

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

Moral Degradation and Violence in Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures*

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.3.560](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.3.560)



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Article info

Article Received: 29/08/2025
Article Accepted: 25/09/2025
Published online: 30/09/2025

Abstract

The present research paper has been attempted to explore the moral degradation, violence, hypocrisy, jealousy and states of women in a male dominated society through the drama *The Vultures* by Vijay Tendulkar, a Marathi writer. The vulture is a ruthless bird that eats the flesh of dead animals. Tendulkar compares some human beings with vulture. He observed his surroundings minutely and presented the ugly face of immoral society. He has said:

"I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can't do it, I have to speak the truth" (Sumit.passionforcinema.com).

The Vultures was considered to be a controversial play for conservative Marathi people because of its theme. The play conveys the story of a family where family members' energy is spent in manipulating conspiracy and trick to cheat one another.

Keywords: Vultures, Hypocrisy, Jealousy, Sympathy

About the Author:

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar, born on January 6, 1928 in a Brahmin family, was a literary essayist, political journalist, social commentator who wrote realism in his plays and portrayed hard and harsh realities of life. He wrote in Marathi, but his works translated in various Indian languages. His works also presented in international level. Violence,

immortality, hypocrisy, jealousy, man-woman relationship and the plight of women in a male dominated society are the main themes of his plays. His contributions have earned him Sahitya Akademi Award, the Sangeet Natak Academy Award and the highest civilian award Padma Bhushan.

Moral Degradation and Violence in *The Vultures*:

The play, *The Vultures* displays the unmitigated violence, greed, avarice and selfishness. *The Vultures* (Gidhade) was actually written 14 years before it was produced (1970) and published (1971). The play *Gidhade* written in Marathi in the year 1961 is translated by Priya Adarkar as *The Vultures*. It is a two act play. It was considered to be a controversial play in context of the conservative Marathi people.

Vijay Tendulkar refers to the house of Pappa which instead of being an actual house was a hole in a tree, where vultures used to live in the shape of men. (204) This is the story of a family where Pappa is the head and has three sons Ramakant (Ramya), Umakant (Umya), one youngest illegitimate Rajanikant, one daughter Manik, and one daughter-in-law Rama. In the beginning of the play, the use of dirty grey colour for drawing room and bedroom shows that something is unpleasant in the house and use of green colour for garage and tulsi vrindavan shows that something positive prevails there, although it is contrary because basil is in feeble position and garage belongs to Rajaninath, an illegitimate son of Pappa. Rajaninath interprets the story of twenty-two years in the beginning of the play where we come to know that he is a poet who expresses his suppressed emotions in the form of poetry. He travels in the past where 'Skelton of memories' awake and he describes Rama, his sister-in-law beautifully that becomes the proof that he has a soft corner for Rama:

An innocent doe, untouched.
As loving as the earth.
As the first shower of rain
Translucent, hesitant,
Now the ripple of a stream.
Now a rushing flow. (203)

There is a reason for this soft corner. It's a human tendency that if a person shows care and love for the second person, then the second one not only appreciates his or her love and care, but

automatically gets attached with the first one. This happens in the case of Rajaninath when Rama shows sympathy towards him, he feels:

Once when I found
No food for my hunger,
Shifting my coming tears
Within a pillow
.....
She looked at the floor, and said:
I've brought some food for you.
From the kitchen.
No one knows. Will you eat it? (204)

When Ramakant denies Rama to offer tea to Rajaninath, then he says one can buy a cup of tea from teashop. He also mentions that many things that one doesn't have, doesn't kill one. He also refers to the last night when he went to a tamasha, where he approached a woman who was indecent but then he became conscious of his own thoughts and put a question to himself that was his own mother decent? He assumes the condition when his mother met his father and compares that condition with the woman who also had a son who was asleep due to intoxication of opium. Self revelation is a hard thing and to accept the place where one belongs is even harder. But at the same time, he also thought that it is better not to know your father and brothers if they are so cruel to put the wolves to shame.

Vijay Tendulkar realistically depicts the departure of Ramakant and Rama in the first scene where Ramakant turns up his collar which is the symbol of male pride and Rama takes the corner of her sari over her head that is the symbol of cultured female. Tendulkar described each and every detail as a 'corrugated iron gate'.

This family has vultures in the form of human beings and the eldest vulture is father. A father always wants the growth, peace and prosperity of his children, but Pappa is not like a fatherly figure, but in spite of this, he curses his children that when he will die :

"If I die, it'll be a release! They're all waiting for it. But I'm your own father, after all! If I die, I'll become a ghost. I'll sit on your chest! I won't let you enjoy a rupee of it." (209)

Once at the time of ringing phone bell, he predicts that it may be the phone of Umya and he must be playing Gopi-Krishan game with little boys or may be for Ramya, a crooked one who ruined his business and raised a flower-vase to hit him and want to kill him. Pappa calls his sons bastards and scoundrels. He blames his wife that she died and left these bastards with him. He also claims that it was his stupidity to produce bastards like them as Ramakant calls Pappa 'A bloody burden on the earth' and ironically replied that as the seed, so the tree. In this heated controversy, screeching of vultures grows louder which symbolises their sad monotonous life.

Pappa set up his business with his brother Sakham and worked hard to make it successful, but he cheated on his brother and controlled all the business and denied to give any money to his brother Sakham, and put him out of the scene. Vulture's [stomach acid](#) is exceptionally corrosive; allowing them to safely digest putrid carcasses infected with bacteria and can eat up to 20 percent of their own body weight in one sitting. Similarly the father vulture annexed the whole property without any sort of indigestion.

From his uncle Sakham, all the three siblings come to know that their father has some hidden money. So these greedy people make a plan to get the money from their father. Ramakant and Umakant forcibly put their father between them. Pappa was so terrified that he wants to call the police by the telephone. But phone was too far away from his vicinity. Vultures often [vomit](#) when threatened or approached. They do not vomit as a quick response for their safety but rather to lighten their stomach so that they can fly easily, unintentionally this distracts the predators too.

Similarly, when Pappa realised that his children are going to kill him, he confesses that his some left over amount i.e. 7000rs is in the Punjab bank. Pappa also curses Manik because he knows that the whole plot is fertile from her mind and calls her a whore. This is the height of immorality that a father calls her daughter a whore. Pappa calls his daughter-in-law Rama to help, but Manik shows in front of Rama that it was just an accident and the only thing required is iodine. But Pappa is so terrified that he runs out of the other door, holding his dhoti, looking backward. The harsh screeching of vultures can be heard. Act I ends with a burning issue. Of the five vultures, the father-vulture's story ends. Rama's suffering is just one part of this act.

Mercy, forgiveness, love, sympathy, shyness are the innate feminine qualities which enhance the honour and beauty of female. But we get shocked with the entry of Manik who is 32 to 35 years spinster, consumes liquor and cigarette and feels insecure in her own home. She closes the door of her room at night because she doesn't trust her siblings and suspects that they want to kill her as she referred last year's incident when she was ill and she didn't take tablets and spent sleepless nights with a feeling of murdered. She also referred her old father as a senile, Umya as a miser and Ramya as a hypocrite when she demanded a necklace of 1000 rs. She also calls the gardener 'Ungrateful bastard'. She curses the old gardener by saying that every morning he came here to ruin her sleep. She also calls her sister-in-law a witch. Manik has illicit relations with Raja of Honduras and her brothers mock her by asking her that how was picnic and last day. She also creates a plot for terrifying her Pappa with her two brothers when they come to know that their father has some hidden money. She possesses anti-feminine qualities.

There should be an honorary gap between father and son. The offer of cigarette to Pappa by Ramakant appears to break that moral set up. Ramakant's greedy nature also reflects when Umakant demands for their house but

Ramakant denies it by saying that he will give his life instead of giving the house. He was also against serving tea to his brother Rajaninath by Rama and he had already banned food for him. Ramakant was conscious about his family reputation which his sister had spoiled with the intimate relations with worthless Hondur, a third class Raja.

Umakant blames her own sister Manik by saying that whole town's shouting that both Manik and Hondur got drunk the other night and made a scene at the Majestic Hall. Cycle shop owner, film company cameraman, stall keepers from the market saw Manik and Hondur roaming around in the town on his motorbike with Manik's arms round his waist. Although Manik denies it and points out his intentions that Umya wants to ruin, slit her throat and kill. Umya claims that we didn't put those pills in your purse. Umakant also grabs her neck for money which she loses in the card-game. Ramakant and Umakant mock this idea that Raja of Hondur will marry her sister. The idea of marriage is ridiculous for them. They warned her sister that Raja of Hondur will not marry her, but she should fix some amount for it. This is a very mean thing that brothers want to get money on the cost of their sister's honour. Umya also suggests that if her belly swells, then they can blackmail the Raja. When Manik responds aggressively on this, then she finds herself between her two brothers with broken bottles in their hand. Violence prevails in the whole play and this disgraces their relations. They plan to con Raja of Hondur and get 25000 rupees from him. They fracture Manik's leg. But next morning they come to know that Raja of Hondur died of heart attack. This is a blow for both brothers and they kick Manik's belly to abort the baby. She was completely helpless with broken leg and white saree with blood. Vultures rarely attack healthy animals, but may kill the wounded or sick as Ramya and Umya do with their sister.

Generally, in our society, if any couple doesn't have any kid, they take medication for

help. But if that doesn't work, they start considering supernatural beliefs instead of finding some scientific way to rescue a solution to their problem. While in the case of Ramakant, he conveys his wife that if touch of swamis' feet could bless us with a child, then twenty kids would have been there in our home. It's all about luck. Man proposes, God disposes. He also suggests that if she wants to go there, go just for some bloody fun. Rama tells Rajaninath that it isn't any saint, saga or doctor that has caused her so much suffering. She says that she herself also isn't a cause of her state. She reveals that her womb is healthy and sound and she is born to become a mother, but if the seed is soaked in poison i.e. liquor, if it is feeble, lifeless, devoid of virtue—then it is useless to blame fertile soil. Rajaninath replies that his seed is diseased, but else everything is good. This is a clear-cut indication of the development of a relation between them.

Rama states:

"Those women long ago who used to commit sati, we're all praise for them. They used to burn themselves alive—in loyalty to their dead husbands. But only once. Once they were brunt, they escaped. But...I commit sati every moment! I burn! I am consumed!" (242)

Scene VII is a soliloquy of Ramakant in an intoxicated mood cursing his brother who is determined to take possession of their house. He curses his wife of having his step-brother's kiddie. The scene fades out to the screeching of a single vulture as the human vulture in Ramakant has to surrender to his own evil design.

The play ends with a poetic summing up of the events like an epilogue by Rajaninath:

The tale of the five vultures
Had this end.
The story of men accursed.
Or else of vultures cursed
To live their lives as men. (265)

The Vultures may be compared to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* which presents a satire that depicts the greed of the society. Jonson has given names of animals and birds to his characters to portray certain universal moral truths. *Volpone* in his greed pretends to be dying so that he can attract birds of prey such as vulture. *Volpone* has always been living for the riches and the vultures too.

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