

“Illustration of Relationship and Existence in Vijay Tendulkar’s Select Plays: An Existential Study”

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is a very prolific figure in the Modern Indian Drama. His portrayal of realism is quite striking and thought-provoking. This research article demonstrates the evils that hover in the present Indian society in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. It also analyses how Tendulkar communicates the social constraints to his audience. Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most prolific and controversial dramatists among the Post-Independence Indian playwrights. The researcher aims to discuss the illustration of relationship and Existence in connection with Existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical and literary perspective that focuses on the experience of an individual and the way that he or she understands the world. After World War II, some philosophers and writers saw the world as an indifferent place without a set of universal rules that is applied to everyone. Thematically, Tendulkar’s plays have ranged from the exploration of relationship of man and woman to reinterpret social, historical and political episodes that exist in the society. His plays concentrate on different aspects of the human character and complex behaviour of human relationship.

Key Words: *Relationship, Life, Exploration, Existence, Philosophy, etc.*

Vijay Tendulkar is an avant-garde playwright and he is one of the significant dramatists of Indian theatre. He is a keen observer of life. Nothing in the world escapes from his watchful eyes. He is realistic in portraying the problems of common man, intricacies of human relationship and discrimination against women in the patriarchal society. Vijay Tendulkar portrays women as victims in most of his major plays. The plays highlight the gender stereotyping that is forced upon them. The roles allotted to women in the patriarchal setup are purely domestic such as daughter, wife and mother. From birth to death, the girl child is subjected to the negative reinforcement for her vulnerability, mainly the sexual assault on her. A girl / woman is expected to be meek, submissive, patient, she should subordinate her will and desires to those of the male unselfishly.

As an experimental playwright, he delineates the degeneration of values and questions the existing value system. As a writer, he has a great social responsibility of presenting the hard realities of the happenings of the society. He writes with social consciousness and realism is his cup of tea. His audience finds their resemblance on the stage. Like Shakespeare, he is able to attract all kinds of audience. His plays deal with all the ills of the contemporary society. He simply depicts the issues of the society without suggesting any solutions. He has brought a sea change in the field of post-independent drama by projecting the stark realities of life, relationship and existence.

As an intellectual movement that exploded on the scene in mid-twentieth-century France, “existentialism” is often viewed as a historically situated event that emerged against the backdrop of the Second World War, the Nazi death camps, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, all of which created the circumstances for what has been called “the existentialist moment” (Baert 2015), where an entire generation was forced to confront the human condition and the anxiety-provoking givens of death, freedom, and meaninglessness. Although the most popular voices of this movement were French, most notably Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as compatriots such as Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the conceptual groundwork of the

movement was laid much earlier in the nineteenth century by pioneers like Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche and twentieth-century German philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers as well as prominent Spanish intellectuals José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno. The core ideas have also been illuminated in key literary works. Beyond the plays, short stories, and novels by French luminaries like Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus, there were Parisian writers such as Jean Genet and André Gide, the Russian novelists.

Vijay Tendulkar, with his *Silence! the court is in Session* has occupied a unique place in the contemporary Indian drama in English. An amateur drama group from Bombay has come to a nearby village to enact a mock trial of president Johnson for producing atomic weapons. Leela Benare, the central character is a school teacher. Mr. Kashikar, the chairman is the judge and Sukhatme plays the role of a lawyer for both prosecution and defence. since Rawte, the fourth witness for the trial is sick with flu, they have decided to have Samant, an innocent village boy, in his place. in order to show Samant the court proceedings, they plan to have the rehearsal of a mock trial of a woman instead of the American president.

Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide under section no: 32. She is a simple, straightforward woman. She is a middle-aged, educated and employed woman. She is a sincere and favourite teacher of her students. She loves her profession very much. She is assertive and determined not to bother about the rumours about her. She loves her life and wants to live every moment of it in her own way. Her personal life is analysed and criticised in the name of mock trial. As an independent woman, she is not bound by the social norms and culture. She never tries to fit herself into the established norms of the society. No doubt, she is a rebel: “who are these people to say what I can or can’t do? my life is my own – I haven’t sold it to 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...” (STCIS 58).

In the beginning of the trial, she makes fun of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar. The witnesses Gopal Ponshe, Balurokde the adapted son of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Karnik and Samant are all men and they have made use of the opportunity to humiliate Benare. They shamelessly dissect the personal life of Benare ruthlessly. Their vulgar mind and brutal mentality is exposed by this. In the disguise of a mock trial, they gradually probe the private life of Benare and damage her self-respect and dignity. She shouts at them, “you’ve all deliberately ganged up against me! you’ve plotted against me!” (92). Sukhatme and Kashikar glorify motherhood and motherland. ironically, they insult Benare and also ask her to abort her illegitimate child. V. N. Dass observes: “the very men who give lectures on the dignity of women and motherhood are responsible for inflicting shame and indignity on her” (12). Benare feels suffocated and falls an easy prey to those vultures.

She has the courage to confess her teenage love for her maternal uncle and admits her admiration for professor Damle’s intellectual capability. But her maternal uncle and Professor Damle are cowards since they are afraid to face the reality unlike Benare. If Benare’s affair is really wrong, both the men should be punished. but our patriarchal society finds it alright for men and punish only the women. Typically, Professor Damle is not even called for the trial. None of the man understands her mental torment. for them, the trial is a game of great fun. no doubt, the men who conduct the trial are mean, indecent and crooked. Banerjee opines:

the theatre group is a “miniscule” cross-section of middle-class society, the members representative of its different sub-strata. their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerisms reflect their petty circumscribed existences. they enjoy a kind of sadistic pleasure by exposing her private life. they are mean, cunning and crooked (Banerjee, introduction, viii).

Jaisingh Jadhav, the central character of *Kamala* is a male chauvinist. He is a journalist, keen on giving sensational news for his professional development. He buys kamala, an Adivasi woman from the human flesh market of Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar, not out of humanity but with a cunning plan to give sensational news so that he can get promotion. kamala is bought “for two hundred and fifty rupees. even a bullock costs more than that” (14).

Vijay Tendulkar’s play **Vultures** projects the pair of women Manik and Rama, both the women exhibit contrast with each other. Manik symbolizes the concept of free women / modern woman, whereas Rama represents the traditional concept of idealism. among the five vultures of Haripitale’s family, Rama is the exact opposite – she painted in the pastel shades of innocence, purity, goodness and willing subservience. The only shade in her life that

asserts itself boldly, when she expresses her desire for the body of the outcast and half-brother of her husband – the poet Rajaniath.

In the play she is introduced indirectly in the opening scene of act I through Rajani Nath's long song, who narrates the history of last 25 years of Haripital's house. He gives the tree picture of Rama's life in the last twenty-five years. She got married to Ramakant, the eldest son of Haripital, Aman addicted to liquor. and the journey towards miserable world starts for Rama. she is directly introduced in Scene II, Act I of the play as she offers prayers devoutly to the basil. But she feels disturbed due to the quarrel inside the house and hurriedly finishes the rituals. Her husband Ramakant beats the gardener who is asking for salary and Rama sympathizes with him and says that they haven't paid him for the last two months. she is being scolded by Manik, her sister – in law for not getting her up at morning, Rama tries to defend herself by saying – 'I called out your name, but your door her far not giving him tea or calling him far tea at the time. she again defends herself helping and says 'I was waiting for you to getup'' (P 67). so, like an average daughter – in – law of Indian society she is dominated by the in – laws.

The plays of both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani reveal that in the patriarchal set up marriage is not only a means of regulating sexual and reproductive behaviour but also a means of upholding male dominance. From childhood the girl child is made to feel that her life and destiny revolve around the biological cycles of puberty, menstruation, child – birth and menopause. A woman who does not conceive becomes an 'aberration' even when the fault is not hers. And the same is the case with Rama. Rama's anguish and disappointment at her childlessness has been poignantly divulged in her soliloquy. Her survival in the house of vultures is –every day, a new death. Every minute, a thousand, million deaths. a pain like a million needles stuck in her heart.

The barrenness in her life is due to Ramakanth who does not accept it and takes her to different saints and Swamiji. She is fed up with such useless visit as she knows the reality, she says 'everyday a new mystic; a swami, an astrologer, a doctor... rubbing your head at the feet of ever lump of store he tells you to stretching out a begging hand to them'' (P 45). Referring to her barrenness she says,

It's not the fault of doctors, of learned men, of saints and says! it's not even my fault! this womb's healthy and sound, I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil is rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root. if the seed's soaked in poison, if it's weak, feeble, lifeless, devoid of virtue – then why blame the soul? and if still the soil, should that seed should with God as it's... (56).

Rama as an individual who is only understood by Rajani Nath who loves her genuinely and pours out Rama's agonies in his poems. Kalindidespande in her paper "capitulation to conservatism Vijay Tendulkar's women characters" writes,

The hundred-year-old social reform movement against female subjugation seem to come alive in the literary representations of women in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. They echo and re-echo jyotibaphooley's discussion of this question and her attribution of female suffering to the partiality of the institutions of family and marriage in Indian society (P 8).

Thus, Vijay Tendulkar acts as a real artist who has excessive love for theatre and his depiction of social problems in his plays could be very beautifully illustrated in the light of Existentialism. Every character undergoes change and tries to create his/her meanings in life. His sense of realism without any artificiality is something that should be commended.

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