



Social Concern in The Selected Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar (7 January 1928 – 19 May 2008) was a distinguished Indian dramatist, screenwriter, essayist, political journalist, and social commentator, primarily in Marathi. His plays have been translated and staged in other Indian languages. By emphasizing significant social events and political transformations throughout his lifetime, he emerged as a prominent radical political voice in contemporary Indian literature. His initial hardships and residence in Mumbai's chawls provided him with direct insight into urban lower middle-class existence. A multitude of his plays drew inspiration from actual events or societal turmoil, illuminating the stark realities of Indian civilization. The characters in "Sakharam Binder" are influenced by the power dynamics in their interactions, with Sakharam representing the harsh patriarchal rules that govern his treatment of women. This results in the creation of intricate and conflicted individuals who must maneuver within the limitations imposed by society. In "Ghashiram Kotwal," the characters are shaped by the prevailing political corruption and class conflict, resulting in moral quandaries and violent clashes that underscore the importance of social issues on their evolution. These plays illustrate how societal issues influence and define the characters, highlighting the complex interplay between social background and character development.

Key Words: Social, Realities, Middle class, Upheavals, Feminism, Gender roles, Capitalism etc.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar, a distinguished Indian playwright, is recognized for his audacious and intellectually stimulating works that frequently confront societal norms and conventions. His plays examine themes including power dynamics, corruption, and the challenges faced by underprivileged groups in Indian society. Tendulkar's compelling narrative and incisive dialogue have garnered critical acclaim and solidified his status as one of India's most significant playwrights. His most renowned works encompass "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" (Silence! The Court is in Session), which critiques societal hypocrisy and misogyny, and "Sakharam Binder," which interrogates conventional

notions of marriage and relationships. Tendulkar's capacity to address hard realities and initiate significant dialogues has cemented his status as a bold and

influential writer in Indian literature. His impact persists in inspiring playwrights and audiences to challenge the present quo and pursue a more just and equal society.

His characters are authentic and devoid of moralization. Tendulkar's works are naturalistic and eschew idealized representations, instead depicting reality in its authentic form. Shailja Wadikar asserts: "He can be perceived as a discreet social activist who subtly aims to transform individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors." Shailja Wadikar, 2008 Tendulkar's works pose inquiries rather than providing answers or statements. In a recent interview, Tendulkar stated: "By refraining from

providing a solution, I allow for various possibilities regarding the direction of the change.” (Saran & Patil, 1993)

Wadikar accurately stated: “The playwright aims to depict the modern individual along with his predicaments, challenges, difficulties, and complexities.” Shailja Wadikar, 2008 Sudhir Sonalkar accurately observes in his piece, “In Tendulkar’s plays, the ethical question remains both unaddressed and unresolved.” Sudhir Sonalkar, 1993 Tendulkar's works

serve as a mirror, reflecting the internal and external realms of individuals. He emphasizes two key facets of Indian society: male supremacy and female susceptibility.

2. THEME

All of Tendulkar's works examine various facets of human nature and the intricacies of relationships. He analyzes familial connections at multiple levels in works such as Kamala, Kanyadaan, Ghashiram Kotwal, and Gidhade. In *The Vultures*, he illustrates how avarice for wealth propels family members into insanity. Kamala exposes the vacuity in a marital connection, while in Ghashiram Kotwal, a father compromises his daughter's virtue to fulfill his aspirations. Tendulkar introduces significant diversity and creativity in both ideas and structure.

Be silent! The Court is in Session (1967) is among Tendulkar's finest plays, initially composed in Marathi and subsequently translated into English by Priya Adarkar. The play is lauded for its artistic ingenuity and originality, as it "merges social critique with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society." Arundhati Banerjee

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The play is lauded for its artistic ingenuity and inventiveness. Within the human psyche, Tendulkar's works are grounded in his observations of life, society, and personal experiences. This drama examines the topic of unmarried individuals. *Be silent! The Court* is in Session was inspired by a genuine incident that Tendulkar overheard. He assisted a group of amateur actors go to Vile Parle, a neighborhood of Mumbai, to perform a fake trial. The play is organized like a "play within a play" or a rehearsal. It depicts the challenges faced by a young lady in a male-dominated world and critiques societal deficiencies. The play portrays modern existence, exposing the harsh realities of parenthood.

Leela Benare is the protagonist of the play who defies societal traditionalism. Tendulkar depicts her with empathy and insight, emphasizing her battle against a self-serving, hypocritical, and patriarchal society. She is a committed educator and an ardent artist; so, she joined the amateur theatre company. The additional group members consist of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, Prof. Damle, and Mr. Rawte, all hailing from Mumbai's urban middle class. Leela is distinct due to her enthusiasm for life and her desire to disseminate her joy, however her magnanimity is unrecognized by others. Her personal life exposes their feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction,

and suppressed desires. They are unable to comprehend, value, or partake in her elation.

Shailja Wadikar states that Leela Benare's role parallels Ibsen's renowned heroine Nora from *A Doll's House*, as both women confront the harsh realities of a world fraught with difficulties and problems. Miss Benare experiences dual betrayal in love: initially by her uncle and subsequently by Professor Damle. The initial betrayal diminishes with time, yet the subsequent one ensnares her in a merciless game orchestrated by her associates, as her pregnancy has already exposed her infidelity.

From the outset of the pretend trial, Benare is charged with infanticide. The trial intensifies as her co-actors orchestrate it to scrutinize her personal life. Marginalized and victimized by society, she proposes marriage to any of them, yet none acquiesce. Consequently, she is terminated from her employment and mandated to terminate her pregnancy. Simultaneously, Professor Damle, equally culpable, encounters no repercussions. Benare represents simplicity, innocence, and honesty, whereas her companions embody malice. Her tragedy illustrates the punishment of women's innocence in a patriarchal culture, although men's intentional actions frequently remain unpunished.

In the play, Tendulkar reveals the sinister aspects of human nature, including treachery, cruelty, and violence. In the play, cultured and refined middle-class individuals exhibit aggression and cruelty against a female companion, deriving pleasure from her misfortune. Benare unjustly endures punishment for a crime she did not perpetrate, as she states, "These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century." Observe their visages - how fierce they appear! Their lips are replete with charming, overused expressions! "Their bellies are filled with unfulfilled desires." Vijay Tendulkar, *Silence! The Court* is in Session 117

In *Silence! The Court* is in Session, Tendulkar condemns the hypocritical male conduct prevalent in Indian society, where women are frequently oppressed. Any minor endeavor by a woman to assert her autonomy is vehemently resisted. Benare's tragedy illustrates that women are fated to endure suffering, even within the most educated and cultured segments of society. The drama *The Vultures* (1971), initially composed in Marathi as *Gidhade*, presents a bleak depiction of its characters and activities. It distinguishes itself from Tendulkar's other works by its unflinching exploration of human nature. The drama illustrates intrinsic aggression, egotism, sensuality, and malevolence among individuals. It authentically depicts gender and interpersonal violence against women caught between their aspirations and familial duties. The play encountered severe criticism, leading to a temporary suspension of its public performances. Characters such as Ramakant, Umakant, and Manik exhibit traits akin to their father, Hari Pitale, consistently prepared to betray one another and even inflict damage for financial gain. They harbor mutual suspicion, resulting in a lack of peace of mind.

All family members, excluding Rama and Rajaninath, exhibit vulturous behavior, hence the title of the drama, *The Vultures*. It depicts individuals acting like vultures. The children emulate their father's conduct, who deceived his brother in business to attain fortune. They constitute a collective of vultures. The environment is permeated with distrust and hostility. Manik's assertion substantiates this: "Ha!" Should I leave it open? Therefore, can all of you come and strangle me? It is due to my diligence that I have endured this residence! Do you believe that human beings inhabit this place? Tendulkar, *Vulture*, 207

Ramakant and Umakant's avarice compels them to assault their father when he declines to disclose the existence of his secret bank account. Upon failing to extract funds from Manik's paramour, the Raja of Hondur, they coercively compel her to terminate her pregnancy. Near the conclusion of the drama, Manik exacts retribution by terminating the pregnancy of her brother's wife. The family's behavior, encompassing Hari Pitale's treachery towards his brother, the sons assaulting their father, and the coerced abortions of Manik and Rama, illustrates the profound animosity they harbor for one another. Shailja Wadikar states: "In *The Vultures*, the characters are fundamentally flawed, lacking any redeeming qualities." Shailja Wadikar, 2008

Rama, the spouse of Ramakant, is characterized as delicate, obedient, and vulnerable amidst the callous family members. She engages with Rajaninath, her brother-in-law, and ultimately conceives with him due to her husband's impotence resulting from excessive alcohol consumption. Rama acquiesces to this criminal relationship due to a lack of alternatives. The play explicitly depicts sexual interactions, violence, and abusive language, which astonishes the audience. It depicts elements that have not yet been seen in Indian Theatre.

The 1981 play *Kamala* is inspired by a genuine story. The inspiration stemmed from Ashwin Sarin's exposé in the Indian Express, in which he purchased a girl from a rural flesh market and showcased her in a news conference. Tendulkar underscores severe societal truths with this occurrence. He critiques journalism and matrimony. In the play, Jaisingh Jadhav, an egocentric journalist, purchases Kamala, an Adivasi woman, from a rural brothel and showcases her at a press conference. He intends to assist Kamala; rather, he exploits her to secure a promotion and enhance his reputation. His fixation on notoriety renders him callous and inconsiderate.

The drama *Kamala* underscores a stark truth: newspapers, intended to foster social transformation and understanding, have transformed into instruments for acquiring acclaim and influence. Tendulkar critiques matrimony. Sarita, the spouse of Jaisingh, epitomizes the subjugation of women as slaves, servants, or instruments for men. Kamala's presence reveals Sarita's husband's greedy and duplicitous character. Kamala assists Sarita in recognizing that she is also subservient to her husband. Jaisingh regards both women as instruments: Kamala advances his career,

while Sarita offers household solace and sexual gratification.

The play reveals the subjugation of women as subservient beings in a patriarchal Indian society. Kamala assists Sarita in recognizing her subordinate position within the household, asserting that she, like Kamala, is also a slave. Kamala's viewpoint on acclimating to life with Jaisingh is enlightening for Sarita. Kamala states: "Memsahib, if you do not misconstrue, I shall inform you." The masters acquired you: he acquired me as well... Therefore, we must remain here as sisters. We shall ensure the master's satisfaction. We shall ensure his prosperity. The master shall procreate. For fifteen days of the month, you will share a bed with the master; for the remaining fifteen days, I shall do so. Do you concur? (Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 35 years old)

The female characters in the drama exhibit traits such as simplicity, innocence, sincerity, kindness, and loyalty to their male counterparts. Sarita's role illustrates that contemporary women are not as liberated as males, as they must adhere to their husbands' desires and oversee domestic responsibilities. Sarita recognizes that her position in the household parallels that of Kamala. However, when Jaisingh becomes unemployed, she provides him with emotional support rather than resisting. In the last moments, Sarita informs Kakasaheb: "However, there will come a day, Kakasaheb, when I shall cease to be a slave." I will no longer be an item to be utilized and discarded. I shall act according to my desires, and no one shall govern me. That day must arrive. I will pay any price necessary for it. Tendulkar, *Kamala*, 52

In the play "*Kamala*," Tendulkar illustrates the egotism and duplicity of the contemporary youth. He emphasizes that society's fixation on wealth and achievement renders individuals callous and unreflective.

3. WRITING STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Throughout his oeuvre, Vijay Tendulkar's writing style and technique consistently seek to stimulate contemplation and contest societal conventions. His plays, such as *Sakharam Binder*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, and *The Vultures* are distinguished for their realism, incisive dialogue, and profound subjects. Tendulkar's writing is characterized by its realism, depicting persons and circumstances in an authentic and lifelike manner.

His employment of speech is notably impactful, with crisp and piercing exchanges between characters that disclose their deepest thoughts and motivations. This discussion enriches the characters and underscores the societal tensions and conflicts. Tendulkar utilizes new theatrical structures to amplify the effect of his pieces. For instance, In *Silence! The Court is in Session* using a fake trial during a theatrical rehearsal to examine themes of justice and morality in a distinctive and captivating manner. Tendulkar's writing style and technique are defined by realism, precision, and a novel approach to storytelling. His plays remain pertinent and

influential, prompting spectators to engage in critical reflection on society and their surroundings. Tendulkar employs language, dialogue, and dramatic structure to craft fascinating narratives that engage with the audience.

4. IMPACT ON TENDULKAR'S WRITING

The works of Vijay Tendulkar have significantly influenced Indian theatre and society, questioned conventions and stimulating thinking and discourse. This contradicted conventional notions of marriage and ethics, igniting dialogues regarding the position of women in society and the limits of individual liberty. Likewise, *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* challenged viewers with the stark truths of class conflict and social indifference. The play's depiction of a mock trial during a theater practice revealed entrenched biases and injustices in society, compelling audiences to confront unsettling realities regarding privilege and power dynamics. *Gidhade* addressed the problem of political corruption and ethical decline, portraying a politician eager to compromise his ideals for self-interest. The play's depiction of the decline of ethical standards in politics resonated with spectators, emphasizing the necessity for integrity and accountability in public life. The drama addressed the widespread problem of political corruption and ethical decline, reflecting the more sinister elements of politics and society. Tendulkar, through the politician's persona, underscored the perils of unrestrained authority and the degradation of ethical standards in public life, advocating for enhanced accountability and integrity in governance.

In *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar examines topics of personal liberty and societal limitations through the figure of Sakharam, who challenges conventional standards to exist according to his own principles. The piece not only interrogated the institution of marriage but also emphasized the agency and empowerment of the women who opted to cohabit with him, contesting dominant perceptions of victimhood and passivity.

5. SOCIAL ISSUES

In his notable plays, Vijay Tendulkar adeptly employs drama to confront significant societal concerns that were present in Indian society during his era, many of which remain relevant now. "*Sakharam Binder*" explores the intricacies of marriage and ethics, questioning conventional beliefs and emphasizing the quest for individual autonomy, particularly for women. Tendulkar, through the character of Sakharam Binder, interrogates the sanctity of marriage and examines the mechanics of power and control in partnerships. All rights are possessed by the affluent; even the most basic experiences, such as feeling emotions, are unforeseen for the impoverished, as articulated in the remark, "Madness is a luxury of the rich."

The impoverished lack the luxury of anger. Other characters represent various societal issues.

In *Gidhade*, Tendulkar directs his attention to political corruption and the erosion of morality, depicting a bleak portrayal of a society afflicted by avarice and depravity. Tendulkar uses the politician's character to reveal the

corruption inherent in the political system and to interrogate the ethical foundation of society. The drama addressed the topic of caste inequality and the marginalization of lower-caste populations. Tendulkar compels his audience to confront disquieting realities of society and human nature through these plays. Compelling them to contemplate the persistent social challenges that impact us. His works exemplify the capacity of theatre to incite thought, foster dialogue, and catalyze change, establishing him as a prominent figure in Indian theatre and social critique.

Tendulkar's works not only entertain audiences but also provide a platform for discussing significant social issues. Tendulkar illuminates the inequities and prejudices afflicting Indian society through his compelling storytelling and thought-provoking storylines. By confronting taboo topics and questioning cultural standards, he invites his audience to examine their own views and values. Tendulkar's dedication to social issues in his plays has profoundly influenced the Indian literary scene, motivating a new generation of writers to employ their craft as a means for social transformation. His work has initiated significant discourse and transformed perspectives on societal concerns. Tendulkar's commitment to illuminating challenging subjects has garnered him acclaim from both reviewers and spectators. His plays persist in resonating with global audiences, exemplifying the capacity of art to stimulate contemplation and incite action. Tendulkar's narrative has both delighted and enlightened, prompting audiences to engage in critical reflection about their surroundings. Tendulkar's play "*Sakharam Binder*" confronts the sensitive issue of gender roles and domestic violence in Indian society, igniting significant discourse on women's rights and empowerment. The play has been staged internationally, enhancing awareness and motivating audiences to combat gender-based violence. Furthermore, Tendulkar's play "*Silence! The Court is in Session*" explores the intricacies of justice and morality within the judicial framework, encouraging spectators to scrutinize their own convictions and principles. This thought-provoking work has been performed in multiple nations, igniting dialogues around truth, authority, and the necessity of advocating against injustice.

6. MARXIST THEORY

Applying Marxist theory to Vijay Tendulkar's works entails examining his plays through the framework of Marxist ideas, with specific emphasis on issues of class conflict, economic disparity, and exploitation. This is a method for applying Marxist theory to Tendulkar's plays:

Alienation: Marxist theory frequently examines how capitalism might cause individuals to become estranged from their labor and from one another. In Tendulkar's works, characters such as Sakharam Binder or the politician in *Gidhade* exemplify alienation from society and their own humanity, attributable to the demands of capitalism and societal conventions.

Class Struggle: Tendulkar's plays frequently portray persons from marginalized or lower socioeconomic

backgrounds who contend with oppressive circumstances. In *Sakharam Binder*, Sakharam's repudiation of conventional marriage exemplifies a sort of defiance against cultural rules that sustain class distinctions.

Economic Inequality: Tendulkar's depiction of characters enduring poverty or economic adversity underscores the societal differences in wealth. In *Gidhade*, the politician embodies the ruling class, exploiting the impoverished for personal benefit, hence illustrating Marxist concepts of exploitation and class struggle.

Exploitation: Tendulkar's works frequently reveal diverse manifestations of exploitation, including the subjugation of women in *Sakharam Binder* and the oppression of the populace by unscrupulous politicians in "*Gidhade*". These representations correspond with the Marxist critique of capitalism societies, wherein the ruling class abuses the working class for economic advantage.

Revolution: Marxism frequently promotes revolution as a method to dismantle capitalist structures. Tendulkar's works may not overtly illustrate revolutions, nevertheless they advocate for social change and contest the present quo, resonating with Marxist concepts of dismantling repressive systems.

Critique of Capitalism: Tendulkar challenges capitalism in his plays, emphasizing its intrinsic inequalities and injustices. Tendulkar's plays portray characters that defy conventional standards and contest the established quo, thereby calling for a more egalitarian and just society, consistent with Marxist principles.

7.FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S PLAYS

Vijay Tendulkar's plays not only reflect the socio-political milieu of his era but also provide a significant venue for feminist discourse. Tendulkar's nuanced portrayal of female characters and exploration of gender relations provide a profound reflection on the situation of women in Indian society and their quest for autonomy and equality. In *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar's women, despite their oppressed situation, exert their agency and contest conventional gender stereotypes. The character of Laxmi exemplifies endurance and courage as she navigates life according to her own principles, rejecting society expectations. Tendulkar portrays Laxmi as a lady who rejects societal constraints. Despite experiencing loss and rejection, Laxmi affirms her autonomy and elects to live life according to her own principles, contesting the prevailing narrative of women as passive victims.

In *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe*, Miss Benare represents defiance against patriarchal conventions. Her steadfast defiance and refusal to be silenced amid societal scrutiny underscore the tenacity of women against injustice. Miss Benare's persona challenges society's conventions by candidly embracing her sexuality and rejecting conventional roles.

Gidhade critiques patriarchy through female characters, such as the journalist and ordinary individuals, who embody resistance and transformation. Tendulkar,

through these characters, contests the perception of women as passive victims and depicts them as proactive agents of change. These characters underscore the significance of female voices in contesting and deconstructing systems.

8. CONCLUSION

Vijay Tendulkar's plays profoundly reflect the intricate and multidimensional structure of Indian culture, addressing subjects of feminism, Marxist theory, class differences, and diversity. Tendulkar's works transcend simple storytelling, providing a critical perspective for analyzing the complexities of societal structures and human connections.

A notable feature of Tendulkar's works is his examination of feminism and the societal role of women. Tendulkar critiques conventional gender standards and underscores the hardships encountered by women in a patriarchal society with characters such as Laxmi in *Sakharam Binder* and Miss Benare in *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe*. His depiction of robust, autonomous female characters constitutes a significant commentary on the necessity of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Moreover, Tendulkar's works exalt the diversity of Indian society by depicting characters from a multitude of origins and experiences. This variety encompasses not only socio-economic status but also includes caste, religion, and regional identity. Tendulkar employs a varied ensemble of characters to illustrate the intricate intricacies and contradictions of Indian society. Furthermore, Tendulkar's works offer a sophisticated critique of class stratifications and economic disparities within Indian society. Characters such as the politician in *Gidhade* exemplify the predatory tendencies of the ruling class, underscoring the obvious inequalities in wealth and position. Tendulkar's Marxist inclinations are evident in his criticism of capitalism and his support for social reform to rectify systematic inequities.

Vijay Tendulkar's plays exemplify his astute societal observations and steadfast dedication to authentically depicting its realities. His writings remain pertinent, reflecting our society and prompting us to face hard realities. Tendulkar's influence as a dramatist and social commentator persists, motivating us to pursue a more open, equal, and compassionate society. Tendulkar is a sensitive and imaginative writer. He illustrated the disconnection of contemporary individuals from politics and the dominance of men over women. He depicted both overt and covert cruelty in humanity and shown acute awareness of women's susceptibility inside Indian society. His primary emphasis is the interaction between individuals and society. In his plays, he adeptly illustrates the concealed aggression and yearning within middle-class existence, the ensuing devastation, and the solitude of individuals. His plays exhibit a profound connection to reality and frequently incorporate the violence inherent in human existence. Tendulkar's oeuvre examines the conflicts between individuals and society, showcasing his ingenuity via many forms and hues.

In conclusion, social concern is a pivotal and substantial element of Vijay Tendulkar's plays. Tendulkar's

writings explore complicated problems such as racism, economic inequality, gender expectations, and society conventions, serving as a potent motivator for introspection and action. Tendulkar illuminates these critical topics, compelling audiences to examine their views and biases, so motivating them to strive for a more just and equal world for all.

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