International Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Trends (IJARMT)
An International Open Access, Peer-Reviewed Refereed Journal
Impact Factor: 7.2 Website: https://ijarmt.com ISSN No.: 3048-9458

# Inheritance, Humiliation, and the Predatory "Joint Family": A Kinship-Political Economy Reading of Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures* (*Gidhade*)

**Anil Kumar**[1]
Department of English, Sanskaram University, Haryana
anilboudhist666@gmail.com

**Dr. Neha Sheoran**
Department of English, Sanskaram University, Haryana
neha07sheoran@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**
In this article Vijay Tendulkar's The Vultures (Gidhade) is interpreted as a negative critique of the myth of morality of the Indian joint family. Not the stable family as a unit of care, but kinship as an economic system of exploitation is at stake, where inheritance fears, property stakes, and circulation of humiliation are implicated. The concept of "jointness" is a legitimizing container for everyday cruelty, and it will be argued with the help of kinship sociology and feminist political economy.
The methodology of the article consists in the combination of close reading (scene-by-scene analysis of dialogue, spatial blocking, and the motifs of food and money) and the conceptualization of the household as a resource regime. The grotesque mode of representation is not sensationalist, but a strategy of bringing to attention what is left out of the respectable narrative – transformation of kinship into a right and transformation of suffering into a feminine virtue. The article argues that the contemporary questions of property, domestic violence, and gendered aspect of "exit" are prefigured in Tendulkar's play through the concepts of inheritance as a present tense and domestic violence as normality.
**Keywords:** Tendulkar; *The Vultures*; joint family; inheritance; domestic violence; kinship; political economy; grotesque realism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present essay explores the joint family not as an idealised symbol of Indian tradition, but as a mundane household economy, in which cohabitation may entail heightened surveillance, entitlements, and coercive practices. In public imagination, "jointness" is assumed to mean shared wealth and multigenerational caregiving; however, the proximity that defines kinship in a positive light can equally well serve to organise domination through quotidian practices. The dramatic conflict in Vijay Tendulkar's The Vultures (Gidhade) revolves around precisely this tension: despite being formally joint, the Pitale family turns kinship into command, and care into entitlement, rather than charity. (Tendulkar 2003)
The play will be analysed using the lens of a kinship-political economy approach, which sees the household as a regime of resources – a place where material resources (money, property, inheritance potential) and symbolic resources (respectability, honour, credibility, recognition)

[1] Corresponding author: anilboudhist666@gmail.com.

are distributed through coercive practices, not consensual norms. The questions this analysis will seek to answer are the following: how is inheritance transformed into present pressure in the household; how are property rights circulated through moral language; and how is humiliation turned into a tool for building ranks? (Bourdieu 1990, 52-56) (Das 2007, 205-6)

The argument will be advanced using close reading (with emphasis on dialogue, spatial movement, and motifs) and will focus on four aspects of the Pitale household organisation: (i) space and thresholds; (ii) speech acts and address; (iii) repetition (quarrel as infrastructure); and (iv) motifs, including food and money, as material speech.

Sociological and anthropological studies of kinship will be used to provide a framework for understanding the process through which authority is naturalised through idiom, rule, and habit. Indian family studies repeatedly point out that the household is an institution of work and obedience, maintained by expectations that normalise hierarchy. (Karve 1965) (Uberoi 1993)

The discussion will be guided by two theoretical perspectives. Misrecognition is a concept that denotes a mode of domination that is experienced as "natural" relationship. (Bourdieu 1990, 34) Feminist political economy reveals coercion not as something external to the system of domestic distribution of resources, but integral to it: entitlement and duty are constructed simultaneously, and property systems are stabilised through daily practices that feminise sacrifice and respectability. (Agarwal 1994) (Skeggs 1997, 8-9)

The discussion that follows starts with the analysis of household space and the naturalisation of violence, then proceeds to humiliating pedagogy, masculinity as the economy of recognition, and inheritance as present tense. The grotesque element in the play will be interpreted as a realistic device that brings to light the domestic power relations that have been disavowed, drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body and Kristeva's theory of abjection. (Bakhtin 1968, 315-17) (Kristeva 1982, 4)

## 2. ANALYSIS

The interior does not provide shelter, and *The Vultures* is set almost entirely in the domestic interior. It is a social space where walking and talking is infused with the question of entitlement: who can come in without being asked, who can stay without having to give an account for their presence, who can interrupt without permission. In this way, the household is like what Bourdieu calls a "space of common sense", a "hierarchy set in motion as common sense", through everyday actions. (Bourdieu 1977) (Bourdieu 1990, 14)

Routine is an important issue in the play. Violence only as an extreme emergency would allow it to be psychologised or moralised as deviation. Rather it is a domestic sphere in which harm is a part of everyday life, in which small changes, silences, and accommodations are the medium for the stabilisation of domination. This is in line with Das' description of violence becoming "normal" without being made ethically acceptable, becoming part of everyday life. (Das 2007, 205–6)

Humiliation is the essence of Pitale household life. An insult is not only expressive but allocative; it denigrates, dishonours and reallocates the burdens of a joke unevenly, producing a chart of who hurts and who gets hurt. Butler's writings on injurious speech are relevant in this case as repeated address becomes a subject that cannot easily be refused - especially within a closed moral community. (Butler 1997, 43)

Most importantly, the humiliation is "public in the house." It relies upon internal audience of wives, sisters and visitors in their compulsion to look and become involved in a domestic economy of recognition. Malevolence is an easy way to get ahead as masculinity is continually tested as the capacity to dominate and not be dominated, recognition is hard to earn. (Bartky 1990)

In The Vultures, conflict does not get resolved; it gets reproduced. Quarrel is reiterated; it is its structure; it is a means of reaffirming who threatens, who mediates and who is expendable. This reiteration is analytically significant as it allows moving from an individual pathology to an institutional routine; household "teach[es]" cruelty in return for its attention, fear and submission. (Das 2007, 205-6)

In the context of the ideology of the joint family, where the older generation are seen as moral centre, Tendulkar's father is a contested site, through which the property, the legitimacy and the authority of the household pass. 'Care' is strategic proximity, access to the dependent body is bargaining power. Thus duty is done as a right and not as a moral obligation. (Tendulkar 2003)

As a property-node, the father's reading can help to explain how a moral language of obligation is mobilized again and again to guarantee a future distribution, and how the refusal of care can be read as a disloyalty, not as resistance to extraction.

The place of Rama in the house is an indicator of the jointness that is dependent on gendered labour in order to hold as the family. She is the continuity woman, the one who cleans up after war, takes insults, defuses escalation and maintains the illusion of normalcy. It is not only domestic work, it is ideological work which enables domination to be continued as ordinary life. (Skeggs 1997, 8–9)

Rama's steadfastness is repeatedly moralized. Endurance is a virtue demanded of women, a criterion of belonging and a marker of respectability. In this context, what looks like consent is a matter of survival in a situation that is costly to escape in material terms and in terms of morality as well. (Das 2007, 205–6)

Manik's role as a boundary-maker in this play is more apparent than any other. The reason why she is portrayed as a contaminant and a scapegoat is not so much because of any inherent "immorality" but because of posing a threat to the moral narrative of the family. This is an example of stigma functioning as a technique of governance.

Douglas' discussion of pollution and taboo helps to explain this. Manik is made to be "matter out of place," and obscenity and pollution are used as a means to police who might belong and on what terms. (Douglas 1966, 44)

Tendulkar's use of vulnerability within the home challenges the comforting dichotomy that posits the home as a place of protection. The credibility deficit that frames claims of sexual harm is exacerbated by women's dependence, authority of male kin and the lack of neutral witness. The family is both a tribunal and an interested party, issuing judgements on women's character instead of on injury. (Smart 1989) (MacKinnon 1989, 179–81)

Inheritance is described in The Vultures not only as a matter following death, but as a horizon organizing the present. Since distribution is anticipated, daily behavior is oriented toward future claim to property: alliances, accusations, and acts of care are made with an eye on future

claims. Affection is always inherently questionable in such conditions because it can never be divorced from the notion of advantage. (Tendulkar 2003)

As a property form, the Pitale household must constantly defend itself as moral unit, and can no longer credibly settle its own conflicts. When there is a conflict of duties, appeals to duty are not able to solve the problem, but rather become weapons. The outcome is an internal court that decides what is reasonable, loyal or obscene based on power. (Bakhtin 1968, 315–17)

There are two tropes that recur, making the household economy intelligible. First, food is a device of inclusion: it is an indicator of who is worth keeping, who is worth tolerating, and who is worth enduring by denial, ridicule, or suffering. Second, money is a language: offering, refusal, accusation, and demand are telling the story of moral worth through economic entitlement. The ordinary is politicized in both cases, as household items become devices for distributing status and dependency.

The mechanics of household logic are established for the play in the preceding sections analytically. This section, however, offers a scene-by-scene perspective, not in order to recount the plot, but rather to show how governance is carried out through what seems like mundane domestic transactions. It is the mechanics of the reproduction of jointness as coercion that the focus lies in: the ranking of speech, the recruitment of audiences in the domestic setting, and the interpretation of gestures as a form of strategy in light of the horizon of inheritance.

These practices can be described as a series of mechanisms employed in the production of domestic governance in the Pitale household: injurious address (jokes, insults, and names) ranks people and creates a hierarchy of credibility; quarrel is a repeated practice and turns coercion into common sense; care serves as a tool of leverage through proximity to the vulnerable body as a claim of inheritance; respectability work is shifted to women, who act as buffers of conflict and endure their hardships; and pollution discourse renders the transgressive woman into a pollutant and a scapegoat. (Butler 1997, 43) (Das 2007, 205–6) (Tendulkar 2003) (Skeggs 1997, 8–9) (Douglas 1966, 44) (Goffman 1963, 3)

Words in this play are never innocent in the household. From flirtation, taunts, and casual comments, words become a test of loyalty and trap to get reactions. This is more about positioning in society rather than information exchange, because it is about who can make someone blush, who can make someone give an explanation, who can tease another without consequences. Under these conditions, addressing someone is a form of governing that determines who is the speaker and who is the addressed. (Butler 1997, 43) (Bourdieu 1990, 14)

It also clarifies why there is no privacy here, since the domestic interior is where people's attention is concentrated rather than dispersed. The closer the relationship, the more often monitoring occurs, and the more difficult it becomes to refuse.

The chaos that occurs as a result of war is actually repetitive pattern. The interruption is a prerogative that is repeatedly utilized and seldom penalized. Threats are not employed to terminate conflict, but to sustain it for purposes of governance. The reason why repetition is important is that it makes coercion habitual; members learn how to go limp, placate, and enact outrage. “The ordinary violence of Das’s description is not a sign of its diminishment in destructiveness, but rather an indication of its increasing habitability.” (Das 2007, 205-6)

This means that comfort for reformers is denied. The family does not have to be "broken down" for injury to occur; it can be recognisable as family and still normalise injury.

Manik's value lies in his story in the sense that he makes visible what others have to hide. Her independence is a scandal, not only of sexuality, but also of legibility: she reveals the disconnect between the respectability discourse of the family and the actuality of their everyday cruelties. Stigma is thus a collective performance. Pollution and insult language is a recruitment of internal spectators which makes condemnation a scene in which the household reassures itself of its own morality. (Douglas 1966, 44) (Goffman 1963, 3)

Threatening to expel, as a form of boundary work, also helps to account for the repeated threat of expulsion. The danger is not so much the removal of harm as the reestablishment of a boundary which will preserve the moral fiction of the household.

Inheritance in *The Vultures* is not a postponed legal process but a horizon which reorganises everyday life. When we give attention, it is not neutral, it is evaluative. Closeness, who is speaking for whose voice, and who is doing what caring work, are all measures of entitlement. The politicisation of the dependent body then is a process in which future distribution is negotiated in the present, (Tendulkar 2003) (Agarwal 1994)

This is an interesting dynamic which illuminates the play's nagging suspicion of sentiment. Affection is always re-coded as strategy and duty is always re-coded as debt when kinship is also a property form.

What is meant by the play's "grotesque" must not be interpreted as sensational excess, but rather as analytic insistence. Tendulkar emphasizes the degradation of the body and abjection to prevent the audience from domestifying violence as some kind of private aberration or as a failure of one individual. Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body illuminates how hierarchy is undermined by the needs and humiliation of the body and how the play's denial of catharsis makes for a difficult moral quarantine. (Bakhtin 1968, 315–17)

Kristeva's theory of abjection also accounts for the tendency of the household to eject what it produces in itself: the family tries to preserve the moral boundary by throwing away what structurally jointness produces: vulnerability and desire. Abjection does not abjure, or cast out, what it is; it is to be considered as within and intolerable. (Kristeva 1982, 4)

Controversies over the enactment of Tendulkar's domestic performances are not peripheral to interpretation, but rather are a reflection of the functioning of the family as a public symbol. If representations of family violence are deemed to be vulgarity or obscenity, the rhetoric of respectability can be seen to serve as institutional defence: the family's injuries must remain unrepresentable if the family is to remain the model of moral order. (Narrain 2008) (*Theatre and Censorship in India (Interview/Feature)*, n.d.) (Dharwadker 2005)

This reception history also helps to elucidate the political agendas of the grotesque approach. Degrading the domestic interior is a way of undermining a broader economy of legitimacy if the domestic interior is a privileged space for the production of 'good' subjects. The controversy thus serves as evidence not so much of the play's lack of taste, but of the symbolic power of the family in the cultural regulation.

Joint families are not always moral shelters (care, continuity, tradition) nor are they necessarily places of occasional breakdown (conflict, greed, miscommunication): The Vultures suggests

another way of thinking about jointness. It can be a form of protection and exposure depending on the distribution of resources and recognition. In this context, tendulkar shifts the focus from sentimentalist appraisal of family to an institutional description: it is not so much a question of whether family members "love" each other, but rather how the entitlement, obligation, and credibility of family members are distributed through household routines. (Desai 1956) (Bourdieu 1990, 52–56)

The play is also lessons for feminist political economy, as it reveals the unequal risk to domestic stability. Women are expected to be endurance and men are expected to be aggressive, and recognised by domination. The morality of the household is often the policing of the female as a buffer, the one who takes the hit, the one who is visibly joint and can be read as family. (Skeggs 1997, 8–9) (Bartky 1990)

Tendulkar's domestic career is not only representative, it's analytical. Theatre is a medium for looking and as a result can create the discomfort of proximity: the audience is the one that witnesses insults flowing around, the recruitment of internal audiences, and the lack of an external adjudicator. The outcome is a dramatic social theory, where the domestic court is made manifest as performance. This is one of the reasons why the grotesque method is important, as it will not allow the cruelty to be explained as a private psychological disorder. (Dharwadker 2005) (Bakhtin 1968, 315–17)

This article has been concerned with the play as a kinship–property diagram, and has given greater prominence to mechanisms (humiliation, stigma, inheritance) than to the history of the play and to translation-specific analysis. Two extensions would be particularly fruitful: one, a performance archive of the various ways in which different stagings of the play negotiate the issues of spectatorship, laughing and disgust; two, a comparative reading of the play across Tendulkar's oeuvre to trace the changes in the house hold forms when the idiom is not jointness but contract, reform or trial. (Narrain 2008)

## 3. CONCLUSION

The Vultures is a demolition of the moral mythology of the joint-family by constructing jointness as a predatory resource system. Humiliation is an accepted way of government, as demonstrated by the Pitale family, where inheritance is the present-tense future of the home, and respectability is an exercise to burden women with the responsibility of domestic tranquility. In such a manner, the refusal of The Vultures to accept redemption is neither nihilistic nor confused; rather, it is a way of insisting that violence should not be considered an anomaly and should be made an everyday process of kinship, which sanctions coercion.

The two implications here are first, the play demands kinship studies that would understand the home as an arena of co-production of symbolic and material goods, as well as property. And second, it calls for conflicts over domestic representation that have taken the form of "obscenity" to be recognized as political conflicts over the public knowledge about the family.

## REFERENCES

Agarwal, Bina. 1994. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Indiana University Press.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1990. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge.
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge University Press.
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Polity Press.
Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge.
Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. University of California Press.
Desai, I. P. 1956. "The Joint Family in India—an Analysis." *The Sociological Review*, ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022919560206.
Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava. 2005. *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India Since 1947*. University of Iowa Press.
Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge.
Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Prentice-Hall.
Karve, Irawati. 1965. *Kinship Organization in India*. Asia Publishing House.
Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia University Press.
MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1989. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Harvard University Press.
Narrain, Arvind. 2008. "The Law and Obscenity in India: (Censorship and Sexuality)." *Economic and Political Weekly*.
Skeggs, Beverley. 1997. *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. Sage.
Smart, Carol. 1989. *Feminism and the Power of Law*. Routledge.
Tendulkar, Vijay. 2003. *Collected Plays in Translation*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press.
*Theatre and Censorship in India (Interview/Feature)*. n.d. India Foundation for the Arts. Accessed July 25, 2026. https://indiaifa.org/theatre-and-censorship-in-india/.
Uberoi, Patricia, ed. 1993. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press.