him to travel, and reduces him to a state of poverty. The children of Hari Pitale treat him poorly, and he responds by violently abusing them.

Pitale goes so far as to deceive his brother in order to provide for his kids, however, the kids themselves end up being carefree by engaging in drinking and other vices and never bother to work for a living or show respect for authority figures. As he becomes agitated, Hari Pitale furiously curses and criticises them for being useless. The playwright portrays the frail and defenceless state of older people in Indian society. He makes some reference to the necessity and significance of old-age institutions. He denounces the moral decay and corruption of society,

where people will use all deceptive techniques to obtain wealth. He highlights the shortcomings of the joint family arrangement, where everyone strives to maximise their riches by lying to one another. He shows in the play how each person is accountable for the joint family system's dissolution. Their lives are unstable as a result of their hostility and disregard for one another.

The Hari Pitale children are obsessed with money. By employing unethical methods, they aim to amass or extort wealth. Their primary obsession is with money. Relationships between people are meaningless. According to the strategy, they set Western music and made wine arrangements to bribe their father into giving them money. While Ramakant, Umakant, and Manik dance, Umakant fills a glass for his father. The children, who had previously been apathetic to their father, now adopt a charming demeanour to demand money from him. Maya Pandit notes that the Hari Pitale family is representative of “the decomposing state of the family where even the outward façade of decency has evaporated and what remains to be seen is the naked play of desire to possess, own, gain money and destroy another human being (71).”

Tendulkar reveals the inhumane side of city people who don't care much about their relationships through the members of the vulture family. He denounces their acerbic, self-centred, and excessively commercial way of life. The consumerist industrial culture is to blame for worshipping of shameless behaviour. Tendulkar demonstrates the pursuit of power and the deterioration and cruelty that result from it. The dramatist analyses how socio-economic, political, cultural, and ethical issues affect the relationships between many characters within their own families. The assaults of the process of urbanisation, materialism, and commercialisation of modern life have destroyed the sacredness of familial bonds founded on the ideals of respect, responsibility, and tolerance for one another.

The playwright emphasises the benefits and drawbacks of the family system. The power of tolerance and compromise are preserved in joint families, although rebellion often results from the assertion of one's identity, romantic love, a change in lifestyle (such as a late marriage), personal motives, and financial aspirations. Tendulkar emphasises these points in his plays, notably *The Vultures*. Finally, beneath the weight of various defects, the home crumbles.

Conclusion

The dialogue above demonstrates how social and familial bonds are deteriorating in Tendulkar's dramatic world due to personal avarice, hypocrisy, insensitivity, extramarital affairs, etc. In *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures*, the relationships among families are characterised by immorality, corruption, drug addiction, adultery, usurpation, greed, and fights. The dramatist emphasises the necessity of human qualities like peace, trust, affection, helpfulness, and tolerance to prevent death and disaster in the world. The playwright's treatment of the issues of exploitation, insensitivity, and greediness implies that only values like selflessness, generosity, cooperation, and tolerance may go a long way toward fostering peaceful familial and social relationships and preventing the collapse of civilisation.

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