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DRAMA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED PLAYS OF
VIJAY TENDULKAR

RANGHBOK LYNGBWA

Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
N.I.T. Meghalaya, Shillong



ABSTRACT

The presence of Drama in the form of performative elements both dramatic and theatrical in almost every society throughout civilization is predominant. In the past the function of dramatic performance was evident in the rituals which witnessed enactments that portrayed the culture, beliefs and social being of a particular community. However in due course of time these enactments of rituals and ceremonies ceased to exist whereas dramatic performances were enacted simply for the sake of enjoyment and entertainment. Yet as the years go by the dramatist and playwright saw something else beyond ceremonies and entertainment. Drama was then viewed as an effective medium for the portrayal of real life itself while its objective circulated around creating a social consciousness among the audience who are not only thoroughly entertained but are also made aware of issues that they may have unconsciously overlooked or taken for granted. It is through the plays that the playwright showcases his/ her views and opinions about the society while also discretely propagating their agenda to educate the masses and bring about a revolutionary change in the social systems. Vijay Tendulkar a prominent Marathi dramatist is well known in the spheres of creating controversial themes relating to the Indian social system especially in presenting the real and true picture of middle class India. The present paper sets to access the role that drama can play in order to bring about social change with special reference to Vijay Tendulkar and four of his prominent plays ie. 'Kamala', 'Silence! The court is in session'(Shantata ! court chalu ahe!), 'Sakharam Binder' and 'Vultures'(Gidhade).

Key words: Drama, Social, Violence, Motive, Character.

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INTRODUCTION

As an audio- visual medium of expression , drama has been a very effective genre of literature which has been used since time immemorial to highlight the social , political, religious, philosophical, cultural and even the economical being of a particular community. Martin Esslin observes in his book 'The field of drama',

that drama can be defined more as an imitation of life which includes the portrayal of both reality and art, real and imaginative and above all presenting events and characters within a dimension of space and time. He further adds by saying that drama can be defined as “...a narrative made visible.”

In India too, the development of drama can be traced back to the time when it evolved as Sanskrit plays or the ‘Natyashastras’, to the likes of Rabindranath Tagore and his unique blend of dramatic productions, from the dramatic genius of Shri. Aurobindo to the revolutionary zeal of Bharati Sarabhai, the post independence playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh to the post modern playwrights like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan. It may be noted that most of the works of these literary artists circled around the portrayal of the political, social and economical issues that surrounded the society during their corresponding periods. Their main aim was not only to entertain a set of audiences but to awake the rational being of the people so that they could understand the prevailing issues that underlined the Indian society. Contemporary Indian English drama aims at displaying a magnanimous picture of life as it is, while providing a study of human nature in response to his/ her surroundings.

Vijay Tendulkar

One of the most prolific playwright in Indian drama would be Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar. Known to be one of the country’s leading Marathi dramatist, he was also a prominent screen and television writer, a literary essayist, a political journalist and a social commentator. Having written and produced thirty full length plays and twenty three one act plays, his contribution in the field of literature is noteworthy. However his fame as a playwright springs mostly from the controversial themes that he adopts in his play. While some have praised him highly for his outright frankness in dealing with sensitive issues, some have even criticized him on the openness and daring subject matters that he presents in his plays. A thorough examination of his plays would definitely leave the audience or the reader speechless as he portrays the ugly side of Indian society, especially the hypocrisy that defines the middle class Indian society. His themes mostly talk about the exploitation, violence and moral degradation of Indian sensibility which was once glorified as a model social system rooted in cultural and spiritual values. His plays awaken the reader to the underlying existing social evils.

A careful examination of some of his selected plays shows the diversity that characterizes his themes and subject matter. Although his portrayal of the middle class Indian society receives pivotal attention, yet in almost every play he deals with a new issue altogether which reveals to the audience and reader a different picture every now and then. Some of the aspects underlying his plays are stated thus:

Realistic Subject- Matter

When one reads or witnesses the literary productions of Vijay Tendulkar, one can definitely see that he is one of the most realistic playwrights in Indian Literature. Most of his themes are based on real life situations while his characters are portrayed in the most realistic manner possible. The play ‘Kamala’ was actually inspired by a real life incident – the Indian Express expose’ by Ashwin Sarin, who like Jaisingh in the play, bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference to expose a flesh trade racket. In another play, ‘Sakharam Binder’, Tendulkar exposes another masochistic practice whereby men arranged contractual cohabitation based on convenience with single women who have been deserted by their husbands or have walked out on them. Such men would bring home wives, have their way with them for a certain period of time, ill treat them and throw them out when they have had their fill. The concept of extra – marital affairs and unmarried pregnancy which is also colored with realism forms another subject matter of Tendulkar’s plays. ‘Silence the court is in session’ portrays this social taboo where even in real life is unacceptable in our society. In the real India the woman is expected to adhere to the rules and norms of society whereas the man is endowed with the right to indulge himself irrespective of his marital status or his relationship with the woman. Leela Bernare’s trial is evident of the actual reaction that a typical Indian middle class society would have towards such an incident. Tendulkar’s realistic portrayal allows the audience to analyze and dissect a society in its truest form thereby enabling them to connect and have a clear understanding of underlying social issues.

Social Issues

Aside from 'Encounter in Umbugland' (Dambadwipcha Mukabala), almost all of the plays of Vijay Tendulkar are steeped in social issues. Each play tells the audience or the reader of a pre dominant problem that infects the middle class Indian society. In 'Kamala' although Jaisingh's action of purchasing Kamala at a flesh trade market seems to portray him in a positive light yet his intentions say otherwise. His aim to expose the flesh trade racket was clearly secondary while the primary objective was simply to boost his image and career as a journalist. Even in modern day most organizations dealing with journalism and mass media seem to be interested in what sells rather than the truth where the singular motive is to improve their ratings at any cost, be it at the expense of an individual's prestige. On the other hand, in the play 'Sakharam Binder', Tendulkar deals with another regular social problem which is domestic violence. The ill treatment that Lakshmi faces in the hands of Sakharam physically, mentally and emotionally brings us face to face with the ordeal that an abused 'kept woman' experiences day after day. Sakharam views Lakshmi not as a human but an object of gratification whose sole purpose is to fulfill his every need. Tendulkar shows the dehumanization of a woman which is an everyday affair in the middle class Indian society, where she is regarded more like an object with a limited utilization period. The cynical and negative attitude of the Indian society towards women is further displayed in the 'Silence ! the court is in session'. The playwright very cleverly employs the play within a play technique to develop a plot. Here to the dramatized play within the play starts on a subtle and lighter note and develops towards a serious issue of unmarried pregnancy, pre-marital affairs and abused relationships. The play shows the extent of deviousness that a human being can go to. The pre planned schemes to degrade and expose Leela Benare's affair with Professor Damle by Sukhatme, Rokde, Ponkshe, Karnik, Mr. and Mrs Kashikar also serves to paint a picture of the reaction of a fundamentally orthodox society. By putting Leela on the stand, the other characters show the way in which our society would deliberate and pass a biased judgment without even considering the other male counterpart Professor Damle as an accomplice in the act. The society to which Leela belongs to does not only condemn her behavior as unethical and immoral but also deems her unfit to belong and exist in one. Considered to be one of the most violent play by Tendulkar, 'Vultures' displays the conflict within a household. The play is steeped in greed, lust and vengeance. As the name suggest even in the play most of the characters seem to devour each other in their thirst for property and wealth. There is a sense of distrust and hatred when one reads the play. Apart from Rama and Rajaninath, the other characters oscillate between playing the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed. The anger that the children expressed at the irresponsible actions of a selfish father and the treatment with which they use to deal with him leaves the reader and audience with a sense of disbelief taking into consideration the reputation of Indian families which have been held in high regard as one rooted in values and culture. Ramakant's and Umakant's greed does not even spare their sister Manik who they were ready to use as bait for attaining material gains. Here too, Tendulkar displays the hypocrisy that surrounded the middle class Indian families.

Motive

It is clear that Vijay Tendulkar sought material from the social system that he himself was part of for his literary productions. These productions display his discontentment with the Indian society. His plays project a silent protest and he rebels subtly against the hypocrisy of accepted norms and values that display a sense of biasness and errors. Yet despite his clear intent he does not make an obvious attempt to change or improve a flawed social system by providing a desirable conclusion to his plays. Kamala's future still remains as bleak as it was, while Leela still has to face the wrath and biased judgment of a male dominated society once she returns to it. At the end of the day, Lakshmi continues to support her Keeper despite the crime he commits of murdering Champa while Rama silently bears a secret for fear of the truth. The conclusion still sees the oppressor as the oppressor while victims still remain oppressed. There is no ultimate solution but what Tendulkar tries to do is to allow his readers and audience to draw a suitable conclusion based on what they felt about the different situations presented. As has been mentioned earlier, Tendulkar seems to arouse the interest of the reader and audience and to draw their attention towards various social issues that plague our social systems. His objective it seems is to acquaint them with what actually happens in the day to day life of

people within different social settings. This acquaintance automatically awakens the rational consciousness to think and ponder about what actually constitutes the social being of this country. Tendulkar's plays seem to pull us away from the utopian concept that we endorse about the Indian society and enables a direct encounter with bare facts and truths which are ugly and difficult to digest. However the way in which we react after witnessing or reading a play is not as important as the remedial steps and corrective measures that we take in order to change and revamp a flawed social system. By creating such awareness, Tendulkar has very subtly yet effectively infused a sense of responsibility in each and everyone's mind.

Conclusion

To conclude, Vijay Tendulkar's dramatic works speak a language of truth and draws us closer to everyday life. Though ugly, we cannot lose sight of the beauty with which he has drawn his plots and characters. The plays have a certain appeal and seem to provide a unique study of human nature put against a social background. How an audience member or a reader would react to it is altogether a different matter, yet Tendulkar's aim of presenting such situations and characters to depict his inner attitude and feelings can be highly considered as the mark of a true literary genius.

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