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VIOLENCE TAINTS TO TRAUMA IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *THE VULTURES*

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Abstract

Indian Drama has the oldest and the richest tradition with their origin in the Vedic period. Its birth is believed in a myth, that Lord Indra requested Lord Brahma to give something which teaches, but in a pleasing way to both eyes and ears. Drama became a powerful tool to educate and its knowledge was spread through the great treatise 'Natya Shastra' and 'Tolkappiyam', written in Pre-Christian era. It deals with all aspects of diverse arts, embodied in classical concepts and guidelines to writing and acting. Drama in Sanskrit reaches its Zenith in the hands of Kalidasa. The arrival of the British in India and the introduction of new language raised the circumstances in emergence of Indian English Drama. It was coloured beautifully and pictured artistically by Tagore and many of his contemporaries. The promising beginning of Indian English Drama saw a downfall after independence. Present paper is an attempt to explore violence and trauma in his work *The Vultures*.

Keywords

Vijay Tendulkar, Social Issues, Violence, Trauma, Indian Writings in Translation.

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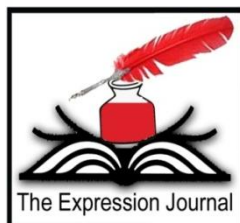
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Indian English Drama was reformed with the translation method. The plays of contemporary regional playwright were translated into English, staged and the world became their audience. The fulfillment of Indra's request was found in Indian English Drama which was a blend of tradition and modernity in its content and mode of presentation. The dramatists Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani brought a drastic change in the way plays were written and they made it more innovative and experimental work of contemporary relevance. Among these contemporary writers the one dramatist whose name is associated with sensationalism and violence is Vijay Tendulkar, particularly after the production and publication of *Gidhade (The Vultures)*.

The Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar is recognized as a pioneer of Modern Indian Drama. His handling of social realities like caste and class, conflict between individual and society, questions of alienation and survival, power, politics and psychological interpretations of his plays promotes him to a social activist than being merely as a regional playwright. Tendulkar writes no fairy tales and fantasies, but he brings the brimming realities and presents raw life with human sufferings. He was clearly influenced by the French writer Antonin Artaud, who created the 'Theatre of Cruelty' which attempted to appeal to the subconscious mind freeing the audience from negative. Tendulkar's play *The Vultures* is a celebration of violence and through violence first he disturbs the peace of mind and concurrently releases the repressed sub-conscious.

The play *The Vultures* was published in 1971 and stands apart in its display of violence arising from selfishness, drunkenness, greed and sinfulness. The title of the play itself suggests the vulturine nature among the characters throughout the play. The characters bring out the obsession of ferocity, instant urge for killing, cunningness and the qualities that are inherent in human nature which is spreading like an epidemic disease in the post modern industrial society. Tendulkar's plays deal with agonies, anxieties and tension of the urban and middle-class people. His plays are provocative and ruthlessly pierce through the human psyche. The angry and frustrated protagonists of his plays are actual victims of harsh circumstances in life. The

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suspended anger and frustration is always in the victims' mind and it creates a peculiar kind of wound that later creates a traumatic effect.

In recent years, authors and literary critics have expanded the study of trauma from psychology to literature, which takes the knowledge of trauma and its symptoms to reach a larger audience and authors through their work clearly illustrates how the human mind experiences traumatic events. Tendulkar's depiction of violence becomes the root cause which consciously or unconsciously leads him to portray the impact of the actual traumatic situation. In explaining trauma and its symptoms, Cathy Caruth in her critical work *Unclaimed Experience* writes "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena." (11)

The plot of the play revolves round the family of Hari Pitale addressed as 'Pappa' who has two sons (Ramakant and Umakant) and a daughter (Manik). Rajaninath is the youngest son in the family, but he is illegitimate and therefore goes through the trauma of alienation. Hari Pitale becomes a successful businessman by cheating his own brother Sakharam. Both of his sons Ramakant and Umakant inherit the selfishness and inhuman qualities of their father. Rama, wife of Ramakant appears as a dutiful daughter-in-law accepting the authority and absurdity of other members of the family.

In this modern drama Tendulkar relates his characters with the flesh eating creatures. These vultures live in a constant fear of each other. It is Hari Pitale, the father and his daughter Manik who are always fearful of other members of the family. In his fraudulent world, the fatal victimization of the single-minded characters like Rama and Rajaninath which long after creates psychic change in the play and is unavoidable.

Rajaninath has two roles in the play. First in the role of a chorus, his poetical lines give the glimpses of the past history and the present situation of Pitale family. In the second place he performs the role of lover and conciliator for Rama. The play begins with Rajaninath's long poems and ends with a prayer to God. It is an unconventional mode of theatrical presentation, but it echoes the reflection of the tradition of a Greek play. The poem reveals his inner conflicts and the consequences which it was tapered into. The memory of his childhood and the humiliations tortures him like a nightmare and he pleads for forgetfulness.

"Leave now at least
To this unfortunate, some forgetfulness.
The peace of loss of memory,
Leave it to me" (Tendulkar 204)

While narrating the event when Rajaninath was ignored and provided with no food to satisfy his hunger for many days, the saint-like Rajaninath got furious and tried to revolt. His fury is depicted as the outcome of his repressed emotions which emits violence in words when he says,

"I'll kill them all! I'll cut off their heads! As a goat's is chopped to mince and eat" (Tendulkar 204)

The other person who endures suffering of the degraded or degenerated members of the family calmly and quietly is Rama, hoping that she will have her child in future. The hostile

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circumstances in life leave some of them aggressive and violent, and others rather helpless and pitiable. Psychologically, heredity and environment play a major role in shaping behaviour and most of them are animals disguised in human forms, to put it in Kumar Ketkar's words "Tendulkar's Human Zoo". In this play he symbolizes the vulturine nature and proves the truth that no amount of social conditioning can hide the vulture hidden in the recess of man's personality.

In Rajaninath's songs he brings in his concern for his sister-in-law for two reasons. Firstly Rama was the only human among the vultures gifted with kindness and showered on him; secondly to show his gratitude he felt like salvaging her once and for all from the cruel clutches.

Rajaninath watches Rama's suffering from outside. Every day, every moment of life is an ordeal of fire for Rama. The emotions, anger and barrenness in her, like a molted lava erupts out of her while expressing it to Rajaninath. Few abstracts of Rama's speech are enough to understand the silent trauma eroding the women in modern urban society.

"Once you people say that, there is an end to it. Freedom to forget! But one does not have that either. Every day a new death. Every minute, A thousand million deaths. Again like thousand million needles stuck in your heart." (Tendulkar 240)

The Vulturesis Tendulkar's darkest play that brings out the darker situation of humiliation and passing out of isolation, in its inherent belatedness creates trauma. The true power of trauma occurs due to the fact that the person who falls victim to traumatic pathology does so precisely to the extent that he or she fails to be present the event in the moment of its occurrence. The very act of surviving trauma entails discovering new ways of relating and being related to others. Rajaninath survives it through his poems and Rama survives it with the special love-relationship she shared with Rajaninath. He lives in the garage. Rama's illicit relationship to her half-brother-in-law evokes the question of morality, but it is the only genuine and humane relationship in the whole play. Rama wants to fulfill her yearning to become a mother through him. Rama's anguish and disappointment at her childlessness has been poignantly divulged in her soliloquy in Act II, Scene II. According to Judith Herman, "The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep". (Herman 52)

Ramakant and Umakant destroy the foetus growing in Manik's womb. She suffers from a psychological disorder and decides to hunt for the baby in Rama's womb. Rama, being the weakest and an expecting mother easily becomes a prey to these vulturine events. The painful scream and the revengeful words of Manik torment Rama. The only root which strongly withheld Rama of the violent storm was the baby in her womb. She goes through sleepless nights and hallucinations torments her.

"I see lot of things. I hear them too. I see them carrying my child out..." (Tendulkar 249)

She tolerated barrenness, abuses and useless visits to saints in a hope that one day her long cherished dream will be fulfilled. Her brittle dream shatters into pieces, making her numb and lifeless like a stone. Thus Rajaninath in his verse portrays Rama as "A statue of emotion chilled to stone".

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Rama's fear turns true; her child was aborted not by Manik but by her own husband. Ramakant comes to know the real secret of the pregnancy of Rama, and it reflects the worst failure of his life. In the darkness, the shrill screeching of a single vulture is the only sound heard at last. The words of agony of the sparrow scavenged by a venue of vultures are no more heard. Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative, her traumatic experience makes her utterly abandoned and no longer a member of the human race. The audience realizes this state of her through the songs of Rajaninath

“Left her a stark insanity of stone

Frozen from her tears.

Empty of pain

And empty of desires.” (Tendulkar 206)

The Vultures shocks the audience by the violence in action and words and it focuses on the impact and the effects of trauma it creates through the characters. The play is a warning to a civilization that is becoming worse, reflecting the collapse of value system, threat of drugs and the disintegration of family. The gloomy den like house and the consistent screeching sound in the background stands for the darkness and the traumatic disturbances in the minds of Rama and Rajaninath who do not belong to the flock of vultures.

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