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www.galaxyimrj.com

galaxyimrj@gmail.com

The Theme of Man-Woman Relationship in Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures*

Pandurang Ananda Kirdat

Lecturer in English

Bharati Vidyapeeth,s

Institute of Technology (Poly.), Palus

Tal-Palus, Dist-Sangli. Maharashtra, India.

Indian drama has always been a poor relation in the house of Indian English literature. In post-independence era, contemporary Indian drama in English gives a brutal account of the social and political realities. Vijay Tendulkar is the most prolific and controversial dramatist among the Post-Independence Indian playwrights. Thematically Tendulkar's plays have ranged from the exploration of man-woman relationship to reinterpretations of social, historical and political episodes. His plays concentrate on different aspects of the human character and complexity of man-woman relationship. 'The Vultures' is an indictment of the male oriented society in which women are mere slaves for the achievement of men. In 'The Vultures', the human relationship between man-woman is depicted as husband-wife, brother-sister, father-daughter, lover-beloved and exploited-exploiter relationship. He exposes the inhuman violence in its verbal form of the patriarchal society against women. The themes of the play are based on the present socio-economic situation, family and marital relations, violence and male domination.

Introduction:-

Vijay Tendulkar, one of India's most influential playwrights, was born on 1928. His prolific writing over a period of five decades includes thirty full-length plays, twenty-three one-act plays, eleven children's dramas, four collections of short stories, two novels and five volumes of literary essays and social criticism. He is an important translator in Marathi, having rendered nine novels and two biographies as well as five plays. He is the author of original stories and screen plays for eight films in Marathi. He has written television serials in Hindi. He is a leading contemporary Indian playwright who writes in Marathi about contemporary issues. His plays have been translated and performed in English. In his plays, women play a central role. His female characters are mainly from the lower and middle class families such as housewives, teachers, mistresses, daughters, slaves and servants. These women bring not just variety of social station but also a broad range of emotions into the plays. Arundhati Banerjee, in her introduction to Five plays of Vijay Tendulkar, said: "...from the unbelievably gullible to the clever, from the malleable to the stubborn, from the conservative to the rebellious, from the self-sacrificing to the grasping." (p.X) His eight plays are translated in English and *The Vultures* is one of them. *The Vultures (Gidhade)* was actually written fourteen years before it was produced in 1970 and published in 1971. It depicts the economic and moral degeneration of a family. It is the English translation of Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi play *Gidhade*. It was first published in Marathi in 1971. It was translated into English by Priya Adarkar as *The Vultures* and first published in 1974. Tendulkar is also screen and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator.

Thematically, Tendulkar's plays have ranged the alienation of the modern individual. The themes of gender discrimination, sexual norms, violence, stability in the society, man-woman relationship, institution of marriage, social issues, power and morality have been featured prominently in his plays. The play has made an attempt to provide a comprehensive critical statement on human relationships. Such a leading contemporary Indian playwright, Vijay Tendulkar, died on May 19, 2008 in Pune.

About the theme of man-woman relationship:

Today, our society is becoming more and more complex. Industrialization, globalization, capitalism, science and technology have made the life of man more mechanical. Life of the modern man has lost all sense of coherence and has become fragmented. All this resulted in the human relationships. In the total network of human relationships, man -woman relationship has always occupied a central place. The theme of man-woman relationship is universal theme in the world literature. Depiction of the man-woman relationship in any literary work stands with cultural, social, economic, moral and political issues of the age. Today's society is becoming more complex in the context of psychological, sociological and patriarchic society. In the patriarchic society, woman's position is bad. Women have no ways to express her feelings, love and emotions in the patriarchic society. Beauvoir describes the bad condition of woman to man upon both the old and new testaments in *The Second Sex*: "For the man is not of the woman but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman but the woman for the man..... for the husband is the head of wife even as Christ is the head of Church. Therefore, as the church is subject upto Christ, So let the wives be to their husband in everything."(Beauvoir, Simone de 1974:110) It shows that the man is not created for woman but the woman is created for man.

In the context of psychology, marriage is the most significant and socially recognized form of man-woman relationship. Marriage is a social institution supported by tradition, custom and social morality. The theme of man-woman relationship deals with the major aspects of marital, premarital, post marital relationship and adolescent love. This type of relationship appears to be inexhaustible and the changing times and social situations have served to bring out its amazing diversity. In this context of premarital relationship, A.A. Khatri says: "There are two kinds of involvements in Pre-marital relationship-unilateral and bilateral. In unilateral involvement, a spouse prior to his/her marriage was romantically attached and/or erotically attached to another member of the opposite sex but latter did not reciprocate by love and/or erotic response. In another type of unilateral involvement, a spouse was an object of romantic love and/or sexual attraction of a member of the opposite sex but he/she did not reciprocate. In bilateral involvement, a spouse, prior to his/her marriage and another member of the opposite sex were mutually involved-romantically and/or erotically."(Khatri, 1983:120)

In the context of sociology, the family is a kind of link between the individual and society. In patriarchic society the status of the family and the divisions of labour are of intrinsic importance. When the male holds a superior economic position in the family and the female always is in favour of males who are in power for her survival and progress. Female is deprived of good status in society. In patriarchal family woman is worshipped only to the extent that man has made her the slave. Woman's position is

uncertain in patriarchal society. An analysis of man-woman relationship in the context of patriarchy is particularly relevant to the dramatic world. The male characters are shown to be dominant. Woman should satisfy her husband or lover by serving dutifully. In male dominated society, woman cannot preserve her feminist self. Saint Paul based the subordination of woman to man upon both the old and new testaments: "For the man is not of the woman but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman but the woman for the man..... for the husband is the head of wife even as Christ is the head of Church. Therefore, as the church is subject upto Christ, So let the wives be to their husband in everything." (Beauvior, Simone de 1974:110)

Man-Woman relationship in *The Vultures*:

The setting of *The Vultures* is an upper middle class family. Ramakant, Umakant and Manik are the legitimate children of Hari Pitale. Rama is Ramakant's wife. Rajaninath is Hari's illegitimate son who lives in the garage. Except Rama and Rajaninath all other characters are corrupted, greedy and lusty. Hari Pitale is the chief member of the family. He and his brother, Sakharam build up a business. Both were hardworker. After a short period, Pappa wrests the company from Sakharam. As a result, Sakharam becomes a poor man. Pappa has no love and affection for his sons. His children also have not any respect, regard or love for their father. When the play opens, Ramakant is seen packing a bag and his wife, Rama is standing motionless. Both are leaving the house. When Rajaninath hears footstep, he runs to the door, calls 'Rama' but she is already gone. Thus, the play opens violently with a sarcastic soliloquy of Rajaninath. It reveals the background of the play. The soliloquy of Rajaninath tells about vulgarity of Pappa and his children except Rama. Rajaninath remembers Rama's innocence, her love, her shyness, smiling face, sensitiveness. He also remembers the day, he had to go hungry to bed and how she had brought him some food and tea. She has only one request to Rajaninath that she wants to be a mother. So she puts illicit relationship with him. Manik is only daughter of Pappa. Her smoking, drinking, violent language and repulsive behavior reveal her hysteric personality. She is a complete contrast to Rama. She wants only money and marital enjoyment. But the man-woman relationship between Rajaninath and Rama is cordial. Manik, Ramakant and Umakant attack their father to grab money from him. They drive away their father and plan to kill him. It shows their vulgarity and aggressiveness.

In Act II, Ramakant and Umakant plan to break Manik's leg for money. They plan to blackmail Raja of Hondur who is lover of Manik. They think to publish their love affair. When they come to know that the Raja of Hondur died of heart attack, they plot to kick in the belly of their sister to abort her child which was of the Raja of Hondur. It is the heartless relationship of Ramakant and Umakant with their own sister.

In the next scene of Act II, Rama pleads her husband, Ramakant to leave the house because nobody can be happy in such a haunted house. Umakant wants his share and possession of the mortgaged house, but Ramakant refuses to help him to pay his debt. Thus Umakant takes revenge on his brother by telling him that Rajaninath is the real father of Rama's child. On hearing it, Ramakant becomes restless. He broods over it and decides to abort of Rama.

The relationship between Rajaninath and Rama is called as a lover-beloved relationship. Rajaninath is the illegitimate son of Pappa. Rama is the wife of Ramakant. Rajaninath is the brother-in-law of Rama. He watches the violent disintegration of the family. His coldness allows him to record the cruelty of the people involved in the process and the suffering of Rama. There is split between Rajaninath and Rama. Both are strikingly cold and his poetry charged with passion, sympathy and concern for Rama. Though Rajaninath and Rama have great sympathy for each other, they are outsiders. Rama is a sensitive, naturally kind and good hearted individual but she is like a helpless, submissive among the vultures. He is out casted from the family. He lives in the garage. Rama's illicit relationship to her half-brother-in-law evokes the question of morality. So the patriarchic society doesn't give permission for such type of relationship but it is the genuine and humane relationship in the whole play. The relationship between them is immoral. The sexual aspect of their association is only their true love.

Rama wants to fulfill her desire to become a mother through him. So she keeps illicit relationship with Rajaninath. It is different relationship from the other members of the family. He closely watches the painful condition of Rama in the house of vultures. He pours out his feelings through his monologues. She secretly feeds him because he is lonely, helpless, unmarried man lived in the old garage. He also accepts whatever she brings for him. Rajaninath says: ".....If you took mud in your hand, it'd turn to sweetmeats." (Tendulkar, 2003: 239) It shows his faith on Rama and she also shows sympathy and kindness towards him.

Rama expresses her agony and frustration in the whole play. She is bored to her husband's drunken love. As a wife, Ramakant doesn't pay attention to her. He treats her badly, and then she declares her intention to become a mother to Rajaninath. For that purpose, she is ready to keep immoral relationship with him. She is hungry for motherhood. According to her, every woman has her own rights, wills. No one can stop it. In this context, Rama says: ".....It's not the fault of doctors, of learned men, of saints and sages! It's not even my fault! This womb's healthy and sound, I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil's rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root. If the seed's soaked in poison, if it's weak, feeble, and lifeless devoid of virtue-then why blame the soil?" (Tendulkar, 2003: 241) In this relationship, no one is dominant. Both are equal and kind. When Rama goes to give Rajaninath food and tea, Ramakant stops her and says if he is so proud, then why he is begging for food and tea. But she has been always on Rajaninath's side. She shows mercy about him. Though she has no courage to bring food and tea openly for him. She gives food to him. It shows her love for him.

Rajaninath is only man in the family of Pappa who can understand the feelings of Rama. He criticizes all the members of the family. He calls them as 'Five Vultures.' They are responsible for the tragedy of Rama. They behave like vultures. When she meets him in the garage, she reveals. "Let's forget that subject! Let's talk of something else. There are lots of other things." (Tendulkar, 2003: 239) It shows that she has a will to meet him to tell about her love. Thus, the relationship between them is cordial.

There is husband-wife relationship between Ramakant and Rama. Ramakant is the dominant character in comparison with his wife, Rama. Being an alcoholic man, he fails as a husband to make mother to her. She spent twenty years impotently. She is

powerless woman. Rama expresses her agony and frustration. She begs Ramakant to change the residence but he rejects her request. He is lean-bodied, snub-nosed and small-browed man. His quest to become a father is intensive. For it, he does whatever he wants. In this context, Ramakant says to her. “.....Rama dear, that Achalanand Swami or what you call' im from Kandivali's coming this evening. To the Rajadhyaksha,.' at Linking road. Let's drop in there.” (Tendulkar, 2003: 212) It shows that the domestic life of Ramakant and Rama is not good. They struggle for success.

Ramakant is not active person. He only sees dreams to become a rich man. He is a lazy man. Though he is vulgar, he shows sympathy and kindness to her during her pregnancy. Ramakant says:”..... Take same milk and ghee, what? Must have rest as well. Change of climate, that's the best.....” (Tendulkar, 2003: 237) Though he treats her boldly, she does not show displeasure. So many years, she has endured it. She does not complain. Many years, she damns up her tears, but she is afraid of losing her control. Streams of blood will flow from her eyes. It gives an idea of how Ramakant behaves with Rama. He goes to every Swami, an astrologer, doctor for the treatment of Rama because twenty years passed but they have no child. So he goes to them. On the one hand, he believes Saints and Swami and on the other hand, he depends on doctors. He is in dilemma. She wants to escape from all these things. Rama wants to escape from life. Though she is alive, it is living death of her wifeness. No one takes care of her but she is loyal to her husband. Ramakant takes care of Rama during her pregnancy. He brings some sacred ash from Shirdi. Every day, he gives her doses. There are injections for her. He tells that at least ten rupees are spent every single day. It proves that he is really good husband who takes care of his wife during her pregnancy. She is really suffered from loneliness. He is always suspicious man. She has no idea at all of his suspicious behavior. She has no feelings of guilt at that moment.

There is brothers-sister triangular relationship among Ramakant, Umakant and Manik. Ramakant and Umakant are the sons of Hari Pitale and Manik is only daughter of Pappa. She is near about 35 years. Her body has withered look of being past its prime. She smokes a cigarette and drinks liquor. She is very lazy. Her clothes are disordered, as if she has come straight from her bed. She appears to be a hysterical type. She behaves badly to every member of the family. She always suspects that Ramakant and Umakant will kill her and get away her share of property. The brothers do not hesitate to kill each other for money. They are greedy. Manik has a fear of being killed. She does not believe them. She says: “...When I had typhoid last years, far from looking after me, you'd all plotted to put poison in my medicine” (Tendulkar, 2003: 208) All they torture their own father. They want money to succeed in getting the bank balance. When the heartless brothers talk to their sister about her love affair with the Raja of Hondur, they use obscene language. They drag out her illicit relationship with the Raja of Hondur. Ramakant suggests her: “Manik, darling, I pity you. Really! Poor soul! If he's going to keep you, or something, that's a different matter. Not such a bad thing, these bloody days! What times are upon us! Business in the bloody dumps! If anyone keeps you, at least you've escaped beggary for the time being” (Tendulkar, 2003: 235)

These words reveal the naturally existing violence in him. It also tells about their rude nature. When Manik goes in bathroom, she takes more time. Hence they

criticize her. Umakant says: “Why did that cow have to be in such a hurry to block the bathroom? Not a hope now of her coming out for an hour! Thinks herself a beauty queen at the best of times! And now she’s after that Raja of Hondur, she’s got above herself! As if that sacred elephant would look twice at this poor man’s mare! Hopes that letcher’ll make her his beautiful Queen, if you please.” (Tendulkar, 2003: 213) Ramakant and Umakant tell frankly about their sister's love affairs. They do not hesitate to tell private life and her love affairs with many men. Umakant says: “Good victim she’s spied out this time! Before this...that cycle-shop owner. The film-company cameraman. And in between, that stall-keeper from market. Used to roam round town with him. On his motorbike. Arms round his waist!” (Tendulkar, 2003: 216)

It shows that Ramakant and Umakant are demons, vultures who behave with their own sister very badly. They have no mercy for her. She also behaves like male. She smokes cigarette and drinks liquor. Shedances with Ramakant and Umakant and fills a glass of liquor for Pappa. They plan to kill pappa for money. They treat their father as a useless man. For money, Ramakant and Umakant break a leg of Manik. They decide to publish their sister's love affair in the papers. They did not take care of their own prestige. When the Raja of Hondur dies due to heart attack their plan to blackmail him vanished. As a result Ramaknt kicks on and aborts the foetus. They also comment on the Raja of Hondur and Manik. Ramakant says: “Bash, How'd she commit *sati*, after her leg was broken? Couldn't sit down ...on the funeral pyre”. (Tendulkar, 2003: 247) Then Umakant says: "She'll sit on the baby. The one in her belly.” (Tendulkar, 2003: 247) It shows that the relationship between Ramakant, Umakant and Manik is like vultures. They behave rudely, vulgarly, cruelly and suspiciously. Ramakant uses obscene language, word. He calls her ‘whore, bitch, rascal’ in the play.

There is father-daughter relationship between Pappa and Manik. She is one of the vultures in Pitale family. She behaves like vultures with her father. She also participates in the plan to kill her father for money. It shows that Manik has no sense, no mercy and sympathy for her father. She is called as scoundrel. When Pappa’s brother, Sakharam comes to home, she is not ready to keep Sakharam in home. Manik says that Papa has money. After that, they torture him for money.

Rama is the daughter-in-law of Pappa. There is cordial relationship between Rama and Pappa. Rama is only one character who takes care of Pappa. He is an old man, but he has habit of smoking cigarette and drinking liquor. Pappa calls Rama as ‘Bahu’. When Pappa wakes up, she gives him break-fast. He has also a habit of working toothless mouth. He also says if he doesn’t get up one day, his ‘Bahu’ will wait for him to get up. When Ramakant, Umakant and Manik were beating Pappa for money he calls Rama to save himself. He thinks that Rama is only one who helps and saves him. It shows that Rama has mercy, sympathy about Pappa.

Thus, the relationship of the members in Pitale family is based on money and not love. The play creates much storm in society. The followers of conventional morality were shocked by it. Greed and lust make the members of the family cruel. As a result of it, they act like vultures towards each other. All characters lack courage, honesty and self-confidence.

Violence and man-woman relationships are the main themes of *The Vultures*. The violence becomes more and more brutal in this play. Samik Bandyopadhyay says, "Violence in *The Vultures* operates in a series of axes-sons against fathers, brother against sister, brother against brother, each leading to an exile from home, followed by a series of returns/ reversal, the exiles attempting to avenge themselves." (Tendulkar 2003:1). Tendulkar depicts the brutal lust for money in this play. After the production and publication of *The Vultures*, Tendulkar's name associated with sensationalism, sex and violence. This play is a pitiless dissection of human nature. It reveals inherent tendencies to violence, selfishness, sensuality, wickedness and greed for money. The decadence and degeneration of human individuals exposed through the interactions among the members of a family.

This play depicts a strange mixture of ruthlessness and compassion, the degeneration of a family. He is realistic in the delineation of characters and the man-woman relationship. The tone of the play is sensitivity and tenderness towards humanity. The title of the play *The Vultures* itself indicates the unpleasant subject matter of the play. N.S. Dharan in his book *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar* commented on Tendulkar's interest in feminism. He told, "...though not a self-acknowledged feminist, (Tendulkar) treats his women characters with understanding and compassion while pitting them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious." (Dharan 1999:28)

Thus, Vijay Tendulkar depicts women as loyal, docile, hardworking, and tenderhearted. He deals with the existence of human being, human mind, human psychology and human relationship through his plays. The issues of violence, sex, illicit human relationships, power, stability in the society and social issues point out in all his plays in English translation. In this context, C.Coelho rightly points out: "In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egotistical man and equally self-centered society. He liberated Marathi stage from the tyranny of conventional theatre with its mild doses of social and political satire for purpose of pure entertainment."(Coelho, 1994:34) It shows that Tendulkar has shown different types of themes in his plays but the theme of man-woman relationship is very complicated.

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