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## Tradition and Modernity in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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### Abstract

Present paper is a holistic attempt to focus on depiction of tradition and modernity in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. One might also say that modernity is an economic force with social, cultural, and political correlatives. Tradition is a cultural force with social, economic, and political correlatives. Vijay Tendulkar in his plays reveals not only traditional but also modern trends. He has made an amalgamation of tradition and modernity in his plays. They are intertwined with tradition and modernity. In Tendulkar's plays, one can clearly see his acute observation of life. The event and incidents depicted in his plays have their origin in real life. While projecting the social reality, he uses the fine balance between tradition and modernity. Tendulkar is not a traditional but a new (modern) playwright.

Key words- Tradition, modernity, economic force, social reality

Tradition is a set of values, beliefs, customs and way of life which has been eternalized by a particular community or group and which is carried from one generation to

next. It moulds different cultures into shape. In fact, it would not be an overstatement to say that tradition is paramount to the survival of any culture. Modernity functions as an economic and social tool to achieve some wealth, flexibility, and innovation for individuals and groups; Tradition functions, partly and at times largely, as a mythological state which produces the sensation of larger connectedness and stability in the face of shockingly massive social change over the last half-century. One might also say that modernity is an economic force with social, cultural, and political correlatives; Tradition is a cultural force with social, economic, and political correlatives. Satisfyingly asymmetrical in their relation, they require us, in talking of one, to talk also of the other, just as they induce us to move as nimbly as possible between theoretical abstraction and experiential reality. But their separation is itself part of the mythological drama in current Indian thought, just as their mutual implication is the import of the same ironic smile that brings to an effective close any conversation one hears here about them. And so we take them in turn only, finally, to see them speaking to each other through the lives of acquaintances, informants, and fictional protagonists.

The second key institution of tradition is the joint family, a usually patriarchal system in which the bride comes to live under the rule of her mother-in-law (in many areas customarily in a village far from her own family) and any senior daughters-in-law, and in which the sheer number and confusion of generations and cousins within close quarters makes both privacy and individuality scarcely relevant values, let alone easily achievable. But the joint family is just as semiotic a figure as village, it is a sign for a kinship system that goes beyond the orderly distribution of women and property to what Sudhir Kakar calls “a therapeutic model of social organization” (124), with relations of trust, respect, and responsibility nurturing and guiding one at every step, an extended familial utopia.

The third institution is that of caste, and here one must distinguish between *varna*, the four castes idealized in the Vedas, and *jati*, the much-proliferated and regionally quite various

denominations based mostly upon actual occupations. The second moves us into the power relations of daily life in which one's Brahmin friends complain that jobs are there only for the "Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes," as the reservation (or quota) legislation terms them, while one's friends from the other end of the spectrum complain about the Brahman (or, alternatively, the Tamil) "mafia" that runs everything. In a social reality being rapidly restructured within a "modern" class system subsidiary to the global consumer economy, there may be plenty of truth in both perspectives. But *jati*, the occupational castes, organize social life, economic contacts and often basic options, value systems, and family customs, and even ethno-sociological profiles of the sort statisticians love best. The *varna* order tidies into four classes the functional divisions of Indian social organization and derives its authority from its Vedic origins. As an abstract, conceptual order it trips us over into the other emphasis in thinking about tradition, namely its logical or cognitive system.

Tendulkar is a traditional artist with extraordinary talents, and his plays reveal modernist qualities. He has made an amalgamation of tradition and modernity in his plays. They are intertwined with tradition and modernity. The plot and character of his plays demonstrate this intertwining in an artistic manner.

Tendulkar's *Silence! The court is in session* makes an emphasis on the treatment of tradition and modernity in the social background in which the play is set in. The play *Silence! The court is in session* is the mile-stone not only in Tendulkar's career but also in the history of Marathi drama. The play is refreshingly new in terms of its content and form. It involves Leela Benare a school teacher and the men who come in her life. Her bitterness with the society for the way it treated or toyed with her gets expressed through the mock court session. The play is based on a real incident. The stimulus comes from an amateur group on its way to stage a mock trial in a village near Bombay. This play comes as a turning point in Tendulkar's career. It is a "play within a play" or a "play in form of rehearsal". In it

Tendulkar has raised several questions about love, sex, and moral values prevalent in the society. To expose the hollowness of the middle class morality and double standards of society, he makes ample use of irony, satire, pathos and mock element. The success of the play lies in its universality. The questions raised by Benare the central character of the play, exist in all ages and societies. Benare is projected as a rebel against the established values of the basically traditional society. So in a sense, she may be seen as Tendulkar's projection of a 'new woman' in the Indian context. The action of the play revolves round the character of Leela Benare. She is presented as a modern female protagonist and her role eclipses the roles of her traditional male-counterparts. In love, she is cheated twice; first by her maternal uncle and later by Prof. Damle, her loving-companion. However, in the first event, the guilt passes unnoticed and hence, unpunished. But, in the other one, she is caught in a trap, through the cruel game cunningly arranged by her companions, for her love affair has been already resulted by her pregnancy. Each time Benare is disillusioned by her male-companions, for they love just her body and not her mind. Thinking of Prof. Damle as, "an intellectual god" (Tendulkar: *Silence! The Court is in SessionI*, 118). She sexually involved in a love affair with him. But he too, like her previous lover, is interested in her love just physically. Having fulfilled his sexual lust, he turns away; leaving her to suffer her on fate in so called modern society.

Each time, Benare's counterparts successfully maneuver to victimize her, since she has no backing and support. She is forced to live a lonely, solitary life. So, it is easy for them to treat her as though she is a use and through object. The tragedy of her life does not end with this only. Miss Benare becomes an object of mock among her companions who pose that they are upholders of moral values of society. Benare is, therefore made a scapegoat. She is ill treated by her colleagues. She suffers at their hands for the offence she has not committed.

This is why she does not accept the punishment meted out to her: “infanticide” (actually, foeticide).

Violence that characterizes most of Tendulkar’s plays make its appearance felt in this play also. Through the torture of a helpless woman, Tendulkar lights on the sadist tendencies of middle class people. All other character fails to achieve the various aims they have in their respective lives. Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar remains childless, Ponshe fails to be a scientist, Sukhatme to be successful lawyer, Karnik to be an actor and Rokde to gain an independent existence. In their attack on Benare, their hidden sense of failure surfaces and is clearly noticed. Tendulkar indicates that the defeatism of unsuccessful, frustrated men forces them to seek vicious pleasure in inflicting miseries on others, particularly those who are simple and innocent.

Benare’s rhetorical soliloquy, at the end of the play, has become very famous in the contemporary Marathi Theater. But it is presented in such a way that it recreates a doubt in the mind of audience whether it is soliloquy or self defense suggesting, of course, in the final analysis that truth always gets suppressed in the proceeding of court, the fountain of justice! That is why Benare’s objection seems to have been drowned by the judge’s cry of silence and the banging of the gravel during the court proceedings. Her tragedy reveals that too much of innocence is unpardonable even in so called cultured society. Innocence is punished and cruelty is set free. Miss Benare is a modern lady, coming out from status of the traditional Indian typical lady she is independent much sincere in all aspect of the life than her male counterparts. On the contrary all male characters including Mrs. Kashikar are of traditional temperament. This difference in the attitude of dramatic personage creates the conflict in the matter of their existence.

Like other plays of Tendulkar once again there is an encounter between tradition and modernity in his *Sakharam Binder*. It is one among his social plays. In this play Tendulkar

has focused on poor middle classmen condition and on their behaviors. Sakharam is cursed Brahmin character of the play who escapes from his house at the age of the eleven with the fear of the punishment of his parents. So wandering in the open streets and facing many troubles he becomes rude and takes a job of Binder in a press.

His suffering makes him rude toward the social institution and traditional beliefs. He does not belief in the holy marriage institution. And he brings the rejected women of the society in his home and he enjoys and tortures them sexually and physically. In this order he brings a woman named, Laxmi, a poor, sensitive, terrified, religious and good working woman. Her husband had thrown her out of house that she could not produce child and due to some other misunderstanding. Shakharam brings her in his house and tell her that in spite of all bad habit he is the master of his house and most be respected in his house in exchange of giving her shelter and food: she agrees with him and starts to live with him. But as the passes of time Shakharam tortures her and she leaves his house and goes to her nephew's house.

After her departure Sakharam brings another woman, Champa. She is totally different in the behavioral sense with Laxmi. She is not silly like Laxmi. She does not serve him physically but she is smarter than Laxmi. Shakaram fulfills his sexual need with her but other household he has to do himself.

After sometime Laxmi returns to Sakharam's home being humiliated by false charge of theft by the wife of her nephew. At this Shakharam kicks her and does not allow her to live in his house but Champa showing pity upon her allows her to live in the same houses saying that she(Laxmi) will fulfill his domestic needs and she(Champa) will physical. But Sakharam in the effect of liquor beats Laxmi and drives her out of house at this Laxmi discloses the secret of the love affair of Daud and Champa at this Sakharam being disturbed and exited kills Champa. And at this juncture Laxmi a traditional lady shows modern temperament and

encourages Sakharam to do not worry to about what happen. She promises him that she will lead a happy life with him and fulfill his needs.

Through this play Tendulkar has contrasted two different aspects of women through Champa, and Laxmi, one is so rude, sensitive and full of revolt, and another is silly, poor and domestic, religious, Indian lady. If we look upon the general tendency of human being is based on social effect. All the good and bad behaviors are product of society. It is society which forces one's to do good or bad: It is also applied in the all of the characters of the *Shakharam Binder*.

Sakharam himself is the deformed product of society being run away from house at the age of the eleven due to fear of punishment of his parents. He wanders in the streets of the city and becomes the subject of hatred and torture by society so he becomes rude and loses all the religious and traditional belief of the society, and behaves according his needs. This also happen in the case of Champa that's why she becomes so rude and complicated. Fauzdar Sinde hires her from her parents in her child age and sexually tortures her but when she grows up she begins to hate him and leaving him she runs away and Sakharam brings her after departure of Laxmi.

The protagonist of the play, Sakharam neither maintains the traditional patterns nor the modern style of the society. He leads a different kind of life. He appears crude, aggressive and violent. But his association with Laxmi who is a traditional lady, he displays the influence of Laxmi's character in his personality. As soon as Champa enters in his life who is a modern lady, all the desired changes evaporate, and he is seen as a transformed into a sensual drunkard and a modern man.

For the balance in the society the adaptation of modernity is as necessary as the presence of traditional values. Access of everything is bad, is moral law, so it can be also applied in the case of tradition and modernity. In the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* also Tendulkar

presents the fine imbalance of tradition and modernity which creates the hell in the life of Ghashiram. In this play, Tendulkar has shown us how Ghashiram commercializes his daughter, to get power and become insensitive towards the feelings of his daughter and turns into a cynic and comes to realize his mistake when it is too late. Ghashiram far from a loving father and a good human being transforms into a beast after getting insulted and being charged of theft by Poona Brahmins. He takes off his sash and throws it on the ground and says:

But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahmin but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made me an animal; I'll be a devil inside. 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. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas one more.

(Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 17)

From a Brahmin he changes into a beast. He is left in this world only with one desire that is of taking revenge from the Brahmins of Poona. He was well acquainted with Nana's lustful nature. For taking revenge, he uses his own daughter, Lalita Gauri as bait. He has only one ambition and to fulfil this ambition he can do anything. He sacrifices his own daughter. He himself takes his daughter to Nana. First, he creates Nana's interest in his daughter who is presented before him as a servant. When Nana was running after Lalita, he interferes in between. Nana accuses him of letting the prey flee. In the disguise of a servant, Ghashiram says:

Servant:        You'll get her back.

Nana:            How-after this!

Servant: If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found.

Nana: But not that one!

Servant: Even she will be found; that very one will be found.

(Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 20)

He tries to bargain this affair and says to Nana:

Servant: Whoever she is, if the order is given, this servant will bring her.

Nana: Would you? We'll be grateful. We will give more than enough in return. But when?

Servant: Tomorrow. Or the day after or the days after that.

Nana: May be tonight, eh!

(Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 20)

He increases Nana's anxiety, knowing fully Nana's lustful behaviour. In order to execute his plan, he does not think about the future of his own daughter and her feelings. He is blinded by the feelings of taking revenge. He uses his own daughter as an instrument to take revenge and to fulfill his ambition of getting power. But there are moments of self-realization again. He cries out loudly, when he realizes his immoral act. He says:

Oh my daughter... The beast .... (Then yells at the audience). Oh you people.

Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look! Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter-a whore. That old over ripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach... Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs.

(Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 22)

To settle a bargain with Nana, he says to him that the public is talking about his relations with his daughter and he is being insulted in public. He adds that he will not send

his daughter any more to his house, “Whatever has happened has flowed into Ganga. My daughter will not come again to your Highness’s house. Now I’ll get here married. Now I’ll search for a bridegroom” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 23). But Nana’s carnal desires have not yet fulfilled and so he does not let her go. Ghashiram exploits this weakness of Nana and blackmails him:

Nana: But—a few more days ... After that, we ourselves will see that she is married well to one of our men.

Ghashiram: No

Nana: Ghashya, you know the price of disobedience.

Ghashiram: This servant is ready, Highness. That humiliation can be borne, but no more of the other. Think about the mother of the girl. After all, it’s her own child, nurtured from the womb, the breast...

(Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 23)

Ghashiram gives Nana a solution of elevating him to the post of Kotwal. He says that if he is elevated to this post, he will give his daughter to him and he himself will manage the people who insult him on account of his daughter being given to him. Nana is hesitant to elevate him to the post of Kotwal. So he assures him to give other rewards. Nana’s promises of other rewards do not impress Ghashiram. To Nana’s reaction, “...Don’t you have a heart?” Ghashiram coldly responds, “The heart that gives a daughter to your whims and fancies. Highness” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 23).

Phadnavis realizing the inefficiency of threats and the futility of his promises finally asks him, “Then what can I do?” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 23). Seizing the opportunity offered thus by a lust ridden lecher Ghashiram proposes, “All right, sir, to shut people’s mouths, makes me the Kotwal of Poona” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 24).

Shocked and stunned by the audacity of the alien Brahmin Nana Phadanvis persuades him not to be adamant. Nana in sheer helplessness says, “Bastard. You’ve got me in narrow pass. Ghasiram-Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 24). Rising to Kotwalship, Ghashiram becomes arrogant and, “seems different and larger than life” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 25). Sutradhar comments and sums up the situation as, “Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 27). After enjoying power and creating terror in Poona, Ghashiram decides to find a bridegroom for Lalita Gauri for he believes, “Now once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter ...and get her married, then every thing will be way I want in...” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 37). He is also convinced that, “...it’s easy to find a bridegroom when one has money, jewels and respect! And my daughter’s beautiful-one in a million!” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 37). But Ghashiram’s plans are upset by Nana. Nana gets rid of his daughter Lalita Guari through a forced abortion and then marries a, “Just-this-year ripened bride” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 39). In the end of the play, Ghashiram realizes his mistake and confesses, “Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on your chest but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me...Come on ... Come on. Oh that’s good. Very good” (Tendulkar: *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 54).

He dies with a heavy heart realizing that he has spoiled the life of his own daughter and he is responsible for her death. Gauri’s character is presented before us totally passive. Her feelings are not conveyed to us by the playwright. She does what his father says to her. She meekly obeys her father’s orders. The father exploits his own daughter for his own interests and is responsible for her death. Gauri has no individuality. She is a mechanical character without having emotions. She does not revolt nor grumble nor complain.

Thus Ghashiram represents both tradition and modernity in his character, in the very beginning he is a traditional Brahmin but later on after facing humiliation by the people of Poona city, he adopts modernity by commercializing his own daughter in lieu of the post of the Kotwal of the city. It is sudden transformation of his mindset from traditional to a modern revengeful Kotwal brings storm in his life.

Thus the plays of Tendulkar display the treatment of tradition and modernity in one way or other. *Silence! The Court is in Session* demonstrates the existence of both tradition and modernity in the plot and character of the play. Benare is modern, successful lady, her independent life causes jealousy to her traditional male counterparts who are a failure in life in one or other way that's why out of sear jealousy they mentally and verbally exploits her; in the play *Sakharam Binder* the central character Sakharam in neither traditional nor modernist, he has his own self made codes and mind set as per his convenience. The two female protagonists Laxmi and Champa represents both tradition and modernity in their behavior and tendencies but in this play it is circumstance which play main role in bringing havoc in the life of the protagonists; *Ghashiram Kotwal* is full of traditional and modern pictures of human behavior. First of all its style is traditional hence it is written in poetic form. Ghashiram appears as a simple, pious and traditional Brahmin in the city of Poona it is misbehaves of the people of Poona city who were of loose morals and blindly lashed with modern culture and style of living. Ghashiram also becomes the same after facing humiliation by them and access of the effect of modernity in his life style brings very miserable end of his life.

In Tendulkar's plays, one can clearly see his acute observation of life. The event and incidents depicted in his plays have their origin in real life. Tendulkar's play can be seen as the mirror that reflects the individual's inner world and outer world. While projecting the social reality, he uses the fine balance between tradition and modernity. He is one of the

contemporary dramatists who advocate new social drama. In his plays discussed above in this chapter, he deals with problems such as marriage, sex, power, politics, and violence etc. He diagnoses the ill and evils of contemporary society with a view to bring reformation in contemporary society and in the mindset of the peoples. Tendulkar is not a traditional but a new (modern) playwright.

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