

## **CHAPTER : TWO**

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***The Lives of the Dramatists and their Dramatic Careers***



Tennessee Williams

CHAPTER -II- (A)TENNESSEE WILLIAMSHIS LIFE AND DRAMATIC CARRER,

The mainsprings of Tennessee Williams' art are his personal tensions. In one play Williams said " a poet's life is his work and his work is his life." (1) The controversial and provocative American playwright can be understood only when one peeps into his personal life.

The first published work of Tennessee Williams was a story published in an issue of Weird Tales in 1928. The story of an Egyptian Queen, Nitocris who arranged a lavish banquet in a hall on the shores of the Nile and invited all her enemies. At the height of the banquet she excused herself and opening the sluice gates admitted the waters of the Nile into the banquet Hall and drowned her enemies like rats. Tennessee was barely sixteen when he wrote this story, which set the keynote for most of his work. His first professionally produced play Battle of Angles was says Tennessee Williams " as violent as you can get on the stage." (2)

To gain an understanding of the violence in his work, it is essential to study it in the context of the playwright's early life. Tennessee says that all his life he has been " haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing is to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible if not a probable loser of what you want most." (3) He had he says to".... always contend with this adversary of fear, which was

sometimes terror, gave me a tendency towards an atmosphere of hysteria and violence in my writing, an atmosphere has existed in it since the beginning. " (4)

Born on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, the son of Cornelius Coffin Williams, a none too prosperous shoe salesman who was frequently away on selling trips. His proud and self-centred father was quick and violent in temper. He played poker and liked his alcohol. He disliked his son's effeminate ways and his artistic leanings, he called him ' Nancy '. His father's coarseness and crudity horrified Tennessee and inspired fear and a sense of disgust in him. Williams labelled the paternal branch of his family " Violent and aggressive." (5)

His small and beautiful mother Edwina was the daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman. She was " Composed and proper to the point of puritanism." (6) The tension between " Puritan " and " Cavalier " is consistently explored by Williams in his work. Williams spent his early childhood in the rectory of his maternal grandfather, a stately and dignified minister who helped to shape his mind. His gentleman grand-father was deeply religious, warm and good-humored. Tennessee accompanied his grandfather on consolatory visits to the members of his flock among whom he " saw the prototype of pathetic women of his plays".(7) Life was pleasant and gracious then. This " careful crystalline existence " (8) was abruptly shattered when the Williams family moved to St.Louis to be with their father who was posted there. To Tennessee and his sister Rose this

was a violent uprooting - ' it was a tragic move '. (9)

Tennessee Williams and his sister, used to a quiet and graceful life in the rectory of their grandfather, could not adjust themselves to a life in a Midwestern city. Something had ended for them and something new, unbearable and alien had taken its place. This was 'forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood. It produced a shock and a rebellion that has grown into an inherent part of my work." (10)

The marriage of Edwina and Dakin being incompatible became a struggle and its gradual and painful decay widened the gulf between them. Tennessee and sister Rose who witnessed this had to rely upon the presence of their mother and grandfather. Rose and he were inseparable companions. An attack of diphtheria which he suffered as a child and the following prolonged illness left him forever sickly. Being in bed for months, he missed a full year of school. The over protective mother did not allow him to play with other children. Rose was his only companion and playmate. The company of the women(mother, grandmother and Rose) made him delicate and sissified. Being called a sissy by the neighbourhood kids and 'Miss Nancy' by his father he sought refuge in reading and he discovered writing as a retreat from the world of reality in which he felt acutely uncomfortable, " It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge." (12)

The tension of their parents' conflict, their moving to

a tenement flat to St. Louis made his sister Rose to resolve her conflict by retreating into insanity. The struggle within Tennessee became a literature as he managed to put his experience into art. The family tension reflected in the disturbed character of a dejected and vulnerable and much loved sister has been reflected in the body of William's work.

When Francis Donahue interviewed him before one opening night Tennessee said, " I was born old. I had no youth, for my youth was unhappy and an unhappy youth is like no youth at all. My life was no bed of roses and my plays rather follow my life pattern." (13)

After his education in St. Louis where he spent much of his youth, he graduated from the state University of Iowa. He worked as a clerk in a shoe factory, operated an elevator, worked in hotels, movie houses and restaurants and other odd jobs to hold body and soul together. Tennessee Williams has been writing furiously since boyhood. But he won general recognition in 1945 with production of The Glass Menagerie. Thereafter, he moved from success to success attaining repute with A Streetcar Named Desire 1947. In rapid succession came Summer and Smoke (1948) The Rose Tattoo (1951), Camino Real in (1953) Cat On a Hot Tin Roof (1955) Suddenly Last Summer in (1957), Sweet Bird of Youth , 1959, Period of Adjustment (1960), Night of the Iguana (1962) The Milk Train Doesn't stop Here Any more (1964) and Slapstick Tragedy (1967).

The artistic achievement and success of the plays was uneven. Tennessee Williams also tried fiction and poetry, but his imagination has been essentially dramatic. His short stories mostly turned out to be the drafts of his later plays. He is a prolific and compulsive writer who gained world reputation with twenty five years of constant literary activity. He became the major figure in American drama with his poetic drama The Glass Menagerie in 1945. He not only became the major figure in the growth of the American theatre after Eugene O'Neil but also contributed to the development of American art of acting, staging and designing. Gassner the American critic admires Tennessee Williams for the theatrical effectiveness of his work. Esther M. Jackson said, " His major asset as a dramatist is his talent for creating characters, situations, forms of dialogue and scenic environments which possess the prized quality of verisimilitude-plausibility in performance. It is this ability to create the illusion of reality in the theatre which has won for him an impressive array of honors. (14)

The first honor was awarded in 1939 by the Group theatre of New York. In 1940 he received the Rockefeller Fellowship for playwriting. In 1944 he was honoured by the National Institute of Arts and letters. In his mature years he won four New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards (1945, 47, 55 and 61) two Pulitzer Prizes (1947 and 1955) and membership in the National Institute of Arts and letters (1952). He won and sustained the artistic loyalty of the

theatrical profession and had the advantage of a consistently high level of production. The effectiveness of his plays in performance won him professional admiration and enhanced his reputation as a popular dramatist.

Although Williams is a writer for the stage he gained wide public exposure and a growing audience in other parts of the world through the motion picture. Permission to produce A Streetcar Named Desire was granted in thirty-six countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. His emphasis on visual spectacle made it possible to adapt ten of his full length plays into the cinematic medium.

Williams writes about contemporary life of common people. Their emotional, social and moral issues are dramatized in the language of the common man. The tensions within human consciousness assume a great significance in his plays. His plays deal with (human life) the problem of evil, the world of unfortunate, defeated and entrapped people, their love, hate, comedy, tragedy, joy, sorrow, passion and violence. His general view of life is pessimistic and tragic. Williams' characters are all fighting a losing battle and are doomed to failure. The shrewd realistic observations found in many of his plays show Williams' awareness of the human condition. On the one hand he presented the pure, the uncorrupted, and on the other, the degraded, corrupted and perverted. The conflict between flesh and spirit; the consequences of nonconformity and destructiveness of time are the themes of Williams' plays



says Francis Donahue. Suffering being his central theme he presents stark and lonely condition of man in a cruel and complex world, through the conflict between reality and illusion, destruction of the sensitive and romantic by the insensitive. While doing this he often revealed the undignified and indecent truths about mankind in his dramatic world. The casual reader or playgoer found his plays unpleasant as they presented sex, violence, cannibalism, alcoholism, neuroticism and homosexuality. Tennessee Williams admits that he cannot handle people in routine situations. He always writes from his own tensions. His characters correspond to his own tensions. In his view if the characters are melodramatic it is because in a play the events of a lifetime are concentrated in a short span of three hours. The dramatist himself being a disturbed person writes about disturbed people. But he writes with power, insight and compassion. As Richard Watts, Jr. has aptly pointed out "...his plays become lyric works of dramatic art of a high and distinguished nature " (16)

Besides his own unhappy life the major influences on him were D.H.Lawrence, Anton Chechov, August Strindberg and Hart Crane.

Technically Williams was highly experimental and had dramatic power. His own ' poet-symbolist-realist technique ' (17) is seen in the introduction to " The Glass Managerie." He did not like the realist believe in photographic likeness. He believed that truth, life and

reality can be represented or suggested by the poetic imagination through transformation. His concept of the theatre was poetic and through it he attempted to present the inner world of his characters. The poetic current in his plays accentuated and intensified reality through contact and bestowed human warmth in Williams' characters. To intensify reality he also used expressionistic and other unconventional techniques like lighting effects, music and symbols on the stage.

Although the plays of this compulsive writer are uneven in artistic achievement his position as a playwright is a highly recognized one. " The contribution he has already made to the theatre assures him a position of respect in the history of American drama." (18)



CHAPTER -II- (B)VIJAY TENDULKARHIS LIFE AND DRAMATIC CARRER.

Vijay Tendulkar, the most well-known and controversial playwright of the Marathi theatre was born on 6th January 1928. He completed sixty years of his life on 7th January, 1988. Out of these, nearly forty years he has devoted to writing. He started writing at a very young age. As he had to give up his studies at the age of fifteen and sixteen, he studied only up to matriculation. After leaving school, he had no friends and did not speak and mix much with the members of his family and so felt very lonely. This feeling of loneliness a part of his nature always kept haunting him and writing was his only outlet and solace. The loneliness experienced by Vijay Tendulkar is not the loneliness resulting from family disintegration that Tennessee Williams experienced. He says that writing was his necessity, writing his speech and his way of communication. While quite young, he started writing to get rid of this terrible feeling of loneliness, thus writing became the sole companion to his intimate thought. He was, he says, haunted by the feeling of loneliness even in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the hectic modern life. In spite of a number of friends and well wishers somewhere deep in, he experienced loneliness. Nothing gave him relief as writing did. All that he experienced, whether tension or relief, whether happiness or sorrow, excitement or thrill, anger or pleasure,

he could not contain himself unless and until it was put down on paper. As he led a very intense interior life, writing came to him naturally.

Upto 1947 he worked as a proof reader in different printing presses, as a journalist upto 1972, and 1979 to 1981 he worked on the faculty of the Tata Institute of Social Science. Last forty years he has been a writer. He also worked as an editor for a number of Marathi newspapers,, weeklies and magazines.

He has won many awards. He received an award in 1977 from the Sangeet Natak Academy for his work in the dramatic field, an award from the Government of India for his film script Manthan in 1977, two Filmfare awards for the script and dialogue of Akrosh in 1980, and one more for the film Ardhasatya in 1983. For his play Shantata Court Chalu Ahe (Silence, the Court is in Session he received the Kamaladevi Chatopadhyaya Award in 1970 for the best Indian play of the year. This play won him international fame. It was translated into English, it was also broadcast by the B.B.C. 1955 to 1973 he received many awards from the Government of Maharashtra. He won the Nehru Fellowship for a research project on " Violence in India." Akashvani and Television honoured him by appointing him Producer Emerits in 1986. To top all these awards he was honoured with Padmabhushan by the Government of India in 1984. He works as the President of various renowned and social institutions.

Vijay Tendulkar wrote continuously. He did not confine himself to any particular genre. He has written a number of one act plays. He has to his credit collections of short stories. Some novels and plays by different western writers have been translated by him. His literary articles in Kovli Unhe , Rat Rani and Fuge Sabnache seem still fresh, evergreen and enjoyable. He has also written some plays for children.

His first play Shrimant appeared in 1955. Manus Navache Bet appeared in 1958 followed by Madhalya Bhinti , Chimniche Ghar Hote Menache 1960, Mi Jinklo : Me Harlo : 1963, Kavlyanchi Shala 1964, Sari Ga Sari 1964, Ek Hatti Mulgi in 1967. These are the earlier works of Tendulkar belonging to the first phase of his dramatic career. In these plays " Tendulkar dwelt on the woes of the middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment." (19) As Vijay Tendulkar comes of a middle class family it is but natural that he should be thoroughly acquainted with the limitations aspirations and the unexpressed sorrows of the middle class. As he is well acquainted with the world of the daily newspapers he is interested in and has the habit of exploring the everyday life of common people in an objective manner. As an artist with a sensitive mind he did not allow anything to escape his keen observation.

The tensions, frustrations arising out of unemployment or meagre pay; the typical anxiety, worry of the middle class parents in finding a suitable husband for their grown-up girl; young people in love, who either have no consent of their parents or have no house to live in; the (defeat) of the truthful and devoted; the pangs of hunger suffered by the proud, the insults and cruelty meted out to an unmarried mother; such and other typical middle class tensions were presented by Tendulkar in the first half of his dramatic career. In two of his plays he depicts the upper class where he presents the rich as corrupt, ugly and selfish, exploiting the poor and taking undue advantage of the victims, cheating and using people

and then throwing them away. The relationships of such people are based on money and not love. Thus in the first phase of his dramatic career Tendulkar depicts the struggles and tensions of the typical middle class Indians, the shattering of their ideals and dreams, their suppressed natural instincts, the cruel and harsh social surroundings that trap these victims, their emotions, misery and suffering are presented in a poetical and lyrical vein, accompanied by subtle humour. Most of his plays before 1960 belong to the above discussed type. The plays after 1960 depict a subtle change in the attitude of the dramatist.

It was with Shantata Court Chalu Ahe (Silence! the Court is in session) 1968 that Vijay Tendulkar broke new grounds in the history of the Marathi stage. The

new technique, new outlook and the modern way of piercing into the hearts and minds of characters were so unconventional that the play and the dramatist arrested the attention of the drama critics as well as the theatre-going public. From this play the second phase of Tendulkar as a dramatist is seen. The plays of this phase differ from those of the first one. Tendulkar in his second phase becomes provocative from the point of view of traditional Indian outlook. As usual he picks up contemporary themes and problems, there is a typical "Tendulkar Twist : " (20) i.e. presentation of social reality to suit his own notion in them. Of course here too as usual the isolation of the individual and the confrontation with the hostile surroundings is his favourite theme. The tremendous social pressure of the ruthless social forces or traditions which isolate the individual and suppress him is as usual the theme of the plays but he is unconventional or more modern, courageous, daring and bold in his presentation of the theme as well as the presentation of characters. He is more penetrating when he reveals the dark corners, the repression, the brutality, loneliness, rejection and alienation of his fugitive characters and the primitiveness lurking under the garb of a so called civilized society. Though he deals with contemporary Marathi society he deals with violence too. He believes that violence exists in each of us and it must be presented in all its manifestations. This is seen in Gidhade , Ghashiram , Sakharam Binder , Akriet , Aakrosh or Ardha Satya .



In an interview with " Fulcrum " he said (I do not consider) the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or ugly, in fact ever since Shantata , I have discovered that violence makes men fascinating. There are so many variations in the way violence manifests itself, in the way men express it. I find, it is a patent, ever present quality. Its various manifestations and how they are moulded by each person are important in a lot about human nature..... I believe that violence is a basic quality." (21) He also told " Fulcrum ", " The most important point is to keep the violence raw ( while depicting it on stage ) not to dress it up with fancy trappings, not to attempt to make it palatable. A torture scene for example, must never seem comfortable, it must be acutely disturbing. The problems arise at times because of the scale of action ( on stage ); for instance the mass scene in Ghashiram. Then experimentation with new forms becomes necessary..... Gidhade was for me a tremendous release. I broke out of the frame work in which I was operating. It was a shattering of the norms..."

In 1971 appeared Gidhade , followed by Sakharam Binder in 1972. These plays created much storm. They made the critics as well as the theatre-goers all restless because of the extreme boldness of the dramatist. The followers of conventional morality were shocked. Gidhade is a bold play which depicts the disintegration of a family due to selfishness and greed. Greed and lust make the

members of the family cruel and violent and act like vultures towards each other. Sakharam Binder is about a man working as a binder in a press. He keeps women without marrying them, he is abusive, physically violent, drinks heavily and admits to all his vices. This play was followed by Gharate Amuche Chan in 1973 and Ghashiram Kotwal in the same year. Its arrival on stage created a lot of controversy and dispute. Though the play is based on an episode in history it is not a historical play. It shows how sex, greed, lust for power and money have a corrupting influence on man. The same is true of Baby 1975 and "Bhau Murarrao" of the same year. In Baby Raghav, the brother of Baby tries to murder Shivappa because he has tried to molest her. Raghav is sent to the lunatic asylum but is later set free. To his horror he finds his sister living with Shivappa. Raghav is a broken man and Shivappa, after some persuasion from Baby lets him stay in his house. Shivappa treats both Baby and Raghav cruelly and violently.

In 1976 appeared Pahije Jatiche and then Kamala in 1982. Kamala is based on a newspaper story. A newspaper reporter buys a woman Kamala and holds a press conference to show the world how inhumanity still operates in modern India. The reporter is fired, is shocked and falls into a drunken stupor. The arrival of Kamala in the reporter's house gives rise to tension, tiffs and quarrels between the reporter Jaysingh and his

wife Sarita. Kamala's arrival makes Sarita for the first time realise that she too is a slave like Kamla. This play was followed by Mitrachi Gosht in 1982. In 1983 Kanyadan another Tendulkar's disturbing play appeared. There is a middle class socialist family whose daughter decides to marry a ' dalit '. The marriage takes place and almost immediately, a terrible kind of violence begins. Thus we see Tendulkar in the second phase of his dramatic career presenting the increasingly violent society. Cruelty in man, violence are a part of life and Tendulkar wants to depict life. Tendulkar says that he is fascinated by a certain theme, he is sometimes not even sure of his story because it is just exploration on his part, whether the audience will appreciate it or be shocked by it is immaterial. His intention is neither to shock nor arouse people. His intention is to write a play as it comes to him. Tendulkar says that he cannot close his eyes to the harsh realities surrounding man. He has no interest in painting false and romantic pictures and dreams of victory.

Tendulkar presents the changed times. Modern life is very complex, times have changed. Old values are out of date. Traditional way of thinking cannot solve the problems of modern man. Man has become a prey to his own inventions. Modern man is not just confused, disillusioned but dehumanised. On such a background, no writer can write with an optimistic view of life. Though Tendulkar

has respect, affinity and concern for the modern struggling man he feels, that he is fighting a losing battle. So Tendulkar writes problem plays. A problem play treats life seriously, not only with a sense of its importance, but also of its difficulties, conflicts, dilemma and suffering. As a writer, says, Tendulkar, he cannot be indifferent to the society around. Tendulkar says that he came in contact with the society around him during his journalistic career. He came to realize how wide the world is and what goes on in the wide world. But at the same time he became conscious that even in this world of newspapers his knowledge of the world was "Second hand" (23) This strengthened his urge to gain "First hand" (24) knowledge. when he was awarded the Fellowship of the Nehru Memorial Fund Committee in 1974, he roamed the whole country and did research work on "Emerging Patterns of Violence". Even in his translations Tendulkar has selected that which treats life seriously. Tragic vein attracts him as tension of some sort is always the soul of his plays. The complex modern life being full of tensions, Tendulkar wants to throw light upon the different aspects of those tensions. He is true to the realities of our time. In the realistic picture that he presents he omits nothing or adds nothing. In a number of his plays a woman who who is trapped by circumstance and who is a victim of different tensions is presented. Mathura in Shrimant, Malu in Manus, Parvati and Manda in Madhalya Bhinti, Anu in Mi Jinklo, Mangla in Hatti Mulgi, Benare in Shantata, Rama

in Gidhade , Champa and Laxmi in Sakharam ,Baby in Baby , Kamla in Kamla , Jyoti in Kanyadan are some of his impressive women characters. But this does not mean that his plays concentrate only on women characters. Tendulkar is interested in the human relationships between people, their complex minds, their tensions and tragic lives. Tendulkar's characters struggle and strive to live as individuals. His play revolves round a character because it is the individual that fascinates him. He depicts the personal tragedy, the broken dreams, the isolation, the hopeless struggle with the ruthless surroundings or social forces of his characters. Though he shows concern and sympathy for the sufferings of his characters he is conscious of the fact that neither he nor any one else can change the social circumstances.

Tendulkar makes effective use of irony, irony of communication and that of situation. He also makes effective use of the old technique of soliloquies. Tendulkar's dialogues are simple, natural. They gradually expose his characters. He does not use refined dialogues simply for dramatization. His simple dialogue can reach poetic heights when required."(25)

Tendulkar experiments with novel stage technique as in Ghashiram Kotwal or Ashi Pakhare Eti . He also changes the form according to his theme. His novel stage technique is an important contribution to the Marathi stage. He has unconventional approach to drama, he mirrors new perceptions of reality, his themes

are extremely relevant, topical and contemporary. In short Tendulkar is the most able representative and significant playwright of the present day Marathi stage.

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