

Contemporary Issues in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar, an avant-garde playwright is one of the significant dramatists of Indian English genre. He is realistic in the portrayal of problems of common man, intricacies of human relationship and discrimination against women in the patriarchal society. He deals with all the ills and issues of the contemporary society. The issues are discussed in this paper under three headings – Gender Issues, Violence and Power Politics.

Keywords

Contemporary society in drama, gender issues in literature, violence and power politics, Vijay Tendulkar's craft.

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The genre 'drama' has a rich tradition in India and it has its inception in the Vedic period. Bharata, the father of Drama's **Natyashastra** in Sanskrit is the pioneering work on ancient Indian drama. Though drama lost its charm after the arrival of the British in India, yet it paves the way for translation of dramas written in Indian languages into English. Under the influence of the British, Indian theatre began to assume the style of western theatre. The combination of classical base and western influence provided wider opportunities to the playwrights to come out with innovative themes and stagecraft. Drama, being a closer mirror to the real life, entertains as well as educates and illuminates people. K.R. Srinivasa Iynger comments, "Indian drama was expected to comprehend whole arc of life, ranging from the material to the spiritual, the phenomenon to the transcendent at once relaxation and entertainment, instruction and illumination" (Iynger 1). Indian English drama has seen remarkable growth and development with the translations of Hindi, Marathi and Bengali plays into English.

Contemporary Indian drama is basically experimental in nature. Indian dramatists make experiments with innovative themes, new patterns and theatrical techniques. History, religion, tradition, myth and folk lore are examined with reference to contemporary socio-political situation along with western influence. Jaydip Sarkar observes:

Contemporary Indian drama, deviating from classical and European models, is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. It is not an off spring of any specific tradition and it has laid the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of world drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk lore with context to contemporary socio-political issues. (Sarkar 14)

Vijay Tendulkar, an avant-garde playwright is one of the significant dramatists of Indian theatre. Tendulkar worked as a sub-editor in Navbharat in 1948. He wrote columns for Manus and Maharashtra Times. He worked for 'Maratha' and 'Loksatta'. He was the Executive editor of 'Vasudha' and 'Deepawali'. He introduced new trends in the Marathi theatre. He was 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. 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. His forte is realism. 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 was honoured with Sangeet Natak Akdadm Award,

Kamaladevi Chattopadhaya Award and Kalidas Samman Award. He received Padma Bhushan Award in 1984. He has thirty-two full-length plays, twenty-four one act-plays, eleven children dramas, short story, screenplay, literary criticism and translation to his credit.

Tendulkar brought a sea change in the field of post-independent drama by projecting the stark realities of life, relationship and existence. His characters are original and they truthfully represent the complexities of modern men. He brought reformation in theme, characterization and stagecraft. Tendulkar's contribution can broadly be studied under three headings gender issues, power politics and violence.

Gender Issues

Vijay Tendulkar, with his **Silence! The Court is in Session** (Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe) has occupied a unique place in the contemporary Indian Drama in English. The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association, an amateur drama group 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 defense. 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 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 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.....(58)

In the beginning of the trial, she makes fun of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar. The witnesses Gopal Ponkshe, Balu Rokde 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 fall an easy prey to 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 okay 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 centre 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)

Jaisingh boasts, "I bought her (kamala) dirt cheap" (14). When there is no customer for Kamala, Jaisingh comes forward to buy her not out of sympathy but to present her as an exhibit in the Press Conference to expose the shameful affair of Human flesh trade. But he never bothers about Kamala's feelings. Kamala an innocent, illiterate girl dreams for a husband, children and a happy life with Jaisingh. To her disappointment, Jaisingh discards her in an orphanage for women against her wishes. Dubbe opines: "He duped Kamala who had come prepared to become his bonded keep with all the associated feeling of sex, motherhood and living." (Dubbe 44)

Jaisingh treats his wife Sarita like a slave. He never informs her about his whereabouts but she is expected to answer all the phone calls and leave a message in a note book for Jaisingh. She is considered as a provider and keeper of the house but not as a life partner. She has to accompany him for the party and takes care of his house. She is not even aware of her slave-life. It is only after the arrival of Kamala, Sarita realizes the meaninglessness of her marriage life. Jaisingh's friend Jain humourously makes fun of Sarita as a bonded labourer to Jaisingh: "This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He's made a

drudge out of a horse-riding independent girl from a princely house....Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes slave of wife. (to Sarita) Bye, lovely bonded labourer." (17)

It is Kamala who enlightens Sarita about her pitiable condition and makes her aware that she is in no way better than Kamala. Sarita's self-realization occurs only when Kamala throws at her the question, "How much did he buy you for?" (34) Woman becomes a play thing in the game of marriage. Kamala's plan that both she and Sarita together could satisfy Jaisingh's different needs may look funny but it is thought provoking.

Sumitra known as Mitra, the protagonist of the play **A Friend's Story** is a lesbian. Our conventional society cannot understand and accommodate people like Mitra. Mitra's problem is her being 'different' from other women. She is not thrilled or excited by the man arranged by her parents for her to marry. She says, "I knew I didn't want a man. I need a woman. I'm different, different." (440) Mitra's urge for a woman is natural. But our conformist society is a silent spectator of the sufferings of Mitra. She discloses to her friend her attraction for Nama Deshmukh.

Nama is Babu's classmate and Mitra has sexual orientation towards Nama and chases her even after knowing her love affair with Manya Delvi. Babu generously helps Mitra by giving his room to Mitra and Nama in the afternoon. Nama is torn between Mitra and Delvi. On seeing Nama with Mitra in Babu's room Delvi bursts out,

“You bloody lesbian bitch. You! I’ll kill you! Aren’t you ashamed? ...you do such things here?...You bring her here again, and I’ll show you! I’ll crush you, you devil, I tell you, I’ll – I’ll tear you to pieces on the streets. I’ll strip you on the road. (456)

Delvi’s words depict the hostile attitude of the society towards lesbians. Lesbians do not have an identity in the society. They are not even considered as human beings. The relationship between Mitra and Nama is made public by a short story written under a pseudonym with characters’ names changed. However, that hits on the right people. As a result, Mitra is expelled from the college. Delvi is not satisfied with this but has evil plans to trouble her wherever she goes. In the unfriendly atmosphere, how can Mitra survive? Bapu is the only human being who can understand her pain. With him, she can share everything without inhibition. That friendship also comes to an end when Mitra has gone to Calcutta to prevent Nama from getting married. Bapu becomes furious since he feels deceived and betrayed at the knowledge that Mitra has broken her promise not to follow Nama. She is thrown out from her house and is forced to stay in a hostel. She comes to Army officer’s club every day and drinks. After getting drunk, she begins to play drunken games with the officers. She becomes the object of fun and laughter. She feels frustrated by the loss of Bapu’s friendship, the only human company she has in the world. To her, Bapu is not just a friend but a surrogate mother. The bold and confident Mitra is scared of her

loneliness and she commits suicide, which was though inevitable. Kavya opines:

Tendulkar's Sumitra is a reflection of Indian society who is victimized for being different; being non-traditional in her sexuality. It is not easy to live in the society being different from others....Fall as a victim to the expectations society creates. (Kavya)

Violence

Violence has been with men since time immemorial. Moreover, modern men use violence to satisfy their needs, to attain material prosperity, to grab power, to humiliate fellow human beings and to disgrace the opposite gender. Violence can be verbal, physical and psychological. Vijay Tendulkar's characters experience physical, verbal and psychological violence at different stages. "Tendulkar's world is one where sex and violence have an upper hand" (Surendran 85). Tendulkar himself says,

As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited-exploiter relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel and will never end. (Tendulkar 1992)

In **The Vultures**, Tendulkar exposes the collapse of a value system in the society. The family which should be the seat of all moral values is found to be the place of cunning people who are eagerly waiting not only to cheat but also murder others for material gains. The society was shaken by the exposure of crude realities and the gradual collapse of value system in the post-modern society. "*The*

Vultures is about the inhuman violence due to self-alienation as well as due to selfishness and avarice" (Babu 53).

Hari Pitale known as Pappa is a shrewd, cunning father. He and his brother Sakharam worked hard to establish a business. But Hari Pitale drives away his brother from the business without giving him his due share even before being cheated by him. He divided the property among his three children Ramakant, Umakant and Manik. To Ramakant, his father is a "bloody burden to the earth" (211). He inherited his father's business but to him it is a 'dead horse'. He has ruined his father's business. He becomes impotent because of his too much drinking of alcohol. Ironically, he takes his wife Rama to so many swamiji and sadhus seeking their blessings to get a child.

Umakant is a miser. He wisely grabbed the landed property at Lonavla. He calls his father 'cunning, old bastard'. The younger sister little Manik is no way better than her brothers. To her, Umya is a 'miser, lick penny, bloody ruffian' (208). Ramya is a hypocrite who charged her board and lodging after the division of the property. She is in love with the Raja of Hondur. Ramakant, Umakant and Manik make their father drink more and more in order to extract the truth about Pappa's secret money. Ramakant deliberately topples the chair so that the old man falls to the ground and has got a gash on his head. The way they force that old man to tell about the money is violent. Their vulture-like behavior is highly condemnable. They create the fear of death in him. Ramakant asks his

father, "Which bankIn which bank, Pappa speak up. Or this bloody Umya may murder you for nothing....the bloody bastard! Tell me in which bank is the money, Pappa?" (230). Pappa's children will do anything to get the money from him. Knowing the intention of them Pappa shouts,

No! Never! You're devils, you pimps! You're going to kill me! You're going to murder me. Murder! I don't want to die! Don't want to! I'm not going to! I'll become a ghost. I'll sit on your chests! Murderers! (229)

Ramakant and Umakant make fun of Manik's love with Hondur. They couldn't succeed in their plan of extracting money from Hondur because of his sudden death. They plan to blackmail Hondur that he should give them twenty-five thousand rupees otherwise they would publicise that he is the father of Manik's baby. This thought itself is disgusting; this kind of behaviour is unimaginable from brothers. They fractured Manik's leg in order to prevent her from meeting Raja. To their disappointment, Raja dies of heart attack. Upset by this, they decide to kill the foetus in Manik's belly.

Like a beast, Ramakant brutally kicks Manik's belly to abort the baby. This callous behaviour of Ramakant shows that he is an inhuman wretch. Thus childless Ramakant commits a heinous crime. Prasad observes:

In "The Vultures" Vijay Tendulkar displays on the stage the unmitigated violence arising from greed and immorality. It portrays the domestic violence caused by greed. The selfishness and greed of

human beings are the main issues of the play. (Prasad ix) Manik who is vindictive has rubbed lemon and ash on Rama's stomach so that the baby in her womb gets aborted. No doubt all members in Pitale's family are vultures and have no 'humane' quality. The moral degeneration of the characters is the result of loss of faith in values and spirituality. Babu observes: "The spiritual deformity facilitates ruthless exploitation and oppression and destroys human relations even within the family." (Babu 150)

Tendulkar's **Ghashiram Kotwal** is also a play of violence and atrocities. In **Ghashiram Kotwal**, Ghashiram offers his innocent daughter Lalita Gauri to Nana in order to become the Kotwal of Poona to enjoy power. As a father, he has great responsibility towards his daughter. He is expected to provide a decent life for his daughter. Since his mind is filled with the thought of revenge and challenge, he fails to realize the consequences of his actions. Lalita Gauri simply obeys her father and submits herself to Nana's lust. Animal imagery is used to explain Nana's lust: "If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found." (379) Ghashiram uses Gauri as a bait to catch the big fish Nana. "Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram's reign is here." (386)

Death of Gauri is a moral blow to Ghashiram. Ghashiram's submission of his daughter to Nana's lust and Nana's treatment of woman as an object of enjoyment—he can use them and throw them out is the violence against woman. After becoming a Kotwal, Ghashiram seems to be a strict disciplinarian and tries to bring Poona under his control. Everyone is scared of Ghashiram. No one can even

breathe without his permission. An innocent Brahman is accused of stealing by Ghashiram and he is forced to take an ordeal. The Brahman is tortured until he falsely confesses that he has stolen. A steel ball heated red-hot is forcibly placed in the hands of the Brahman, unmindful of his yelling. The death of his daughter fails to bring any transformation in Ghashiram. He couldn't give up his beastly character; he becomes more cruel and simply torture innocent people without any reason. The city of Poona trembles at his name. He becomes tyrant with the absolute power he enjoys. Because of his senseless rules and insensitiveness, he becomes the cause of the death of twenty-two innocent Brahmans. Nana a cunning politician uses this opportunity to get rid of Ghashiram once for all. He orders for Ghashiram's death. The end of Ghashiram is gruesome and terrible. Nana orders for the execution of Ghashiram. Nana orders for the physical torture of Ghashiram before he meets his end.

In **Kanyadaan**, the protagonist Jyoti, a girl of 20, belongs to the upper class and her decision to marry Arun Athavale, a dalit boy is appreciated and encouraged by her father Nath Devalikar. Jyoti is shaped by her father's ideal of 'uprooting caste system' and the dream of 'casteless society'. To Nath, it is an opportunity to put his ideals to test. But Seva, his wife warns him of the practical difficulties Jyoti would face in future. But Jyoti's marriage with Arun is an experiment for Nath. Jyoti spoiled by her father's ideals, gives her concern to marry Arun. Arun is doing his B.A. and is working part-time in 'Sramik Samachar'. He has to support his big family financially

instead of accepting Jyoti's love and appreciating Nath's broad mindedness. He verbally and physically abuses Jyoti because of his psychological torment. Arun fails to reconcile himself to the present and worries about the humiliations his community had undergone for generations. He suffers from inferiority complex and tries to settle his score against the upper caste by his verbal and physical abuse of Jyoti.

Nath thinks Jyoti's marriage will act as a catalyst to transform the society. But as a wife what she receives from Arun is brutal beatings. Nath spends sleepless nights agonizing over the future of his daughter. Nath and Seva feel disturbed on seeing the injury upon her arm. Jyoti experiences all kinds of violence—physical, verbal and psychological. Arun uses abusive and filthy language against Jyoti's parents. She is taunted by him by being born in a high caste; she is beaten mercilessly by him and then is compelled to make love. Wadikar observes:

The violence projected in the play has three dimensions: physical, psychological and verbal. Psychological violence is noticed in Arun's cruel inhuman treatment to Jyoti, which is also his way of overcoming his inferiority complex. The vicious pleasure that he seeks from it is shocking. Verbs of violence can be seen in Arun's abusive, obscene language.

Power Politics

An urge to acquire power is inherent in every human being. If he attains power, he tries to execute it blindly without knowing the consequences. In the patriarchal society, man always enjoys more power than the fair sex. In his attempt to execute power, he ignores the fellow being's freedom and human values. Foucault sees power as a major force in all relations in the society. To him, "power is a strategy, something which has to be constantly performed....a set of relations dispersed through the society." (Foucault 2003)

Sakharam in **Sakharam Binder** is a tyrant but appears to be fair in his deal with the women he has brought. The way he introduces himself to Laxmi in the beginning of the play shows that he is autocratic. Love, emotion and passion are strange words for him. He declares, "I'm hot-headed. When I lose my temper, I beat the life out of people.....Won't put up with slipshod ways.....I'm the master here." (127) Laxmi deserted by her husband has to yield herself to Sakharam's despotic ways. Without becoming his legal wife, Laxmi fulfills all his needs but in turn she receives only rebuke and blows. He never lets anyone to boss over him. He says, "I had six before you. I disowned my own father. I wouldn't let anyone boss over me." (148) He is the master of the house and he treats the woman he has brought worse than slaves. He is a self-styled man and is not even afraid of God. He says, "This Sakharam Binder – he's a terror --- He's not scared of God or of God's father" (126)

Unlike Laxmi, Champa is physically strong, plumb and looks bewitching. Both Laxmi and Champa are forced by destiny to live with Sakharam. Sakharam exploits both the women and squeezes them for the food and shelter he provided for them. He demands more from the women than what he actually provides for them. Though Sakharam boasts of his honesty and straightforwardness, he behaves like a tyrant master. He calls her a slut, a bitch and a niggling bit of a cast-off woman. His ego is hurt because Laxmi dares to raise her voice against him. He couldn't digest Laxmi bossing over him. Laxmi who suffocates all these days bursts out:

I've never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders. Curses. Oaths. Threatening to throw me out. Kicks and blows. [Wipes her eyes with the end of the sari] There I was in agony after I'd been belted, and all you wanted me to do was laugh. Laugh and laugh again. Here I am on the point of death and I'm supposed to laugh. Hell must be a better place than this. [Whimpers] If I die, I'll be free of this once and for all. (148)

For Sakharam, it is easy to rule cast-off women like Laxmi and Champa as they cannot claim their rights. He wants to enjoy all luxury of family life without the bondage of marriage. His infatuation for Champa reduces the intensity of his tyrannical nature. His lust for her body weakens him. Laxmi who has come back to Sakharam couldn't bear her place replaced by Champa. Innocent Champa permits Laxmi to stay with them against the will of Sakharam.

Laxmi who has lost her hold on Sakharam is waiting for a chance to throw Champa away from home. Champa submits her body to Sakharam by force. She shocks Laxmi by her secret affair with Dawood, Sakharam's friend. Champa is very stubborn and gives her body to Sakharam only after taking alcohol. Moreover, the presence of Laxmi in the kitchen makes Sakharam impotent. Champa shouts, "Stop that 'Champa - Champa— 'You're not a man - not since she came. She's made an impotent ninny of you. Don't have the guts to take me before her. You turn into a corpse - a worm." (193) Unlike Laxmi, Champa is able to overpower Sakharam because of his lust for her body. Her affair with Dawood is out of her own will.

Innocent and meek Laxmi becomes villainous and reveals Champa's unfaithfulness to Sakharam. This provokes Sakharam to murder Champa. Sakharam loses all his power and becomes weak with this murder. Laxmi makes use of this situation and turns the wind in favour of her. The power structure changes at the end with Laxmi assuming more power to lead Sakharam.

In Sakharam Binder the issue is sexual power. When that power is threatened, the protagonist is confused and lashes out viciously, taking a life. The equations change in an interesting round of musical chairs that tilts the balance off and on, and each character seems to reflect the role of another.
(Agrawal 199)

Ghashiram Savaldas in **Ghashiram Kotwal** is not basically a power monger. His arrival with his wife and daughter to Poona is to seek his fortune. But the humiliations he has

undergone there make him feel hungry for power. His attempt to get Nana's favour is prevented by Poona Brahmins. Power and violence are inseparable. Gulabi, the courtesan snatches the necklace from Ghashriam by using thugs. That necklace was given to him by Nana Phadnavis, the chief Minister of the Peshwa of Pune in the 19th century for helping him when he sprained his leg while dancing with Gulabi. All Brahmans including Nana are enchanted by her and are willing to surrender themselves at her feet. She exhibits her power by taking the necklace from Ghashiram by force. In the great dakshina ceremony at the foot of the holy hill of Parvati, there used to be a great feast. Moreover, Nana will honour the Brahmans. With hungry eyes, Ghashiram is standing in the queue. But he is accused of stealing a Brahman's prize money. He is mistaken for a thief. He is beaten and then put in the cell. This insult forces Ghashiram to vouch, "I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs." (377) Ghashiram uses his young, beautiful and innocent daughter Gouri as a bait to acquire power and fulfill his oath. He decides to sacrifice his daughter to Nana in exchange of power.

Since Nana is infatuated with Gouri, Poona comes under the reign of Ghashiram. People are whipped, sued and arrested. Any sin can be committed with the permission of Kotwal. Power makes Ghashiram insensitive to the sufferings of people. Sutradhar says, "Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules" (387) Without Kotwal's permission nothing can be done. Kotwal's permission is necessary even to walk on the road at midnight and to call a midwife

to attend a delivery. People of Poona shudder at the thought of Kotwal. Sutradhar comments: "Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you lay a hand on Ghashiram, Nana will smash you. If you don't, then Ghashiram will get you anyway. Ghashiram Kotwal" (392). Gauri's sexual power fetches Ghashiram a chance to reign Poona as Kotwal. Satish Barbuddhe observes:

The play deals with the mechanics of power. It is the power of Nana which makes Ghashiram the Kotwal of Pune. It is the power of Ghashiram which terrorizes the citizens of Poona. It is the power of beauty of Lalita Gauri which enthralls Nana for some time. The power-politics is undercurrent of discontent in the citizens of Pune. It is Ghashiram who brings dishonor to Nana by unmindful terror. Ghashiram's insolent behaviour is the principal cause of his end of power. (Barbuddhe 41)

Encounter in Umbugland is completely different from other Tendulkar plays. In this play, one can find the protagonist Princess Vijaya metamorphosed from an innocent girl into a cunning politician. Vichitravirya, the king of Umbugland, aims at immortality and at his sixtieth coronation ceremony, he advised his Cabinet ministers to serve the people of the country so that he can rule them for a hundred years. He thinks principles and honesty are inappropriate terms in politics and he considers politics as a profitable game of Skullduggery (Five Plays, 273). His sermon about "power" to his five experienced statesmen-Vratyasom, Bhagadanta, Karkashirsha, Pishtakeshi and Aranyaketu is like Satan preaching scriptures.

Power is a crown of thorns. Power is a sword hanging over you. Power is the bread you ate at the stake. Power means responsibility. Power means problems and painful decisions. There is no headache like power. There is no trouble like power. (Five Plays 279)

The sudden death of Vichitravirya makes the statesmen fight among themselves to usurp the throne. Since the Kadamba tribes have broken into fierce riots in the North, West, East and North-East of Umbugland, the Cabinet is left with no choice except to make the king Vichitravirya's daughter Vijaya, a small girl to rule Umbugland with the intention, "she'll be the rule, we'll be the rulers." (Five Plays 293)

In the beginning, Princess Vijaya is very innocent and playful and not matured enough to understand practices of court. As a motherless child, she depends upon Prannarayan (eunuch), the attendant in the harem of Vijaya for her emotional support. It is Prannarayan who teaches her 'power game' calmly. He advises her how she has to behave in the Cabinet meeting. Prannarayan says, "Insult them, but don't wound their egos. And diplomatic language." (Five Plays 229) Gradually, she learns the game of politics with all its nuances. With her indomitable will, she decides things on her own. She cannot be the puppet in the hands of the Cabinet Ministers. The Cabinet Ministers get irritated on seeing Vijaya's photographs in the newspaper, "Queen Vijaya in Kadamba settlement." (Five Plays, 311) When the Cabinet ministers desire to crush the Kadamba tribe's riots, Princess Vijaya's concern

to them make the ministers become wild with her. The Cabinet is irritated by her free mingling with the tribal people.

The Kadamba tribes are original inhabitants of that island. Since they are continuously ignored by the rulers, they have become the victim of exploitation. They are straightforward people with no conceit and they keep their heads high. Princess Vijaya plans for their upliftment. To put this into practice, she has to get the approval of Cabinet ministers. But her proposal is rejected by the Cabinet. When the Cabinet passed 'No confidence motion' against Princess Vijaya, she used absolute power to get the assent of the Cabinet. She took this as a prestige issue.

She gradually becomes ambitious and wants to rule without restraint. (Five Plays, 325) This is how the politicians who begin with democratic ideals are transformed into autocratic rulers in the end. She feels herself that she undergoes a change gradually: "Something in me is changing greatly, Prannarayan. I feel afraid of myself, very afraid." (Five Plays 326)

Tendulkar's truthful presentation of hypocrisy, vulgarity, violence and duplicity of the contemporary life is well received. He never makes an attempt to comment on his character; he simply exhibits the brutal ways of life for our observation and comments. He simply presents the crude realities of life to the audience without suggesting any solutions. He portrays the sufferings of women in the male-dominated society. He silently presents the gender inequality and the discrimination they face in the society.

His woman characters—Benare, Rama, Mitra, Sarita, Kamala, Laxmi, Champa and Manik—are no doubt rebel against the existing norms of the society. This way, Tendulkar questions the very institution of family. He presents various layers of power structures in the human relationship and society. He strongly feels power and violence are inseparable. Violence is the reality in the post-modern period. He deals with all the ills of the contemporary society.

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