

CARNIVALESQUE AND DIALOGISM IN THE PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

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Abstract

The renowned Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin had given a new approach of looking into a work of art. In this paper I have observed one of the most acclaimed modern Indian playwrights Vijay Tendulkar as applying the Bakhtin's ideas of carnivalesque and dialogism in his plays. Presentation of drama in itself is a dialogic process, here different characters express their opinions in the form of dialogues. Dramatists like Bertolt Brecht had been a staunch Marxist, his plays frequently had a political and social message to convey or G.B.Shaw again believed in propagating some social message through his plays. In the process of getting didactic a writer loses the spirit of objectivity because he starts administering his characters and letting them speak his own personal views.

Keywords:- Bakhtin, Tendulkar, Kanyadaan, Sakharam

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Bakhtin explores in his *Rabelais and his World* (a classic of renaissance studies) the concept of carnivalesque, it refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. It is both the description of a historical phenomenon and the name he gives to a certain literary tendency. Carnivals are marked by full liberty, rules and practitioners of authority are mocked upon, people revel and behave in an eccentric and natural manner. Bakhtin goes far beyond to suggest that European renaissance itself was made possible by this free spirit of free thinking that the carnivals engendered.

Tendulkar's plays although do not embody the spirit of revelry, laughter or celebration of carnival, but the inner spirit of freedom is exhibited in the portrayal of his characters and the situations they confront. His characters like Arun in *Kanyadaan*, Sakharam in *Sakharam Binder* or Sumitra from *A friend's story* speak about themselves. Here the authority of the author is neglected, plays of Tendulkar do not seem to move on his will but according to the need of circumstances and these circumstances evolve from a character's social, cultural or historical background. Arun in *Kanyadaan* could not detach himself from the ill effects of his society inspite of attaining higher education or marrying a girl of upper caste. The valid reason which he gives for such behavior may have been as a kind of revenge of his dalit class against the atrocities of upper caste from centuries emerging from the subconscious levels of his mind.

The various themes of Tendulkar's plays are bubbling up with the rebellious mood against the long running moral ethics and degenerate hypocrisy of the society. Whether its Leela Benare's advocacy of non-interference of other people in her personal life even if it is the case of bearing a child by an unmarried woman, or Mitra's homosexual aspirations in *A Friend's Story*. Sakharam Binder although being a Brahmin finds nothing wrong in not following the social codes of marriage but denounces the sanctimony and dishonesty lying deep in the middle class and its social conduct. He has a simple rule of keeping a relationship as long as it could give him happiness. So it can be seen that Tendulkar has not

given a single thought about the old conventions of society while choosing the subjects of his plays.

As happens in a carnival people from all walks of life are brought between the theatrical spaces and create an eccentric and grotesque kind of atmosphere. In Tendulkar's plays such a gathering could be easily found. We can see that such coming together of people change the calm and cordial environment into a stormy and chaotic one. In the play *Kamala* entry of poor miserable woman Kamala bought by Jaisingh from the rural flesh market totally disturbs the life of Sarita. Although there is no match between the two but the presence of Kamala brings forth certain realities in front of Sarita which she didn't take notice of or had accepted it as the role assigned to her. But coming of Kamala in Sarita's life enlightened a rough truth that both of them were mere slaves in the eyes of Jaisingh. Character of Kakasaheb and Jaisingh are again a bright contrast of each other. Kakasaheb provides the true ideals of journalism while Jaisingh represents the modern success oriented generation, ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself. In *Kanyadaan*, Jyoti's proposal of marrying Arun Athavali, a dalit boy troubled the loving and peace filled climate of Nath and Seva family. Different opinions of the family members regarding this alliance create a chaotic atmosphere leading into series of arguments and conflicts. Such an interaction not only makes the characters but also the audience to test the validity of general accepted perceptions.

Naturalistic and wild behaviour are the key factor of a carnival. Persona of Sakharam Binder is most crude and naturalistic. He defies the laws of society and believes in doing what he likes to. He gives shelter to forsaken women as long as they could serve him well. He is drunkard, uses abusive language and beats his female partners on petty mistakes like beasts. Such a vulgarity and peevishness is also visible in the family depicted in the play *Vultures*. Ramakant, Umakant's avarice, sister Manik's utter sensuality all depict a very naturalistic aspect of human beings which they never like to admit. Beating and slanging of a father, forced abortion of sister and hostility towards own family members' underlines the inherent evil in human beings.

Carnavalesque and Dialogism are not the separate entities; both of them are interconnected with each other. Carnavalesque demands the writer to think and present his works dialogically. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin specifies that in contrast to monologism dialogism recognizes the multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Discourse does not logically unfold (as in analytical philosophy) but rather interacts. For Bakhtin, dialogism characterizes the entire social world, authentic human life is an open ended dialogue. We find Tendulkar practicing the concept of dialogism in all of his plays. He doesn't seem to be pushing his words from the mouths of his characters. In *Silence! The Court is in Session* if Leela Benare defends her side by claiming her rights as an individual, then advocate Sukhatme, judge Kashikar or other witnesses like Rokde ask about her

duties towards the society or the essential virtues which an Indian woman is expected to carry unquestionably.

Bakhtin suggested that the meaning is continuously created and recreated through dialogic process. He insisted on a work's essential indeterminacy and an equally strong commitment to its social and communicative functions. Tendulkar seems to be treading on the same path. His plays centers on interaction and discussion over certain issues. The interaction is not limited to characters but indirectly it creates a tumult in the minds of audience too. *Silence! The Court is in Session* offers an unusual plot where a play within a play is enacted to victimize Leela and compel her to answer the acidic questions of her colleagues. Since, she is a single independent woman not answerable to anybody; Tendulkar very tactfully arranges a situation to force Leela answer the questions which she was not bound to answer otherwise. Very interestingly he has brought the different opinions of Leela and her colleagues and how in their trialing process of Leela their own selves are unraveled. Their inner looseness of character, jealousy etc. is disclosed in this trial.

Tendulkar has never seemed to be coming into any conclusion, this makes him very close to Bakhtin's dialogism. The drawing of conclusion is left over to the audience. Whether it is the *Silence! The Court is in Session* or *A Friend's Story*. *Kanyadaanon* the first impression was condemned for its critical assessment of a social class. Although, later he was awarded Saraswati Samman for this play. In the speech during the award ceremony he said:-

"The work which has been selected for the Sarawati Samman is not the story of a victory; it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion. It gives expression to deep rooted malaise and its pains."

"...I have written about my own experiences and what I have seen in others around me. have been true to all this and have not cheated my generation. I did not attempt to simplify matters and issues for the audience when presenting the play, though that would have been an easier option. Sometimes my plays jolted society out of its stupor and I was punished. I faced this without regrets. It is an old habit with me to do what I am not told to do. My plays could not have been about anything else. They contain my perception of society and its values and I cannot write what I do not perceive."(1)

Thus, Tendulkar was known for his straightforwardness and objectivity. He projected his experiences remaining truthful to the last nerve. In this way we discover the concepts of Bakhtin in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar.

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