



Tendulkar's Role in Indian Drama

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Abstract-Vijay Tendulkar was a leading Indian playwright; movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator during late 1960s.He gave a new dimension to the Marathi Theatre in India through his creative writings. Many of Tendulkar's plays derived inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals, which provided clear light on harsh realities. Tendulkar perceives the realities of the human society without any preconceived notions, reacts to them as a sensitive and sensible human being and writes about them in his plays as a responsible writer. He never writes to win a prize or an award; he writes to show the mirror to the society and his intention of writing is neither to please the readers, nor to entertain them but he wants to awake them. He deals with gender inequality, social inequality, power games, self-alienation, false consciousness, sex and violence in all his plays. Tendulkar's plays deal with agonies, anxieties and tensions of the urban, white-collar, middle-class people. He has seen the ugly side of life through his close observation. His plays brought a revolution on the Marathi stage as well as in contemporary Indian Theatre.

Key Words- Social realities, Gender Inequility, Social Upheavals.



Vijay Tendulkar in spite of having its roots in Marathi regional theatre has emerged as a new voice in Indian theatre to explore the volcanic dimensions of resentment and discontent hidden within the invisible terrains of human consciousness. Tendulkar made his place as a Marathi writer but he had modified the shape of Indian drama with the power of his pen to represent the issues that are temporal as well as timeless. Tendulkar through his plays gave a voice to the oppression of the individual in conventional social codes. He was more concerned with the machinations of power effects of oppression manifested in different forms. His plays present a fictional reality in which the reality of life assumes a new significance. He draws material for his plays based on his own observations of life, from newspaper reports r incidents narrated to him. Tendulkar for his profundity of thought got highest popularity. Vijay Tendulkar was one of those sensitive artists who made churning of the deep recesses of his mental reactions to search out the artistic equivalents appropriate to the experience and also the appropriateness of the requisites of genre of drama. Tendulkar, a sensitive artist and a versatile genius, with his passion for freedom and the boldness of a journalist gave a new direction to his dramatic creed. Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born on 7 January 1928 in a Bhala valikar Saraswat family in Maharashtra. He spent his early childhood in Bombay. His father Dhondopant was a clerk and ran a small publishing house and also an actor and director as well, mother Susheela and two elder siblings brother Raghunath and sister Leela. There was a literature friendly atmosphere in his family and his interaction with books encouraged Vijay to take up to writing. He wrote his first story at age six. He grew up watching western plays, and felt inspired to write plays himself. At age eleven,



he wrote, directed, and acted in his first play. When Vijay was thirteen years old, Tendulkar family shifted to Pune. He was put into a new school. During Quit India Movement, Gandhiji called upon the students to boycott the schools run by the British Government as a part of the campaign to end the British rule in India. Vijay was one of those who answered Gandhi's call and began to attend secret meetings and distribute seditious pamphlets. He was also associated with the Rashtriya Swayam sewak Sangh and communist party for a while. These incidents bring out the fearlessness and adventurous nature of Tendulkar and his love for his country. These qualities can be found in his writings. A sudden raid at a secret meeting landed Vijay at the Police Station. As he was a minor, he was let off after giving a severe warning to his father. Dhondopant prohibited him from taking any more part in the nationalist movement and Vijay returned to school. By now he had fallen far behind in his studies. He would often be made to stand on the bench or leave the class. When all this became unbearable, Vijay began to bunk the classes and spent his time watching movies with the money given to him as the school fees. Some of this time was also spent at the city library profitably in reading books. After some time his parents came to know about this. They did not beat or scold him. But this resulted in his alienation from his family and friends. Lonely and sad, writing became his outlet. Tendulkar tells Mukta Rajy adhyaksha in an interview: "I participated in a small way in the 1942 movement. Owing to that, I stayed away from school a lot and was often humiliated whenever I turned up in class. I was confused, a loner without many friends, not much of a talker. Writing was an outlet for emotions" (Tendulkar: An Interview). Most of these early writings were of a personal nature and not



intended for publication. Tendulkar got his early education from the municipal schools in Mumbai, Kolhapur and Pune. He has given the credit of creating his interest in literature to his teachers such as V.V. Bokil, N.M. Sant and P.G. Sahastra buddhe. The knowledge and guidance provided by these teachers helped in shaping the writer inside Tendulkar. In Pune, young Vijay came into contact with Dinkar Balkrishna Mokashi and Vishnu Vinayak Bokil, both well-known names in Marathi literature. Tendulkar admits to having been influenced by the personalities and the style of writing of these two authors. Bokil was Vijay's Marathi teacher in school. Many of his stories written in conversational Marathi had been turned into successful movies. He never shied away from writing on controversial subjects. He advised Vijay to develop himself in a particular direction in addition to his formal studies in order to become successful in life. One of Vijay's maternal uncles had committed suicide and another one spent his life in a mental asylum. He admits that he developed a liking for cranks and madmen because of his uncles. There was a time when the Tendulkar family was in a bad shape. Dhondopant was severely ill in his last days. Raghunath had left home after a quarrel with father. Vijay's elder sister, Leela, was forced to work to support the family. Because of her idealist father's refusal to make her a showpiece and pay a dowry, she could not get married. Thus Vijay had come into contact with suffering at an early age. Tendulkar worked as a proof-reader in various printing presses from 1944 to 1947. He made up his mind to pursue writing as a career and began writing for newspapers and magazines. In 1948, he worked as sub-editor in daily 'Navabharat'. He also worked for 'Maratha' and 'Loksatta'. He was the executive editor of 'Vasudha' and 'Dipawali' for some time. He wrote columns for 'Manus' and



‘Maharashtra Times’. He also spent a few years as public relations officer for the Chowgule Group of Industries. During his career as a journalist, he got an exhaustive knowledge of society and human life. His varied professional experience brought him in touch with people of all classes. While working for daily ‘Maratha’, he came into contact with Acharya Atre, an eminent Marathi playwright. Atre’s guidance had a considerable impact on Tendulkar’s writing style. According to N.S. Dharan, Tendulkar’s “Creative genius sharpened by his keen observation and seasoned by journalistic experience, found expression in his plays” (93). Tendulkar had settled down in Mumbai in 1966. While pursuing his journalistic career, he also wrote plays and one-act plays. His collection of one-act plays ‘Ajagar ani Gandharve won the Maharashtra State Government Award in 1966. Some of these plays were aired on radio. He met Nirmala Sakhalkar at Mumbai Radio Broadcasting Station and they got married. They had three daughters, Sushma, Priya, Tanuja and a son, Raja. Some of Tendulkar’s plays created controversies due to which even his family members had to suffer. He took all the oppressions, threats and insults in his stride. He regarded the calamities as learning and experiences.

Tendulkar’s play *Silence The Court is in Session* bagged the Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya Award in 1970. This play brought him recognition on the national scale. He received Nehru Fellowship in 1973-74 for a project titled “An Enquiry into the Pattern of Growing Violence in Society and Its Relevance to Contemporary Theatre”. He toured the various nooks and corners of India in order to understand the reasons of the rising violence in the country. Amar Nath Prasad and Satish Barbuddhe write, “He was not satisfied with the ‘second hand’ information which he got, while sitting in the



newspaper office. In his study tours he got ‘first hand’ information of the outside world” (vi). Thus Tendulkar tried to conquer the limitations of his bookish knowledge and ignorance. He observed the social problems and the oppression of the poor and the down-trodden from close quarters. Through his plays he tried to sensitize the reader-audience to these matters. Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal*, written and staged in 1972, won him an international reputation. A section of the society, however, bitterly criticized him branding the play as anti-Brahmin. The agitation against him rose to such a high pitch that he had to seek police protection for his family. His play *Kanyadaan* (1983) met with a similar fate. It was criticized as an anti-Dalit play. He was awarded the Saraswati Samman for this play. While speaking at the awards ceremony, Tendulkar revealed that once he had a slipper hurled at him for this play. Thus Tendulkar received awards and honors as well as curses and abuses at the same time for his plays. Arundhati Banerjee aptly comments that “Tendulkar is both a venerated as well as controversial figure in the country’s theatre scene” (vii). In the years that followed Tendulkar wrote screenplays for the movies such as *Nishant*, *Akrosh* and *ArdhaSatya* in addition to plays such as *A Friend’s Story* and *Kamala*. He wrote screenplays for Marathi movies such as *Samana*, *Simhasan* and *Umbartha*. In 1977, he became a member of the General Council of Musical Drama Academy. In 1978, he worked as a guest lecturer at Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He became the Vice-Chairman of the National School of Drama in 1979. He won the Film fare Award for the best screenplay and dialogue for the film *Akrosh* in 1980. Later in his career, he tried his hand at novel writing with ‘*Kadambari: Ek*’ and ‘*Kadmbari: Don*’. ‘*Vijay Tendulkar Festival*’ sponsored by the Indo-American Arts



Council was organized at New York in 2004. A Drama Festival of his plays was organized by the actor Amol Palekar at Pune in 2005. Tendulkar died in Pune on May 19, 2008, after five weeks at the Prayag Hospital battling the effects of the rare muscular disease Myasthenia Gravis. Towards the end of his life, Tendulkar faced sufferings like the long illness of a bed-ridden wife, the death of a son and a daughter and his own mounting health problems. But nothing could destroy his love of life. He tried to live each moment of life as it came, attempting to make sense of the experience. Writing every day was as natural as breathing to him. He was writing an autobiographical account of his times when he died. His passing away caused a huge loss to the theatre and literature field. Tendulkar did not get a formal education of playwriting from any institution. There were not any courses in his time on this skill. He learned by a sheer trial-and-error method. He got his earliest lessons in theatre in his home itself. His father and brother used to write plays and also acted in them. They used to take young Vijay for rehearsals. Vijay felt amused as well as puzzled to see men playing female parts. Tendulkar tells Gauri Ramnarayan in an interview,

“From the time I was four years old, I was taken to those rehearsals. They were a kind of magic show for me. That’s where I saw living persons change into characters. At that time women’s roles were played by men. Imagine my amazement when I saw some of the actors suddenly changing their voice and movements to become women. They didn’t wear saris, but in some mysterious way their pants and shirts stopped identifying them as men. I often fell asleep in the middle of those rehearsals. I suppose father carried me home. All I knew was



that I woke up in my bed 40 the next morning. (Tendulkar: An Interview)

Watching the performances of the rehearsed plays later with sets, lights, costumes and make-up thrilled him. The sense of wonder that he felt in watching the transformation of the crude actions in the rehearsals into the polished performances which aroused tears and laughter from the spectators resulted in Vijay's being drawn to the theatre. Tendulkar himself comments, "I always feel that this first and repeated experience of the mystique of the theatre has something to do with my being drawn to the theatre"(xiii) In later days Tendulkar's interest in theatre led him to writing plays while at school, acting in them and discussing them with classmates. He became an avid play-watcher. Watching a play every day became a routine with him. He used to watch the complete play even if it was below quality. He tried to correct the faults of the bad plays in his mind. Thus it became an excellent exercise to learn the technique of playwriting. Another important influence on Tendulkar came from the Hollywood and Bollywood movies of the 1940s. The earliest movies which he saw were silent films, with an orchestra sitting below the screen and playing music right through the show. Then he saw the 'Talkies' of Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. He said to Gauri Ramnarayan in an interview, "As a school boy I had watched the Hollywood films playing in my hometown, not once, but each one over and over again. I still remember the visuals, not the dialogues which I didn't understand" (Tendulkar: An Interview). Tendulkar learnt the sense of structure, which is an important part of playwriting from various activities such as listening to classical music, reading poetry aloud and witnessing the fake yet dramatic freestyle-wrestling matches. Roaming around the art galleries and



observing paintings taught him lessons in rhythm, form and structure. Watching the performance of Marcel Marceau, the French mimic, had a profound influence on him. He felt that Marceau's mimes had achieved the same effect as that of a complete play and that too, without the usual accessories of the play such as words and multiple characters etc. Even Marceau's face was hidden behind the make-up of a joker. In an interview, Tendulkar tells Gauri Ramnarayan: "...watching Marcel Marceau from the last seat in the last row (which I could manage) was an enthralling experience. Not a single word was uttered, but so much was expressed" (16). Tendulkar felt that using any number of words will not suffice to convey emotions as effectively as Marceau did through his mimes. Through this incident he learnt to use the words more carefully. He realized the unlimited possibilities of the visual and began to reflect on how to combine the visual with words to convey more out of his playwriting. Thus Marceau's mime made him rethink on the concept of theatre. Tendulkar's first published work was a story *Amchyavar Kon Prem Karnar* (Who Will Love Us). He wrote his first full-length play *Gruhastha* (The Householder) at the age of twenty-two. It flopped miserably. Young Vijay could not digest its bitter criticism and vowed never to write again. He broke the pledge however, and wrote *Shrimant* (The Rich) in 1955. He dealt with the subject of unmarried motherhood and jolted the conservative audience of the times. Writing about Tendulkar's early plays, Arundhati Banerjee says: "Tendulkar's first major work that set him apart from previous generation Marathi playwrights was *Manus Nawache Bet* (An Island Called Man, 1956), which gave expression to the tormenting solitude and alienation of a modern individual in an urban industrialized society. His dramatic genius was cut out for



the newly emerging experimental Marathi theatre of the time” (570). Some notable plays in the early phase of Tendulkar’s career are *Madhlya Bhinti* (The Walls Between), *Chimniche Ghar Hote Menache* (The Wax House of Sparrow), *Mee Jinklo Mee Harlo* (I won, I Lost), *Kavlyanchi Shala* (School for Crows) and *Sari ga Sari* (Drizzle O Drizzle). In all these plays, he deals with the conflict between the individual and the society. An undercurrent of sympathy for the suffering humanity runs through these plays. He depicted the life of the urban lower middle class people authentically. His early struggle for survival and living in the Mumbai Chawls had provided him first-hand experience of the life of these people. These plays rapidly changed the course of modern Marathi theatre in the 1950s and 60s, with experimental presentations by theatre groups like ‘Rangayan’. Tendulkar’s *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session) was written and produced in 1967. It was based on Friedrich Durrenmatt’s story *Die Panne* (Traps). It received a lukewarm response initially. In 1970, it won the prestigious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award for the best play of the year. It was followed by *Dambadwipcha Mukabala* (Encounter in Umbugland, 1968), *Gidhade* (The Vultures, 1971) and *Sakharam Binder* (1972). *Encounter in Umbugland* deals with the various evils of politics such as intrigues, treachery and corruption. *The Vultures*, produced in 1971, had been actually written fourteen years earlier. It is about a family dispute in which Tendulkar shows how the lust for money makes human beings turn into vultures. It attracted a lot of opposition. The next play to appear, *Sakharam Binder*, suffered the same fate. In this play, Tendulkar dealt with the topic of the domination of the male over the female. Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal*, written and produced in 1972,



is a political satire created in the mould of a verse play set in the 18th century Pune. Unlike the naturalistic mode of writing in his earlier plays, here the playwright combined traditional Marathi folk-forms with contemporary theatre techniques. His next play *Mitrachi Goshta* (A Friend's Story) appeared in 1980. It was based on a short story *Mitra* written by the author himself in the mid-fifties. It presented the pathetic life of Sumitra, the protagonist, who is a lesbian. Nothing like this had been presented on the stage in India way back in those days. The play created a sensation due to its daring and different subject. Tendulkar's play *Kamala* (1981) deals with the victimization of women and society's apathy towards the weak and the down-trodden. It portrays the exploitation of women by the success oriented men for whom women are mere stepping stones for their achievements. Tendulkar's next play *Kanyadaan* (The Gift of a Daughter, 1983) became controversial as it was criticized as an anti-Dalit play. In this play an upper class Brahmin girl marries a Dalit poet and suffers untold miseries. At the end of the play she blames her idealist father for not training her to face raw life and the play *Cyclist* (1991) is about of journey of an individual. All these plays concentrate on different aspects of society and human life. They deal with the complexities of human relationships in a subtle manner. The playwright shows how the society which victimizes the individual, who violates its norms, is itself full of evils. He satirizes the ills afflicting the society and makes the reader-audience introspect itself by showing the society as it is, in all its ugliness. Many of these plays are women-centered and explore their plight in a male-dominated society. Tendulkar has written thirty full-length plays. Out of these, the eight plays which have



been translated into English are the subject of this study. A comprehensive list of his plays is given below.

1. Gruhastha(Householder) (1947)
2. Shrimant(The Rich) (1956)
3. Manoos Nawache Bet (An Island Named ‘ Man’) (1958)
4. Thief! Police!
5. Bale Miltat (1960)
6. Gidhade (The Vulture) (1961)
7. Patlachya Poriche Lagin (Marriage of a Village Mayor’s Daughter) (1965)
8. Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe(Silence! The Court is in Session) (1967)
9. Ajgar Ani Gandharwa (A Boa Constrictor and “Gandharwa”)
10. Sakharam Binder (1972)
11. Kamala (1981)
12. Madi
13. Kanyadan (1983)
14. Anji
15. Damdadwicha Mukabala (Encounter in Umbugland)
16. Ashi Pakhare Yeti
17. Kutte
18. Safar (The Cyclist) (1991)
19. The masseur (2001)
20. Pahije Jatiche(It has to Be in One’s Blood)



21. Jat hi Poochho Sadhu Ki (Ask a Fakir's Lineage)
22. Majhi Bahin(My Sister)
23. Jhala Anant Hanumanta
24. Footpayricha Samrat
25. Mitrachi Goshta (A Friends Story) (2001)
26. Anand Owari
27. Bhau Murar Rao
28. Bhalyakaka
29. Mee Jinklo Mee Haralo
30. His Fifth Woman (2004)

In addition to the thirty full length plays, Tendulkar has written twenty five one act plays, two novels, a biography, five anthologies of short stories, sixteen plays for children and five volumes of literary essays and social criticism. His columns in newspapers like *Kowali Unhe* and *Ram Prahar* became quite popular. He has translated nine novels, two biographies and five plays by others into Marathi. Tendulkar won many awards for his prolific and creative writings. He won the Maharashtra State government awards in 1956, 1969 and 1972; and Maharashtra 'Gaurav Puraskar' in 1999. He was honored with the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1970, and again in 1998 with the Academy's highest award for 'lifetime contribution', the Sangeet Natak academy Fellowship ('Ratna Sadasya'). In 1984, he received the Padma Bhushan award from Government of India for his literary accomplishments. In 1997, Tendulkar won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay for his screenplay of Shyam Benegal's movie, *Manthan* (1976). He has



written screenplays for many significant art movies, such as *Nishant*, *akrosh*, and *Satya*. In 1991, he received the Kalidas Award in 1999 and Katha Chudamani award in 2001.

Tendulkar felt the plight of an individual, his survival, sufferings of upper middle class people, and their exploitation. He wrote about all these follies in his plays having a touch of violence and anger and gave a new dimension to the Indian drama through his dramatic art.

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