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**A Portrayal of disillusionment, irony and incongruity of human life in Vijay  
Tendulkar's *Safar***

**ABSTRACT**

Vijay Tendulkar has remained the representative of the contemporary modern drama, not only in Marathi, but also on the pan-Indian level, for a long span of years. Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the last quarter century, to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing particularly on those of the middle class. He has always been on the forefront and frequently achieved something new that gave new directions to Indian drama. Tendulkar's *Safar* bares the cloistered middle class mind to the problems and situations of this real world. He puts forth the disillusionment, irony and incongruity of human life in the contemporary antagonistic surroundings. Making a common man experience a persistent feeling of estrangement in society and forcing him to return home with a feeling of charging, encountering a vacuumed emptiness in midst of reality. This paper aims to emphasise upon the immobile fate of impotent aspirations and unrealistic desires of the common man as revealed in Tendulkar's play. *Safar* is a testimony to Tendulkar's insatiable interest in human mind and his compulsion to write about all kinds of human situations. The play doesn't carry the burden of intellectual speculation and yet it remains beyond the shallow and hollow, telling us silently, something original, beyond words. The play tends towards existentialism. *Safar* is notable for its uncompromising realism, merciless probing of human nature, and candid scrutiny of individual and group psychology and use of an effective experimental technique.

**Keywords: middle-class, common man, human, fantasy, realism, under-developed.**

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'*Safar*', earlier named '*Cyclewallah*' (1991) is a play that incorporates elements of fantasy to convey the sameness of human nature.<sup>1</sup> The play is a reflection of people who spend their entire lives in a fantasy without any understanding of reality. But to live in the true sense of the word, a person must live through situations that force him to look beyond himself. Situations, which

shock him by confronting him with the unimaginable.<sup>2</sup> What makes the play a unique creation of Tendulkar is that it consists of type-characters representing a certain class. As a result the playwright does not name them. The protagonist is denoted just by the phrase '*Mukhya Patra*' (Main character) and other characters, though specifically named, are the fictitious projections of the mental images of the main character. The *Mukhya Patra* represents the suppressed, parent dominated, underdeveloped grown ups of the protection-oriented middle-class. The character is not entangled in any extra ordinary contexts or situations, but explore the realities of the life around us, as he is inevitably settled in contemporary psychic influences. Here Tendulkar has intelligently restricted the number and range of characters, situations and episodes, giving wider scope to deeper interpretations and meaningful corollaries.

The idea of the play *Safar* was born when Tendulkar, advised to exercise at home, procured a wheel less cycle. Though his thoughts and fantasies, wavered, he remained immobile. This, says Tendulkar, is the state of our society, where man's problems are perennial and their solutions, temporary.

The play begins with a note of fantasy and remains on that level throughout. There is an 'exerciser' (bicycle without wheels, meant for exercise) on the stage. The main character (*Mukhya Patra*) appears fully prepared (though childishly) for a long tour. He declares his intention of a long tour on the bicycle. He has never been out of his house. His parents have taken care of not allowing him to do so, he being their only child. However all this while he has nurtured the dream of a long tour. Finally his parents have given their consent after his insistence and pleading for many years. Now the parents appear on the stage and make their final attempt to change his mind, but he is determined to make his dream true and so finally they bid good-bye to him, making all kinds of over affectionate parental suggestions.

The main character sets off to his tour, partly tense and frightened, partly enjoying his freedom. He jingles the bell of the bicycle, and a man comes out of his house angrily and scolds him for disturbing him by sounding his doorbell. The dejected traveller recollects his enthusiasm and reaches a spot where there are roads going in different directions. The main character finds himself confused as he is unable to decide which way to go. A guide appears, but he is of no help. The main character somehow manages to escape, but again comes to a halt when he finds the name board of his town at the end of the road. He is confused how he reaches the same town again after coming out of it. A wise man appears and explains to him the meaning of that board. The tour continues. Four rowdy people storm in and take the main character to task, accusing him of killing their hen under his bicycle. All his defenses are ignored and he is compelled to pay them fifty rupees. After the main character recovers from the shock, he continues paddling

further and then halts a while to appreciate the majestic beauty of the sunset. He is confronted by two rough men, they accuse him of trespassing into their private property and threaten to arrest him and keep him in cow shed. He has to pay some money to them too. Slowly it is getting dark. The main character remembers that it is an ideal situation for the arrival of dacoits, but boasts that he needn't worry, as he is carrying a burglar alarm. The so called burglar alarm starts ringing and a dacoit actually appears. He withdraws only after taking away the traveller's camera. Now it is fairly dark. While the main character is enjoying his confident mood after the dacoit's exit, a lion appears. When the main character ascertains that it is actually a lion, he tries to play a trick on him by engaging him in silly conversation. The lion gets simply bored of him and leaves silently. The main character feels victorious, remembers that he is to write his diary and starts writing it in the torchlight. A veiled figure is seated beside him and writing a ghost diary without torchlight. After an exchange of words and demonstration of the veiled figure's ghostly powers, the main character faints. The ghost takes away the veil and discloses that he is not actually a ghost, but a stage actor. The main character now gets up and discloses that he had not really fainted and shakes hands with the so-called ghost. But he experiences, and the ghost confirms that the ghost is a real one. The main character desperately cries for Baba, his father who appears in his internal mind. Baba, after much thinking advises the main character to do nothing, which, according to him, is the best policy in the present situation. The main character stops for some time and the ghost retreats when it hears the call of a cock. The gigantic cock actually appears on the stage and settles itself upon the bicycle. It refuses to oblige even after much persuasion by the main character. The main character renders round the bicycle making noise like hen, and then the cock excitedly chases him. In the commotion that follows, the main character finally succeeds in escaping from the cock. He resumes his journey after extreme physical exhaustion. Suddenly it begins to rain heavily with the thundering of clouds and lightening. When it becomes impossible to proceed, the main character halts, takes off his drenched clothes, squeezes them and hangs them to dry, when the rain stops. While he is enjoying his free nakedness, his clothes disappear one by one. Unaware of the fact, he is busy in locating his place in the big map. A feminine voice calls him and announces her arrival. The main character desperately cries for Baba. Baba appears in his inner mind and advises him to close his eyes. The main character thinks that he cannot see his hanging clothes because his eyes are closed, though they are actually open. A big fish, owner of a feminine voice, enters and introduces herself to be a real princess, who has turned into a fish due to the curse of a *Yaksha*. She admits that she has fallen in love with the main character and appeals to him to fight with the *Yaksha*. She discloses that she had swallowed his clothes, and fancies that now she will give birth to his child that will be wearing his clothes. The main

character desperately cries in protest. Again the same neighbour angrily comes out and scolds him for disturbing his sleep. He points out that the bicycle has no wheels. The main character, in a state of shock, splutters childishly in protest and finally goes to sleep like a small child in a pathetic pose. The play finally ends here.

The play is remarkably short in length. The very idea of *safar*, viz. a world tour upon a bicycle that has no wheels brings in a dramatic element. Here, in this play, he highlights the typical world of experiences of the middle class.

*Safar* is an obliquely scathing commentary upon the middle class view of life woven through a series of refreshing fantasies. Apparently, it is an imaginary journey of a slightly mentally retarded man, but every detail points its finger towards one or the other middle-class feature either satirically and jokingly, or seriously and harshly. The very first sentence of the main character is his question addressing to the viewers, “aaj *san kaun sa hai? San*”<sup>3</sup> poignantly reveals the fact that days, weeks and months just roll on routinely and meaninglessly for this class. His confessions like “*bahar kabhi gaye nahin. Baba aai ne kabhi jaane nahin diya. Iklauta hoon na!*,” (S54) i.e. he’s never been out since his parents never allowed him to do so, his confirmation after his money is robbed by men that “*Baba kehte hain ki samaaj ke nichle tabkon mein aaye din naitik moolyon aadi ka jo nymaas ho chala hai, who sach maloom padta hai. Jise dekho woh corrupt*” (S70)- all point towards the narrow, limited, frightful and still boastfully so-called value oriented, elders – dominated, routine world of the middle class. Even the fantasies and the main character’s responses and reactions towards these fantastic endeavors are deeply tainted with middle – class mentality. The central character *mukhya patra* in the play is a clumsy and confused person, with a hackneying attitude. His shyness, insecurity, insensibility, doubtfulness and ambivalence represent the society. His over cautious muttering reveal his baseless fears. The petulant impression casted by him makes the readers realize that his over protective moulding has turned him into an introvert parasite.

The play appeals to the thought process of the readers. This is achieved through minimisation of ‘actions’ or a major fantasy (world tour on wheel less bicycle.)which unfolds and spreads out a fan of multi-bladed fantasies, and though inhuman character like a cock, a lion, a ghost and a princess turned into a fish keep pouring in; and the play remains entangled into these fantasies. In the play these various happenings on the stage keep on underlining the fact that actually nothing has really happened. It is an old saying that something must keep on happening on the stage constantly and continuously, otherwise a play will loose its dramatic effect. But here the scanty use of actual happening on the stage does not lead to the de dramatization of the play, but on the

other hand, it enhances the proper dramatic interpretations, as it helps in shifting the focus of the play to the thought process of the readers.

*Safar*, though poses to be just a fun filled form of art, a playful projection of fantasy, its content is multifaceted. Firstly, it criticizes the queer ways of the so-called middle class; it's over cautious, over calculating, dull, charm less approach towards life. Secondly, it probes into the moulding of children grown under the pressurizing influence of their parents – their indecisive, under-developed, frightened attitude. Thirdly, it portrays the cruel, opportunistic, ruthless ways of the materialistic world that never hesitates to exploit the simple, sensitive and weak class. Apart from these, there are oblique (but sufficiently poignant) remarks de-masking the so-called prestigious concepts like psychological analysis, artists and actors turning into political leaders, and so on. Above all, the futility of dreams that are affectionately nurtured by man, especially a middle-class sensitive human being is candidly and effectively highlighted through all these fantasies.

Tendulkar can rejoice in the beauty and nobility in the world but he is not blind to the ugly and ignoble in it, and what *Safar* brings along with it is the ignoble. But though his eyes are focused on the middle class and its suffocations, his implied chief targets are the human mind, the way of life and the complexities therein. The play itself speaks up that the playwright does not crave for outdated ideals or impossible aims. He is just drawn towards “the real”, with all the imitations.

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