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VIJAY TENDULKAR : THE MAN AND THE DRAMATIST

Vijay Tendulkar has been in the frontline of not only Marathi but Indian theatre for almost four decades. Beginning his career as a dramatist in the mid fifties, this prolific writer has produced twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one act plays, and eleven children's dramas. A good number of his works have been translated and produced in major Indian languages. He is one of the four prominent dramatists that emerged in 1960s on the literary horizons of India. These four playwrights from different regions of India, writing in their own regional languages, were said to have ushered modernity into the sphere of Indian drama and theatre. They were Mohan Raksh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannada. Rakesh's untimely death left his life's work incomplete and Karnad has written only intermittently. Sircar, of course, has been almost as active as Tendulkar, though his plays can be divided into three distinct periods. Tendulkar, however, has not only been the most productive but has also introduced the greatest variations in his dramatic creations.

Beginning from *Grihastha* (House holder) (1955), Tendulkar has travelled a long way. A journalist by profession, he has penned daily columns in newspapers, started his career as a creative author by writing short stories, composed children's plays, diverged later into screenplay writing, translated and adapted novels and plays both from English and from regional languages. His creativity has a prismatic quality myriad potentials and a multitude of colours seem to emanate from it. The greatest-quality which Tendulkar can claim as a creative writer and dramatist is an ability to simultaneously involve and distance himself from his creation.

Tendulkar's first major work that set him apart from previous generation Marathi playwrights was *Manus Navache Bet* (An Island Called Man) (1955), which gave expression to the tormenting solitude and alienation of a modern individual in an urbane, industrialized society. A number of plays followed *Manus Navache Bet*. These were *Madhlya Bhirti* (The Walls Between) (1958), *Chimnicha Ghar Hota Menacha* (Nest of Wax) (1958), *Mee Jinklo Mee Harlo* (I Won, I Lost) (1963), *Kavalanchi Shala* (School for Crows) (1963), *Sari Ga Sari* (Rain, O Rain) (1964). "In all these early plays, Tendulkar is concerned with the middle class individual set against the backdrop of a hostile society. Another distinctive feature of these plays is the absence of

an easy solution. Tendulkar presents modern man in all his complexities. He portrays life as it is from different angles, without trying to moralize or philosophize in any way. Most of these works are endowed with his characteristic style of dialogue—jerky, half-finished, yet signifying more than what it says. Another implicit quality of the treatment of his subjects in all these creations is an underlying sympathy for the 'little big man' in our modern world." (Arundhati Banerjee).

Vijay Tendulkar emerged as a rebel against the established values of a fundamentally orthodox society. He is known as the angry young man of Marathi theatre. With the production of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session) in 1967, Tendulkar became the centre of general controversy. This depiction of harsh social attitude towards a woman, Leela Benare, is worth appreciation. Through a so-called 'game', the Judge and the witnesses expose the private life activities of Miss Benare. Also, their attitude exhibits the basic hypocrisy and double standards of society. However, Leela Benare boldly defends herself against the onslaught of the upholders of social norms. During the court proceedings, on several occasions, her objections and protestations are ignored by the judge, crying 'Silence!' and banging the gravel. Benare's monologue is more a self justification than an attack on society's hypocrisies. It is poignant, sensitive and highlights the vulnerability of women in Indian society.

Tendulkar is said to have been influenced by western play and films. According to Arundhati Banerjee, "It must, however, be mentioned in this context that Tendulkar himself has admitted to being generally influenced in his early days by Western films, mainly the Hollywood films of the forties, and western playwrights like Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and J. B. Priestley in particular. He has also stated on occasion that he has consciously and unconsciously been inspired by just about everything around him : real life experiences, hearsay, news items, films, plays and literature in general". His chief concern has always been the human condition. He himself says, "But the basic urge has always been to let out my concerns vis-a-vis my reality : the human condition as I perceive it."

Tendulkar has not taken up uniform themes and not used similar techniques in all his plays. There is a variety in his themes and ways of presentation. His play, *Dambadwipcha Mukabala* (Encounter in Umbugland), produced a year after *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a political allegory. The powerful satire that Tendulkar builds, exposes the intricate political intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the corruption involved in holding on to them. His *Ghasiram Kotwal* is another political play that raised storms in literary and political circles. *Gidhade* (The Vultures), chronologically the next play to be produced (1970) and published (1971)

after *Dambadwipcha Mukabala*, was actually written fourteen years before. This is an entirely different kind of creation. It exhibits the astonishing range of Tendulkar's dramatic genius. With the production and publication of *Gidhade* Tendulkar's name became associated with sensationalism, sex and violence. He has successfully created a sensitive, naturally kind and good hearted individual in Rama, Ramakant's wife. However, she has been depicted as a helpless, submissive, tender little bird among the vultures. Her illicit relationship with her half-brother-in-law, Rajaninath, is strictly frowned at by the conservative heads of the social set-up.

His *Sukharam Binder* is probably the most intensely naturalistic play. Sukharam, the book-binder, is a Brahmin by caste, but his actions and temperament are quite different from any member of that particular caste. Sukharam has been depicted as a crude, aggressive and a violent man. He has framed his own laws of personal morality; and he follows them strictly and maintains his moral standards in all conditions. Tendulkar's *Kamala* (1981) is another thought-provoking play in the galaxy of Indian drama. It was inspired by a real life incident – the *Indian Express* expose by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference for his popularity and position in his profession.

Jaisingh Jadav, a self-seeking journalist, in the play *Kamala*, purchases a girl from the flesh-market and uses her as an object that can buy him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. He is one of those modern day individuals with a single-track mind, who pursue their goal unquestioningly. Jadav never stops to think what will happen to *Kamala* after this expose. Through the story of *Kamala*, Tendulkar exposes the selfish and immoral trends and approaches that have crept in modern journalism.

The above-mentioned prominent and popular plays show that Tendulkar has been a writer with a purpose. He dauntlessly exposed the hidden realities of court, politics and journalism. Beginning his career as a journalist, Tendulkar has penned daily columns in newspapers, has written short stories, composed children's plays, diverged later into screenplay writing, translated and adapted novels and plays both from English and from regional languages.

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In a nutshell, Vijay Tendulkar is such an impressive writer that he commands the attention of his reader as well as audience. He is known as

the most turbulent and controversial dramatist among the modern Marathi playwrights. Tendulkar is said to be the pioneer who changed not only the external framework of the Marathi drama but also the limits of the picture of life at the core. His plays helped to refine the Marathi drama that was so far polluted by propaganda for political awakening, social reforms and cheap and vulgar entertainment. The only reason for this being that he began writing plays after delving deep into human relations. He did not indulge in painting superficial conflicts in bright colours, on the other hand he presented the egoistic tensions, effectively. Tendulkar has not only written plays but also inspired the young genuine talented ones to become dramatists. He has guided the Marathi drama that seemed to have lost its proper track, and has kept leading it for over two decades. Tendulkar's place-importance in this respect shall remain permanent in the history of Marathi drama.