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Paradox of Hedonism in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar



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Abstract

Pleasure is a propelling element that drives the wheels of life in motion. Hedonism or pursuit of pleasure, if attained through appropriate means and in moderate forms, is desirable. This is a proposition approved by ancient philosophers and modern theorists. However, hedonism in its extreme means and forms results in a paradox, contributing to an individual's unhappiness and doom. Vijay Tendulkar is a Marathi playwright who wrote extensively on a wide range of themes like violence, oppression, poverty, women's rights and corruption. Beside these, he has thrown ample light on the hedonistic tendencies of men. The present paper endeavours to analyse how hedonism in excess may lead to paradoxical experiences. The study is based on some hedonistic characters of Tendulkar's plays.

Keywords: Tendulkar, Sidgwick, Hedonism, Paradox, Pleasure.

Introduction

Pleasure has been one primary element that keeps the wheels of life in motion. Hedonism or pursuit of pleasure can be achieved by adopting means that are fair or foul. Just as the means are varied, so is the degree of hedonism. If the balance between the means and the form is disproportionate, it may result in paradoxical consequences. Hedonism is an important theme in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. Some of his characters like Sakharam, Jadhav, the group of ministers of Umbugland, and the members of the Pitale family are all victims of hedonism sought through unhealthy ways.

Objective of the Study

By analysing certain characters drawn from some selected plays of Tendulkar, the present paper aims to arrive at a conclusion that a seeker of pleasure ends up experiencing it in paradoxical terms.

Review of Literature

The books and articles on the plays of Vijay Tendulkar give the impression that he draws a considerable attention from the critical circles and in addition of being a popular dramatist among the theatre goers he is also well appreciated by the readers of his plays. *Vijay Tendulkar* by Katha Publishers contains a selection of lectures by Vijay Tendulkar and a host of essays by eminent scholars and critics like Shanta Gokhale, Samik Bandyopadhyay, Satish Alekar and Rajinder Nath. A study of the various speeches gives a plethora of information on the formative influences and the mind of the playwright in shaping his creative genius. The essays contained in the selection throw ample light on his multifaceted personality, his stagecraft and creative brilliance that went on to churn plays which took on the society and its conscience keepers by storm. The anthology *Vijay Tendulkar's Plays: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, edited by V. M. Madge has a rich collection of fourteen articles and essays on Vijay Tendulkar and his works, including a personal interview on the playwright. *Dramatic World of Vijay Tendulkar: Explorations and Experiments* by Beena Agrawal lays focus on the experiment and explorations made by Tendulkar in scripting his plays. Divided in fourteen chapters, her work presents an unconventional analysis of the experimental insight involved in Tendulkar's different plays. *Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright* by Shailaja B. Wadikar delves deep into the problematic nature of Tendulkar's plays and brings out their salient aspects in areas like socio-cultural, psychological, existential, feminist etc. N.S. Dharan, while mentioning about the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* states in *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar* that Tendulkar brings the characters of the play "together under the banner of an amateur theatre, in order to highlight the hypocrisy latent in the microscopic cross-section of the milieu of the metropolitan Bombay middle class." (Dharan 50). Professor Arundhati Banerjee states in the

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introduction to the *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar* about the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* that “on the surface, Tendulkar seems to have adapted the model of naturalistic drama. But the integration of the play creates an additional dimension where the demarcating line between reality and illusion is often blurred. An almost Pirandellesque effect is achieved as the characters move back and forth from make believe reality.” Shailja B. Wadikar in *Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright* states that in a limited sense, he may be seen as a silent ‘social activist’ who covertly wishes to bring about a change in people’s modes of thinking, feeling and behaving. Samik Bandyopadhyay comments about the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* in his book *Collected Plays in Translation* that this play is Tendulkar’s first play to become part of the new Indian Drama phenomenon of the sixties and the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as protagonist and victim.

Lalima Chakraverty in “Power, Resistance and Identity in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session*” makes an elaborate attempt to comprehend the crisis, conflict and the alliance of the gender as portrayed in the play. She also tries to understand how gender stands on the way when women try to break the shackles of a fixated order and conventions of society. Taking a few selected plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani, Alpana Saini in “Negotiating the Ethical Crisis – A View of Contemporary Indian Drama” enquires the position of contemporary Indian drama in taking up issues relating to social ethics. Pratibha Sharma in “Social Concerns in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar” makes a case study of the Marathi dramatist’s plays in order to find out how successful he was in mirroring the various issues that plague contemporary Indian society. John Peter Joseph in his “The Playwright as a Social Critic: A Critical Study of Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session*” makes an analysis of Tendulkar’s efforts to expose the collective force of moral hypocrisy, the sadistic tendencies, the hostility and violence that gang together in inflicting greatest harm to women. Sonal Singh in “Studying Literature as an Aide to Psychology: With Special Reference to Henrik Ibsen and Vijay Tendulkar” makes a comparative study of the psychotic patterns in the characters of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and Tendulkar’s *Sakharam Binder* to prove that literature offers a firsthand information to the field of psychology by maintaining the context in which events occur and people behave. Nikita Garg in “Feminism in Contemporary Modern Society in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Kamala* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*” makes a feminist analysis of the status of modern women at modern times through the very realistic and natural portrayal of both men and women by Tendulkar.

The survey reveals that although much have been written on Vijay Tendulkar, yet no systematic and comprehensive study has been done on the proposed subject stated in the title and hence, the paper promises to lend a new dimension to the oeuvre of Vijay Tendulkar’s creative art.

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Methodology:

The present paper is based on analytical study and is carried by analyzing the primary sources that also includes a few select plays of Tendulkar. The secondary sources are comprised of library resources like reference books, scholarly journals and also the internet.

Main Text:

Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods are the primary or most important goals of human life. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry). Aristippus of Cyrene, a student of Socrates, is believed to be profounder of Ethical Hedonism who held the idea that pleasure is the highest good. The original Old Babylonian version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a fine example that propagates the Hedonistic philosophy: “Fill your belly. Day and night make merry. Let days be full of joy. Dance and make music day and night [...] These things alone are the concern of men.” Democritus and Epicurus were the two well known philosophers of ancient Greece who believed in hedonistic philosophy. Democritus called the supreme goal of life “contentment” or “cheerfulness” and was of the opinion that “joy and sorrow are the distinguishing mark of things beneficial and harmful.” (Taylor 125). Epicurus believed that the greatest good was to seek modest, sustainable “pleasure” in the form of a state of tranquillity and freedom from fear (ataraxia) and absence of bodily pain (aponia) through knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of our desires. The combination of these two states is supposed to constitute happiness in its highest form. (Wikipedia on Hedonism). In the Indian context, the Charvaka school of thought also echoes the Hedonistic philosophy in one way or other: “*yavat jivet sukham jivet* (Be happy as long as you are alive), *runam krutya ghrutam pibeyat*

(Do not forsake the use of clarified butter in your diet, take a loan and indulge), *bhasmi butasya dehasya punaragamanam kutaha* (As once the body has turned to ashes it is not going to come back).”

Utilitarianism is another western school of thought that gives a central role to happiness. The two most prominent contributors were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill who opined that all actions should be directed toward achieving the greatest total amount of happiness. Marquis de sade and John Wilmot believed in the extreme form of hedonism that views moral and sexual restraint as either unnecessary or harmful. Michel Onfray is a contemporary French hedonist philosopher and writer whose two books *L'invention du plaisir: fragments cyréaniques* and *La puissance d'exister: Manifeste hédoniste* deal with the history of hedonistic philosophy. According to him hedonism as an introspective attitude to life based on taking pleasure yourself and pleasuring others, without harming yourself or anyone else. There are abundant references of hedonistic thought and philosophy in the works of literature. Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* reflects the utilitarian philosophy in all walks of life including education.

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However, pursuit of hedonistic pleasures more so often ends up in a paradoxical manner. Utilitarian philosopher, Henry Sidgwick in his monumental work *The Methods of Ethics* believes that the pursuit of pleasure often leads to paradox of hedonism. In a layman's language it means that the more a hedonist runs after pleasure, the more he/she is unlikely to experience it.

Sakharam Binder is a unique play of the Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar in the sense that it depicts the story of a man who defies the customs and manners of a polite civil society. Sakharam, the protagonist of the play is a book binder by profession. As a child, he has experienced a childhood which may be termed as disturbed. He is a victim of negative parenting. According to Rick Nauert of Rocky Mountain University of Health Professionals, "Researchers defined negative parenting to include when parents expressed negative emotions toward their children, handled them roughly and the like" (Nauert, 2011). In this regard, Flora Richards-Gustafson cites a 2011 report of UK's Department of Education which states that "Children who are exposed to bad parenting are two times more likely to misbehave. Inconsistent disciplinary approaches, poor supervision and physical punishment are poor parenting attributes that can negatively affect children, regardless of their ethnicity and socioeconomic status" (Richards-Gustafson, 2017). Again, as per a study published in the *Journal of Family Violence* it was found that "Children who both witnessed and experienced domestic abuse were far more likely to suffer from internalized anger and behaviour problems than their peers. This can lead to a 'cycle of abuse,' in which children grow up to abuse others in the same way they were abused" (Miller-Wilson, 2006).

Love, care, affection and support constitute the ingredients for the emotional development of a child. Sakharam fails to receive what a parental-guru would have ordered. Instead he is dished with abuses and physical tortures. His mother labels him as a *Mahar* and uses derogatory terms like 'dirty scavenger' (Tendulkar 127). His childish tantrums are dealt with an iron hand. His father resorts to the stick to discipline him. Negative parenting has a severe effect on his psyche. His self-esteem and coping mechanisms have been severely dented. Unable to bear the constant abuses and corporal punishments, he leaves his parents to architect his own destiny, author his form of perverted pleasure and happiness.

He acquires the skill of book-binding and joins a press. After ensuring his financial security, he constructs his own small world and declares himself as the undisputed monarch of all he surveys. To compensate the pain and suffering of his childhood, he charts his own course of pleasure and happiness, based on hedonistic principles. Like in a standard four-course meal, the body of women becomes the entree or the main course of his pleasure-meal. Whereas, narcotics (bhang), alcohol and music (mridangam) are the other three courses. The main course of his pleasure-meal consists of visits to red-light districts and in bringing home women who were

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forsaken by their husbands and disowned by civil society. Though visits to brothels have declined in frequency, the number of forsaken married women taking shelter under his roof was in the vertical trajectory. By the time the play opens, he has already feasted on the bodies of six helpless women.

Sakharam's pleasure seeking mechanism is erected on the foundation of a strange code of conduct. He brings home such women who are shown the doors by their husbands. Upon their arrival, an informal contract based on fear and disciplinary regimentation, is made with them. As per the deal, he would give them the social security and a roof. In return the woman has to look after the household chores and cater to his physical needs.

Communication with strangers has to be brief and that too by covering her face with a veil. She cannot step out of the house "unless there's work to be done" (Tendulkar 126). Staying 'docile', to 'behave properly' and not to question the authority of Sakharam, are some of the other important sections of the contract. However, a flexible clause is attached to the pact. The woman can make an honourable exit if and when she wills.

Laxmi is the seventh destitute woman to enter Sakharam's household. He brings her from Sonavane, after she is thrown out by her husband for not being able to be the progenitor of his off-springs. She is the prototype of a traditional Indian *bahu* – caring, uncomplaining, docile, submissive, hard working and devout. All these qualities have a positive influence in the hitherto bohemian lifestyle of Sakharam. Unconsciously he is transformed to a great extent. The regularity of alcohol consumption has come down. Ingesting of marijuana or *ganja* is reduced to a couple of times in a month. Regular baths in the mornings, wearing clean clothes, and compulsory *puja* of the gods are other new inductions in Sakharam's otherwise undisciplined and unconventional ways. But, the principal trademark features of Sakharam's personality persist. He is still the angry, violent and aggressive man. These instincts remain because of the conflict of interest in pursuing his pleasure principle. Laxmi's frigidity, excessive spirituality and fragile body offer no salivating fascination to mitigate his hunger for sex. Nor can he allow her to possess his soul and play spoilsport in his obsession to fill his 'no ordinary appetite' (Tendulkar 135) with pleasure. To maintain an upper hand, he beats, curses and tortures her regularly even on trivial matters. But, when she opposes Dawood from chanting hymns to Lord Ganesha, he seizes the opportunity to snap the 'link based on a need' (Tendulkar 183). She leaves for her nephew's place at Amalner.

Laxmi's place was taken over by Champa, the voluptuous wife of Fauzdar Shinde. Unable to bear the tantrums of her impotent, alcoholic husband, she walks out of his life on her own volition. She is, in fact, an anti-thesis to Laxmi – fearless, explosive, sluggish, promiscuous and irreverent. Her sensuality casts a magic spell on Sakharam. He is so 'infatuated with her body' (Tendulkar 157) and gratified by the accompanying 'fun' that he even skips half day's work

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at the binding press. To ensure that the 'bird' remains in his cage and is not beguiled by someone else, he proposes to meet Dawood only in the latter's shop and not in his home. Contrary to his normal demeanour, he becomes a virtual prisoner of his pleasure, his own self. The anger, violence an aggression which personified Sakharam once, hitherto stand placated, mellowed and laid-back. He is impuissant and concedes to Champa's insistence to allow the re-entry of Laxmi, albeit, at the cost of amending his infamous code. His virility receives a severe blow when Champa declares:

Yeah. Can't take it any more – not even with all that drink inside me. If you can't make it, go and lie down quietly. Haven't been able to Make it these last few days. (Tendulkar 193)

The rift between Sakharam and Champa has been carefully observed by Laxmi. She takes it as an opportunity to distance the two. She spies upon Champa and traps her having an illicit relationship with Dawood. She passes this information to Sakharam, who in a fit of rage inadvertently strangulates Champa to death. Sakharam is dumbstruck by his action. Laxmi comes to his rescue by hitting a plan to bury her inside the room. The once all pervasive and powerful Sakharam will now have to live the rest of his life under the mercy of Laxmi.

The paradox of hedonism is instant in another popular play of Vijay Tendulkar, *Kamala*. The play depicts the story of Jaisingh Jadhav, a wannabe journalist stationed in the capital city of India. He is under the payroll of one of the leading English dailies of the country. He is married to Sarita, a highly educated lady having roots running into the erstwhile princely family of the Mohites of Maharashtra in Western India. Though married for some years, the Jadhavs are yet to be blessed with the fortunes of becoming biological parents. As a hardcore career journalist, Jadhav's sole aim in life is to entrench himself in the pinnacle of success.

Jadhav's obsession for success, fame and material gains leads him to specialise in investigative journalism. "Investigative Journalism," according to *Investigative Journal Manual*, "is a form of journalism in which reporters go in – depth to investigate a single story that may uncover corruption, review government policies or of corporate houses, or draw attention to social, economic, political or cultural trends.....Unlike conventional reporting, where reporters rely on materials supplied by the government, NGOs and other agencies, investigative reporting depends on materials gathered through the reporter's own initiative. The practice aims at exposing public matters that are otherwise concealed, either deliberately or accidentally" (*Investigative Journal Manual*, Chapter I). It definitely gives Jadhav a good measure of success. He consolidates his job by registering himself in the good books of the editor and the newspaper management. Access to the corridors of power becomes a reality. He gets regular "invitations from foreign embassies" and "have access to ministers and Chief Ministers – or even to

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the Prime Minister!" (Tendulkar 23) Additionally, material success follows suit. He buys a plot of land at the posh Neeti Bagh locality of Lutyens' New Delhi, and builds a small but comfortable house, fitted with all modern amenities. Services of multiple domestic helps are at his doorstep for home management. Commuting in crowded and slow-paced public transport systems like buses and local trains are things of the past. Now, he owns his own car, something unthinkable for a small time scribe of the 70s and 80s of the last century. Gone too are the days of covering an outstation story by reaching the place through surface transport. It is replaced by the aerial route.

Jadhav's phenomenal ascent in his nascent career breeds in his mind's space conditions for more success. His investigative journalism now gives way to new forms. "High-Speed" or "on the spot" (Tendulkar 5) reporting, "mercenary journalism" (Tendulkar 23) or writing news stories in return for a sum, and "Sensational journalism" (Tendulkar 27) or what the Oxford University Dictionary defines as the presentation of stories in a way that is intended to provoke public interest or excitement, at the expense of accuracy – are the new USPs or unique selling points of his curriculum vitae. Behind all these looms large, the scope of gaining "a nice front page" (Tendulkar 9) space for his stories filed "under his own name" (Tendulkar 7), "more publicity" (Tendulkar 9), and "money-making" (Tendulkar 24). With rewards galore in his style of journalism, he goes to the "Luhardanga bazaar in Bihar" (Tendulkar 14) to make an expose of "auctions" of women for slave trade. There he buys Kamala, a tribal woman, at a throwaway price of "two hundred and fifty rupees" (Tendulkar 14) so that through a press conference in New Delhi he could expose how "Women are sold in many places like that, all over the country", and "throw the whole caboodle in the government's lap – along with the evidence". (Tendulkar 15)

Jadhav's sensational press conference parading Kamala, earns him nationwide fame. It also stirs up a hornet's nest in the corridors of power. Many politicians of the day have been connected with the traders of the slave market. Combined pressure from invincible political forces, compels the owner of the newspaper to fire Jadhav from his job. A case is filed against him for buying a human being, which is forbidden as per Indian laws. His greatest deficit is in domestic life. A home, above everything else, is the most reliable place where one's emotional and mental happiness is guaranteed. For that one needs to create an environment where every member can bond together, feel significant and most importantly loved. Jadhav has never tried to increase the quality of life by investing his time and resources to build a happy family. Sarita, his significant 'other' is "made a drudge" and reduced to the status of a "lovely bonded labourer" (Tendulkar 17). Equality is denied to her as he is the one "who takes decisions in this house, and no one else" (Tendulkar 42). She confesses to Kamala, "Yes, Kamala. The house....it devours us. It's so empty." (Tendulkar 34) His position is lowered in front of his better half. He cannot aspire to earn her

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respect, honour, support and the bonding. He could never fathom even in his wildest dreams, Sarita uttering, "I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one can rule over me" (Tendulkar 52). All these could have been averted if he knew "how to play it right" (Tendulkar 23). Jadhav falters in this game, prompting Kakasaheb to remark, "This is the mistake men make. That manhood makes. Do you understand now?" (Tendulkar 51)

Encounter in Umbugland is Tendulkar's attempt at depicting how political systems function in the ruthless struggle for power. The paradox of hedonism is seen in the calculating designs of a group of ministers to usurp the ruling disposition. Umbugland is an island kingdom ruled by a "decrepitly old, white-bearded and moustachioed, cunning King Vichitravirya" (Tendulkar 275). He is advised by a Council of Ministers consisting of five Cabinet Ministers or Statesmen, viz. Aranyaketu, Bhagadanta, Karkashirsha, Pristakeshi and Vratyasom. King Vichitravirya has completed sixty glorious years of undisputed authority stemmed from an excellent understanding of politics, people friendly governance, promotion of welfare schemes for the masses, the knack to identify dissidence brewing within the executive of his administrative setup and to nip such activities in the bud. King Vichitravirya is in the prime of his age but has groomed no heir to the throne. There is no male child to succeed him. Though he has a daughter, Vijaya to replace him, yet, the King is not the one to take up the cudgels for her sake. He still considers her "a little childish and half-witted" (Tendulkar 281) for the throne.

Prospects of replacing the aged King with his own blood becoming remote, the five Statesmen or Cabinet Ministers of Vichitravirya's Cabinet have been nurturing individual plans to take over the reins of the island kingdom. For almost forty years these Ministers have kept their ambition to the throne as the sole driving force of their existence. In the process, "Power seems more important" for them than "duty!" and "Selfish designs have replaced service!" (Tendulkar 278) But, the wily King keeps their hopes in bay. When Vichitravirya dies all of a sudden, their hopes of usurping to the throne have become a reality. As "Each one's a rascal" and "No one's willing to withdraw! No one's coming to the fore!" (Tendulkar 291-292) they fail to arrive at a conclusion to select a consensus leader. The Kadamba uprising that takes place in the length and breadth of the country against Vratyasom, Karkashirsha, Pristakeshi and Aranyaketu further turns out to be a spoilsport in the tussle for power. With no consensus at sight, the five Cabinet Ministers finds a "compromise!" and decides to install the young Vijaya as the successor of Vichitravirya till they "agree on a firm decision!" According to their new formula, "She'll be the rule, we'll be the rulers!" (Tendulkar 293) When Vijaya embarks on "a plan for the uplift of the Kadamba tribe" and make the original tribal community more "economically stable and self-supporting" (Tendulkar 315), the Cabinet seizes it as an opportunity to topple

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the Queen from power and exact revenge against the Kadambas for revolting against them.

A four decade plus obsession for power nursed by the five Cabinet Ministers has turned into a "crown of thorns" and "headache" (Tendulkar 279) for them. During Vichitravirya's reign, all their moves to grab power have been foiled by the crafty, scheming and manipulative old king. Vichitravirya adopts the Machiavellian policies to crush any seeds of dissent from growing into a full blown tree. By pursuing a people-friendly administration, he keeps his subjects happy and rises to the position of an "Autocratic" (Tendulkar 283) to decimate any opposition from within the power structure. Such is the aura of the King that the five Ministers admit in private:

His Majesty, having come successfully and safely out of the ordeal of four calamitous accidents, and seven moderate serious illnesses, has managed to cast such a deep spell of infatuation over the people, that there is no public danger to him at least the next hundred years. After a public speech, he very often gets the populace to play mss hopscotch. Or chant their tables, or recite hymns, in chorus. If he doesn't do it, people write letters of protest to the public opinion columns of the newspapers!" (Tendulkar 274)

With no end of the king's rule "even remotely in sight", the five power mongers have no other option but to "endure the inevitable, and not lose our balance or peace of mind" (Tendulkar 274).

Queen Vijaya who is intended to become a puppet ruler for the elderly Cabinet members, turns out to be a step ahead of her illustrious father. Under the guidance of her guardian-mentor, Prannarayan, she soon learns the nitty-gritty of politics and that "it doesn't do for a ruler to be human. He has to be a super human, or even divine". She is taught to insult her foes "so lightly that their self-importance won't suffer". She is further taught to use a "diplomatic language" while insulting them and to take care not to "wound their egos" (Tendulkar 298). Enlightened with the words of wisdom from her mentor, Vijaya fires salvo after salvo to tame the "gathered beasts of prey" (Tendulkar 307) around her. Her first volley of prominence was when she makes the Cabinet toe her line by forcing them to maintain "the protocol of court" to bow to her, and not to address her as Viju but "As from today, we are Her Most Virtuous Majesty, the Queen of Umbugland" (Tendulkar 301). Within a year of her coronation, she rises to be the "Darling of the Umbugites / the Mascot of the Country's Luck" (Tendulkar 308). In every social, economic, political and health parameters, she seems to score a brownie point or two. The dreadful malaria is on the verge of eradication, "Infant Mortality was remarkably reduced", inflation is under manageable levels, horticultural produces soars, "beggars were subjected to intensive legal action", corruption is placed under zero-tolerance mode, an enviable foreign policy is in place to "match that of Hindustan"

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(Tendulkar 314) and so on. Slow rate of employment is the only area of concern during this short tenure.

With such a vice like grip over the affairs of the kingdom, the kingmakers in the form of the five Cabinet Ministers dare not to raise the pitch of conspiracy against her. She takes it as an opportunity to consolidate her position beyond the reach of her conspirators. She announces her plan of empowering the Kadamba tribe which once revolted against the Cabinet. The five Statesmen could read between the lines of her plan and comes to an understanding that it is "not for the rehabilitation of the Kadambas, but for the destruction of the Cabinet" (Tendulkar 336). The Cabinet denies consent to the plan. However, she proceeds towards implementing it by using her discretionary powers. An emergency type situation ensues. Meanwhile, the five Statesmen confronted with "a matter of life and death" (Tendulkar 335) like situation hatches a plot to bring her downfall. As per their machination, they will incite the majority of the Ubugites to rise against the Queen for trying to murder democracy. They will go to the extent of buying the services of agents who can "sell any stupid idea to the mob" (Tendulkar 334). As per their stratagem, a protest rally will be carried out against the undemocratic ways of the Queen. The mob will take siege of the palace, wreck property to the tune of "at least five or seven hundred thousand", and if necessary to become martyrs for the sake of upholding democratic principles. After receiving inputs from intelligent agencies, Vijaya launches a swift counterattack. She "Drives a Wedge" within the ministry and bestows Bhagadanta the "Highest Order of Ubugland": "Her Majesty Drives a Wedge. Bhagadanta splits; Aranyaketu Planning to Renege" (Tendulkar 337)

Despite the split in the opposition camp, the plan to use the mob is put on operation as per the script. Vijaya's attempt to thwart the mob by using military force comes to nothing. The mob is on the brink of seizing the palace. Having left with no other alternate, she decides to confront the crowd. She musters courage and meets it. While meeting the mob, she comes to the realisation that the anger of the people is as much with the corrupt ministers as also her. Sniffing the wind, she announced that "We shall institute a public enquiry into the property of our Ministers, who have today gone against the interests of the people". She also declared that "Those Ministers who are found guilty will be severely punished". She is in track. The mob appreciated her stand. Then someone in the crowd shouted that "The Kadamba Plan must be scrapped". His voice is echoed by several others. The Queen realizes that it is time for her to rise to the occasion and respond to the wishes of the people and wrest the initiative back from them. She makes a remarkable volte-face on the Kadamba Plan and declares, "Down with the Plan – and the Ministers who made it!". The crowd equally responds back by shouting deafeningly "Death to Vratsayom! Death to Karkashirsha! Death to Pistakeshi! Death to Aranyaketu! Bhagadanta was already done for" (Tendulkar 353-354). She also promises them to hand over the Ministers and to

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meet them frequently hereafter. The Ministers are sent in disguises to take stock of the fury of the people. When they return, they realise that their obsession for power was a fatal mistake akin to wearing a crown of thorns and cause for inviting headaches.

Vulture is another play where we find the theme of the paradox of hedonism in full operation as far as the major characters are concerned. The play is perhaps the most bizarre of all the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. It dissects the inherent weakness in human nature to its barest minimum. The play centres round the Pitale family. Sakharam and Hari Pitale are both brothers. Hari has three adult children. Ramakant and Umakant are the two legitimate sons, while Manik is the only daughter. All these members of the Pitale family are depicted as having attributes that mark the behavioural pattern of the predator birds, vultures. The only exceptions are Rama, the wife of Ramakant, and Rajaninath, the youngest and illegitimate son of Hari Pitale. Rama and Rajnikanth are the only characters who could be called as humane in the real sense of the term. The rest bear personalities like those of vultures – violent, crafty, and opportunistic to the point of driving their selves for the sole motive of making profits.

Hari and Sakharam are representatives of a rag to riches story. Both of them are highly ambitious, diligent and hardworking. They possess an entrepreneurial bent of mind which ultimately led them to the path of success in the venture of "contracting business". Starting from scratches, with an investment capital of less than fifty rupees, the Pitale brothers established a contracting firm. Soon their firm, "The Hari Sakharam Company's name became famous in the contracting business" (Tendulkar 214) and they become proud owners of a huge property. The property so developed with a united effort gives way to a greed for individual development rather than collective growth. Sakharam in particular makes a game plan to swindle the property in his name. Hari gets scent of his brother's intention and turns out to be an even bigger swindler than Sakharam. Displaying the agility of a vulture, he "Pushed him out of business!" (Tendulkar, 218) and becomes the sole proprietor of the Company and the property that "grew out of it" (Tendulkar 214): "I kicked you out of the business quite legally. I did. Why'd you lose all the court cases you brought? Threw you out by law. I did." (Tendulkar 226)

Sakharam is defeated in his own game of chicanery. His dream of becoming the sole owner of the Pitale property comes to nought. Fifteen years after his ouster, he is reduced to the state of a pauper. Rama even fails to recognise him as his "beard was long. His clothes were dirty. He looked as if he had gone hungry for many days" (Tendulkar 219).

Vulture like gene so ingrained in the personality of Hari Pitale, is now transferred to the chromosomes of his three legitimate offspring. Ramakant, Umakant and Manik have inherited a penchant for avarice. *Pleonexia* or extreme greed for wealth or material possessions becomes the ruling

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passion of the three Pitale siblings. It leaves them dissatisfied to be joint inheritors of the family property. Under duress of his two elder sons and the lone daughter, Hari makes a will to divide the family property in their names. The division does not satisfy the three. They have an inkling that their father did not part with all the wealth. An uneasy suspicion creeps into their minds that an undisclosed amount of money is still stashed in the bank. To procure the money deposited ostensibly in the bank, pressure is applied on Hari Pitale, even to the extent of manhandling him. Fearing for his life, he decides to write a cheque bearing an amount of rupees seven thousand to be debited from the undisclosed account under the name of "Pitale Plumbers" (Tendulkar 230). Hari's predicament is indeed pathetic. He has amassed a substantial property for the future of his progeny even at the cost of throwing out his brother cum business partner. Like every elderly citizen, he too longs for care, affection and security from his children. Instead, he becomes a beneficiary of verbal and psychological abuses, mental and physical tortures from his legal heirs. The worst comes when Rajaninath, the most humane of all his children also shows him the door.

Ramakant is the eldest son of Hari Pitale. He is married to Rama "for twenty-two long years" but is yet to be blessed with a child. Ramakant is the worst of all the five vultures that live in the Pitale home, which, according to Rajaninath is no more than "a hole in a tree where vultures lived in the shape of men" (Tendulkar 204-205). After division of the family property, Ramakant heads the contracting business of his father. He wants to develop in his business so that he could have the all the comforts of life benchmarked by a materialistic society. He tells Rama of his desire:

"A bloody car. A chauffeur. A totally bloody renovation for the house! We'll have it done. We'll put down new bloody flooring. Make the House bloody posh. We will! A cook, a chef, a watchman at the gate. Eight or ten servants. All under you. Dinner at the Radio Club.....We'll put the kiddie in a bloody convent school, what? From there, straight to Rajkumar bloody College at Delhi. Yes! Then Oxford if he likes.....After all he is going to be Managing Director of the top-ranking Constructing firm in India! (Tendulkar 251-252)

But stiff competition from rival firms and poor management skills undermine his prospects of becoming a successful contractor. Instead of going through the grind, he decides to adopt deceitful ways for conducting business. However, it leads him to lose credibility in the market. In a matter of time he is in debt up to his neck. His "office is gone already" (Tendulkar 253), while, household articles including his "Mother's jewels" (Tendulkar 252) have to be sold to repay the creditors. He even fails to bail himself out of the debt-trap by mortgaging the house. He is in such a mess that prospects of a five to seven year jail term or rigorous imprisonment for life could be the

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logical conclusion of his material pursuits. His greatest deficit is in the domestic sphere of his life. He is unable to father a child as his concentration is not on getting medical treatment for impotency but on seeking blessings from scores of swamis, astrologers or healers for a miraculous childbirth. As he is unable to meet Rama's "raging thirst" (Tendulkar 242) and hunger for sex, she ultimately surrenders herself in the arms of her brother-in-law, Rajnath. The clandestine affair results in Rama becoming pregnant. Initially he thinks the child in Rama's womb to be his. But when he comes to know from Umakant that the "brat" (Tendulkar 255) is not from his seed, he decides to forcefully abort the foetus from Rama's womb. Pursuing an excessive greed for money and material success, costs Ramakant so dearly that neither wealth nor domestic bliss could be his prerogative.

Manik is the only daughter of Hari Pitale. Even after crossing "thirty - five years", she is still a spinster. Marriage is on the back-burner as flirting and picnicking with men has been her prime obsession all along her life. "The whole town's shouting" at her because of her coquettish nature. Her flings include among others a ".....cycle-shop owner. The film-company cameramen. And, in between, that stallkeeper from the Market". She is used to "go for picnics with anyone / or stay the night with them", and roam around the town in motorbikes with "Arms round" the biker's waist. She plays her game safe as her purse is always stuffed with contraceptive "pills" to prevent unwanted pregnancies. But her latest fling with the Raja of Honduras has no effect on the pills. The encounter in the "room at the Majestic Hall" (Tendulkar 215-216) impregnates her. However, she allows the foetus to be alive by cultivating the hope that the "lecher'll make her his lawful Queen" (Tendulkar 213). Contrary to her expectations, the amour dies of a heart attack. Her brothers come to know about it and they were quite wary of the loss of prestige to the family. They kick her in the belly so that she is compelled to abort the illegitimate child.

Umakant, the second son of Hari Pitale is no less than his elder brother. His mind is fixed with the obsession of minting money and "swelling his bank balance" by "black-marketing paper". Though he is financially independent and well off, Umakant "never spends a bloody paisa for the family" nor is of help to any members of his family when they are in need of money. Rather he would like to "spread bundles of money on his bier" (Tendulkar 213) when he dies. Being thrifty is wise money management but to be a miser and to look everything in terms of profit is detestable. Albert Camus in his monumental work, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* rightly points out that "A man wants to earn money in order to be happy, and his whole effort and the best of a life are devoted to the earning of that money. Happiness is forgotten; the means are taken for the end". Pursuing the obsessive pleasure has made Umakant lose sight of the brighter aspects of life. Being older than Manik who is "thirty - five years old" (Tendulkar 215), Umakant hardly gives any consideration of having a

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family of his own. He has no immediate plans to marry an eligible lady or to fill his house with a bliss that children often bring. Bank balance and alcohol can never be the end of one's life. Nor can one sever the time-tested bond with relations of the blood, for, in trying times they are the ones that stand by us. But his priorities are different. He would prefer to live all alone rather than "redeem" their parental house which Ramakant had mortgaged to bail himself out of the financial mess he is hitherto subjected to. He is ready to walk out of Ramakant's life if the latter does not "transfer this house" in his name. Perhaps, old age might teach him why marriage, children and geniality with near and dear ones matter in life rather than "profit" (Tendulkar 253-254) as the sole motive.

Conclusion

A proper understanding of life is what defines a great dramatist. Vijay Tendulkar is one such dramatist who has a thorough comprehension of what life ought to be and how it should be pursued. Pleasure, ambition, dreams and the like are all desirable activities. But chasing after them in an obsessive manner is fraught with pitfalls. The more we chase them, the more they become deceptive, illusory and fleeting like the mirage in a hot desert. His plays communicate a strong message that consciously pursuing after pleasure or anything of that sort may interfere in experiencing it.

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