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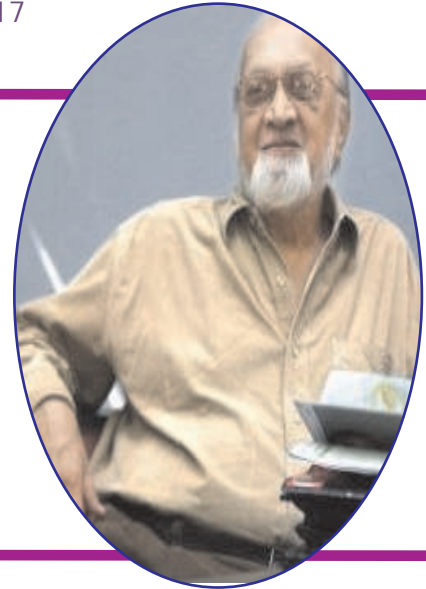
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SOCIAL SICKNESS IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *THE VULTURES*

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ABSTRACT :

In the modern materialistic society, man is so much obsessed with physical appetites that he does not give any importance to social and spiritual aspects of human life. Outwardly, he seems to be a human being but internally he is more beastly than a beast itself in various ways. In true terms, modern civilization does mean to help man get rid of animal instincts, but it is taking him back to the primitive stage wherefrom he develops into a rational and cultured being. He is going to be a creature sans social and spiritual consciousness. As a playwright, Vijay Tendulkar unravels this social sickness in his dramatic construct. In his plays, social sickness is portrayed through the action, attitude and behaviour of the dramatis personae. This malaise is greatly owed to the loss of human and moral values in the face of increasingly materialistic mode of life. In *The Vultures*, Tendulkar shows how so-called humans lose humanness and their essential goodness for transient pleasure and prosperity. In the course of the play, almost all the characters, confined to animal appetites, disregard the importance of social and spiritual life that differentiates them from the animal world.

KEYWORDS : Human world, Animal world, Sickness, Materialistic society, Humaneness.

INTRODUCTION:

In the contemporary times, with the spread of education, it is presumed that man is going to be more more cultured, civilized and healthy. As a thinking being, he is supposed to think not only of himself but of social welfare and common good. It is education that differentiates humans from non-humans. The word human does mean one who displays innate humanness, upholding the virtues of love, compassion, trust and tolerance. By doing this he can overcome the degraded and debased appetites, on the other hand, the one who fails to come to terms to humanistic values is overwhelmed by the narrow and egoistic interests. For petty personal gains, he/she ceases to be a social and spiritual being.

In the modern materialistic society, man is so much obsessed with physical appetites that he does not give any importance to social and spiritual aspects of life. Outwardly, he seems to be a healthy human being but internally he is rotten on emotional, cognitive and spiritual levels. In true terms, modern civilization increases the desires and instincts that jeopardize individual as well as social health. It is taking him back to the primitive stage wherefrom he develops into a rational and cultured being. He is going to be a creature sans social and spiritual consciousness.

As a playwright, Vijay Tendulkar unravels this social sickness in his dramatic oeuvre. He portrays this malaise through the action, attitude and behaviour of the dramatis personae. He seems to suggest that the loss of human and moral values in the face of increasingly materialistic mode of life is responsible for social sickness.

In *The Vultures*, Tendulkar shows how so-called humans lose humanness and their essential goodness for transient pleasure and prosperity. In the course of the play, almost all the characters, confined to lower needs, grossly disregard the importance of higher values essential for an ordered and healthy society. It is the established fact that animals or birds do not hurt or harm their young ones and also do not let others do the same; rather they try to protect their young ones from natural as well as man-made dangers. But in the play, out of greed, even the so-called humans maltreat their young ones and family members.

In *The Vultures*, Tendulkar shows how social degeneration in inter-personal relationships goes from one generation to another. In the play, HariPitale and his brother Sakharam jointly establish a business firm but the former cheats on the latter and becomes the sole possessor of the firm. The vice of dishonesty goes from the father to his children. Children of HariPitale, averse to the virtues of hard work and honesty, want to live a luxurious but by cheating their father. The children prove worse than their father in terms of deceit and dishonesty. The playwright shows how greed for money makes the members of a middle-class Indian family wild and mad after easy money. They cheat each other and want to grab the share of other members of family. Like hunting animals they are always in search for a prey. Children treat their father badly and, in turn, he abuses them furiously.

Shut your foul mouths, you scoundrels! Bury me, will you! Talk of burying me while I'm still alive, will you, you bastards....I could throw you all out. The property's mine! I earned it! I sweated for it. Sakharam and I went hungry day and night. We sweated tears....And now, go ruin it, go ahead, both of you! (*The Vultures* 214)

Pitale's children in inebriated state mistrust each other but get united against their father. Internally, they celebrate the departure of their uncle but outwardly they feign to fight. In the uproar and excitement, they hurt their father. In order to escape from the cruel clutches of his sons the father cries foul and tries to phone police for assistance, "No! Never! You're devils, you pimps! You're going to kill me! You're going to murder me ... murder! I don't want to die! don't want to! I'm not going to! I'll become a ghost. I'll sit on your chests! Murderers! Call the police! Police!" (*The Vultures* 229). To avoid any problem they try to appease their father. As Manik says, "It's only a tiny cut" (*The Vultures* 229). At this the father retorts, asking her to "get away from me too, you she-devil! You're like the rest of them! You've plotted this. You're going to kill me! You're going to take my life. Murder me! You'll rob what little money I've got left ... I know it.... [*Pappa is shocked suddenly into silence. They are all startled into silence, too.*]" (*The Vultures* 229)

Children pretend to be soft with their father only to grab his wealth without losing any time. Finally, he discloses the name of the bank where he has hidden his money, "Punjab ... the Punjab Bank ... don't kill me, you pimps!" (*The Vultures* 230). He urges them to spare his life but when he finds that they are bent upon killing him, he cries to Rama for help. "[He cries] Bahu! Where are you, Bahu! They're killing me, they're killing me! Bahu!" (*The Vultures* 231). Not only they mistreat their father but also the household gardener, Jagannath. They abuse him for demanding wages: "That old clown of a gardener Jagannath! He's another case! Comes here everyday. Asking for money. He and Ramya haggle away. Every morning. Ruin my sleep, the swine! Does money grow on trees here? Or is there a mine of it somewhere? Bloody cheek!" (*The Vultures* 207)

In the pursuit of materialistic gains, Manik surpasses her brothers. She is also of the same vulture family like her brothers. She leads a carefree life and without any commitment and responsibility she carries extramarital relationships with Raja of Hondur. As ShantaGokhale writes:

Tendulkar uses bold, almost brash colours to portray Manik. She is the classic 'slut' who parties, sleeps late, smokes and drinks first thing in the morning and hops from one bed to another. Her latest affair is with a so-called rajah whose child she is carrying. If Manik is one of the vultures, then Rama is the exact opposite. She is a sparrow. She is pointed in the pastel shades of innocence, purity, goodness and willing subservience. The only shade in her life that assert itself boldly, albeit briefly, is when she expresses her desire for the body of the outcaste half-brother of her husband, the poet Rajaninath. (85)

In the traditional Indian society, brothers take vows to protect their sisters from any danger and difficulty, but in this play, the brothers are bent upon taking life of their sister to satiate their corrupted and contaminated ego. Through the members of the vulture family Tendulkar exposes the inhuman face of the city dwellers who hardly care for relations.

The cult of shameless behaviour can be attributed to the consumerist, industrial culture. They don't even respect their blood relations as is depicted in Umakant's words:

Why did that cow have to be in such a hurry to block the bathroom? Not a hope now of her coming but 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 Lecher'll make her his lawful Queen, if you please. (*The Vultures* 213)

Manik gets terrified when she sees the brute faces of her brothers. Ramakant admits to Umakant, "Brother, we are beasts! (*The Vultures* 215). On hearing these words, Manik also becomes furious, "Oh-h! These bastards'll burn me alive one-day! They'll poison me, they'll slit my throat. (*The Vultures* 215). They not only tease and terrify her but also plan to blackmail her lover for money. This suggests that there is no place for the finer virtues of love, compassion, trust and tolerance in the familial relationships and by extension in social relationships.

Brothers out of a narrow motive detain their sister in the house only to extract money from Raja of Hondur. By detaining her in the house they plan to break her leg as Ramakant tells Umakant, "Accident! How do you like that, brother? We'll manage it. Supposing Manik breaks her arm ... or her bloody leg? Then how'll she go out? Not with a leg in plaster! If her shank's in plaster, how can any—romance—take place? Eh? Then it's agreed? It is, isn't it?" (*The Vultures* 237). They carry out the dirty plan to satiate their degraded hunger for money. As they succeed in their plan, they begin to fight for undue share:

RAMAKANT. 'Put down your money! Or else—publicity in the papers! No money? Then publicity! That's all!' Brother, he'll puke out money! He won't get away now, brother. Ten for you, fifteen for me. [*Umakant gets up even in that state*]. Oh, all right, all right! Twelve and a half, and twelve and a half. All right? Satisfied? You're never bloody satisfied!

UMAKANT. Satisfied my foot! I will make you puke out twelve and a half. It was I who pushed Manik. No joke, that ... (*The Vultures* 244)

Even after the demise of Raja of Hondur, they refuse to stay back from their evil designs. They plan to kill the baby in the womb of Manik. As Ramakant tells Umakant "... Listen here! [*Umakant leans towards him.*] The Raja's alive. In little Manik's belly. The bloody bastard, damn him! Bloody enemy! The traitor! I'll shoot him, brother (*The Vultures* 247). Ramakant supports Umakant in carrying out the ill-design, "Let's knock him out! The Raja in little Manik's Belly! One kick—that's enough!" (*The Vultures* 247) Seemingly they behave as if they are well-wishers of their sister, but they inhumanly kill the foetus in the womb only for the sake of money. ManchiSaratBabu observes, "The spiritual deformity facilitates ruthless exploitation and oppression and destroys human relations even within the family" (150). Authenticating the observation, Shailaja B. Wadikar rightly comments, "The conservative Maharashtrian people were stunned to observe the vulgar reality of their lives presented through the sexual relations and the scenes of violence in the play" (94). Through the incident, the playwright exposes the sickness that comes to characterize the Indian society in the modern times. K.V. Surendran observes, "Tendulkar frowns at the society around him which is known for its hypocrisy, lack of sincerity, promiscuity, dishonesty and a host of other ills. Tendulkar's world is one where sex and violence have an upper hand" (85).

Umakant in his frustration tells Ramakant that the child in the womb of her wife is result of illicit relations with illegitimate Rajaninath. "It's that bastard Rajaninath's! That enemy at your gates! It is your half-brother's! Your bastard brother's! That son-of-a-whore's!" (*The Vultures* 255) Outraged and drunken Ramakant makes it to

abort. In the words of Rajaninath:

There is no escape for them.
No ... there is none.
For there is no escape.
For them ...
Or for anyone... (*The Vultures* 265)

The playwright uses the metaphor of vulture to show the social sickness through the family of Pitale. The family members like the vultures are shown feeding on decomposed and stink body parts of the dead ones. Instead of cleansing the environment of deceased animal carcasses, they, unlike the vultures, pollute it to the point of disease and destruction. Through the Pitale family the playwright illustrates the social sickness and predicament of modern Indian society. Prof Kohle aptly remarks, "Gidhade, which has a ruthless dissection of human nature, revealing violence, avarice lying beneath the put up of personality, was as fascinating expose of social reality" (75).

The foregoing discussion reveals the fact that humans in the grip of crash materialism and narrow individualism lose their humanness to self-perpetuation. They often stoop to the level of animals and are always in the search of preys as vultures do. The very title of the play suggests that the characters in the play cease to be humans by adopting the role of animals. Almost all the characters are governed or swayed by sickly instincts even in their intimate inter-personal relationships within and outside family. It does not mean that the playwright looks at the sordid side of human nature and perceives no possibility of transformation in human life. Through the character of Rama, the playwright underscores the cardinal human virtues of love, sympathy and tolerance in inter-personal relationships. The playwright is committed to the truth and portrays it boldly and faithfully. As a true artist, Tendulkar brings us face to face with the harsh realities of the modern, materialistic and mechanized society. The playwright underscores the view that only the virtues of hard work, honesty and sacrifice can go a long way to provide us respite from social sickness.

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