

Why is this man  
**SO**  
**ANGRY?**



Talking to Vijay Tendulkar is a lot like being blow-dried in a furnace.

Even at 76, Indian theater's loudest and angriest voice hasn't lost its edge.

Joideep Sen faces its wrath

It's unusually, even suspiciously quiet on the other end of the telephone line. There is an eerie silence completely unlike the raucous chaos we expected when we called Vijay Tendulkar in Bombay.

We are accustomed to the city's everyday cacophony of street vendors, gridlocks and the noise of commerce, but when all we get is silence, we imagine Tendulkar is confined to some kind of personal dungeon, removed from the perpetual sounds of a city that once fed and fueled Indian theater's loudest voice.

When his gravelly tones finally make their way through the lines, slightly agitated and vacantly weary, we expect a tirade against long queues sweltering outside government offices, or all too-familiar laments about pedestrian affairs, possibly fresh vegetable prices.

Instead, Tendulkar says: "First of all, you have to understand I'm now running 76. This is obviously the last stretch of my life..."

"No usual questions," we assure him, the history of Marathi theater and four decades of groundbreaking work is now consigned to homework.

"I hope you will understand. I need time for more meaningful work. Not many years left that's why." We quickly wish him luck at the forthcoming Tendulkar Festival, a month-long celebration of the most influential dramatist in India, hosted by the Indo-American Arts Council at New York City in October, and decide to talk about the context of his work and what it would mean to an Indian living in the US.

"I cannot guess it; I really do not know where I stand in the American or world context. I have not been able to evaluate my writing as yet. I know for whom I'm writing, and they know what I write. I will be going to the US with an open mind, and probably at the end of it I will know a little about where I stand." A deep sigh later, he says, "Whatever impression I have, I will convey."

The deliberated 'will' is almost menacing. It is the kind of 'will' that would've had Hamlet floundering for a resolution. For that matter, it would've sent shivers shooting down Shylock's spine. But of all Shakespearean characters, Tendulkar is probably closest to King Lear. Although in this case, the betrayal and mistreatment came from an

unjust and dominating political scenario.

Along with firebrand daughter Priya (she died unexpectedly, midway through a rising career in television and theater) the Tendulkars intrepidly campaigned against oppressive forces: their cause was to liberate the creative classes. And Priya's glaring grimace remains a symbolic reference for every agitated spokesperson of the people, long after she's gone.

It was the same grinding 'will' that geared Vijay Tendulkar into numerous skirmishes with the government. His standpoint, that 'the quality of politics has changed, to become more of a profession, a lucrative profession that has become an obsession for power', sealed his position as a renegade. For good measure, he adds, "It is probably going beyond control."

"They (politicians) care more about their existence, about their growth, about their careers... and then they are dogged by a feeling of utter insecurity, in addition to everything else. In such a situation, who can care about others? I think they care only about their existence."

This is typical Vijay Tendulkar - lashing out at people, organizations and even ideas with the anger that can only come from a man who believes he's been wronged. When Tendulkar steps out onto his terrace, hollering at neighbors and passersby to get inside their homes and pick up a certain article in the newspaper, or tune into a particular discussion, he becomes his anger. At times, it is almost terrifying to watch.

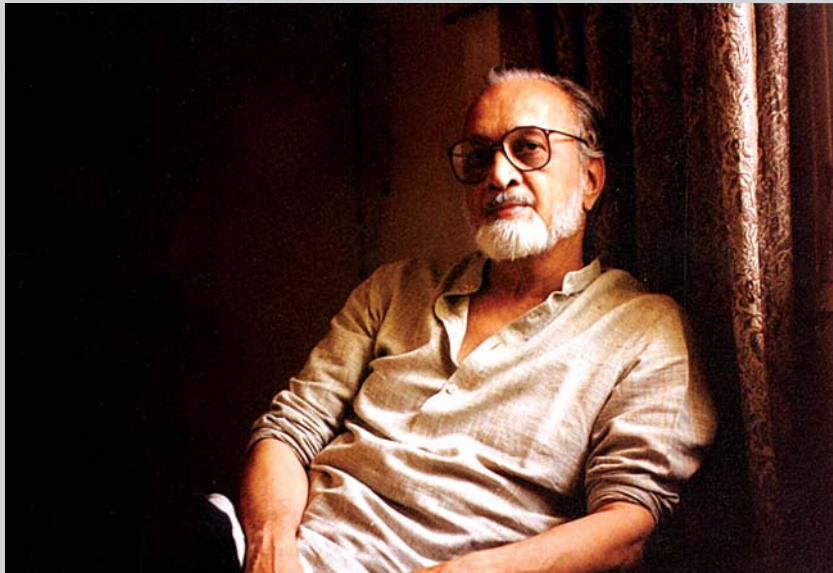
#### WRITING FOR HIMSELF

Life still has some meaning. I'm fortunate that I can still write and apply my mind to what I'm doing. And I will continue to write, but the difference between what I used to write once and what I'm writing now, is that this writing is more or less for my self, necessarily. Meaningful work can possibly mean the proper application of the mind.

Over time one becomes a professional writer, especially in theater, if you are with a theater group, because they need scripts. I was financially dependent on writing more or less all the time. At this stage, writing doesn't happen because of these reasons - it necessarily comes because I feel like writing.

As you can see, there is no more a young man; an angry man, yes – he is angry; at times he is maddeningly angry

I hope you will understand. I need time for more meaningful work. Not many years left that's why.



[THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S PLAYS]

**Ghashiram Kotwal** (Ghashiram the Constable). Performed in Marathi; directed by Jabbar Patel.

**Ghashiram Kotwal** Performed in Hindi translation; directed by Rajinder Nath.

**Sakharam Binder** (Sakharam the Book-Binder). Performed in Marathi; directed by Arvind Deshpande.

**Panchhi Aise Ate Hain** (This Is How the Birds Arrive). Performed in Hindi translation; directed by Rajinder Nath.

**Jat Hi Puchho Sadhu Ki** (Ask a Good Man Only What His Caste Is).

Performed in Hindi translation; directed by Rajinder Nath.

[FILMS WITH SCREENPLAYS BY VIJAY TENDULKAR]

**Manthan** (The Churning, 1977). Film by Shyam Benegal, Hindi, with English subtitles

**Akrosh** (Rage, 1980). Film by Govind Nihalani, Hindi

**Ardha-satya** (The Half-Truth, 1983). Film by Govind Nihalani, Hindi

**Aghat** (The Wound, 1986). Film by Govind Nihalani, Hindi

>> Writing has become more or less a need, like reading – or like talking to one's self, which I do in fact – I talk aloud to my self when I'm alone. Such needs I think are necessary in the phase of life in which I am now.

Otherwise, writing is more or less along the same lines; I try to explore situations, problems, aspects of my reality. It was more or less the same throughout, but then other needs also existed then. Now there is no such need, now I write essentially and totally for myself.

[Tendulkar often refers to a certain 'they' as an opposing entity. These could be television at one moment and the largest media houses at another – 'they' need the circulation, or 'they' are out to loot us, or 'they' just don't care. It's the slant of a voice in a tone that's turned defiant over the years.]

**THEY JUST DON'T CARE**

I'm mad at television, mainly because of the sudden barrages of loud advertisements hitting me in the face – which continue till the thread of thought that I had is lost.

At times I feel that I'm only at the

receiving end – it's not for me; they just don't care. I'm needed because they need a number to get the advertisements. I don't know where this kind of use of technology is leading us.

I hear that it's a consumer's market. But all along, starting from banks to automobile companies to electronic goods sellers – you see the big hoardings, carrying prices like Rs449, something for Rs10, something else for Rs100; and banks call asking me if I need a loan; when I go deeper into it, at the end I find that they are out to loot me. It's a cheating game.

I have been a student of human nature, and I am willing to condone a number of people. Because ultimately, a human space is part of probably a larger crowd of spaces, a variety of spaces – human space is basically no different except that it can probably think, and it can definitely deceive itself, it can fantasize. At times this can lead to dangerous games... this is what is happening, and that worries me and at times it makes me very angry. I wonder where we have come to ultimately.

[It's not family entertainment anymore – today it's more or less Family Drugging.]



Pictures Courtesy: Vijay Tendulkar

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#### DRUGGING THE MASSES

Family entertainment doesn't exist anymore. Today, it's more or less Family Drugging. If this is what's passing off as entertainment, I really wonder what actual drugging would be like.

The way they churn out things, the way they put in advertisements – these are all drugs. What we expect, what we want, what we want to see, is irrelevant.

Entertainment no longer remains in the hands of entertainers – it is now in the hands of certain vested interests, very influential vested interests, and they are using entertainment for their own ends, to earn their fortunes.

It's the same thing in the print media. Ultimately everything is business, everything is commerce – and since they need the numbers to boost their ad revenue, since they need circulation – we are needed, that's all. And they know we don't have any option – even the news is not reliable.

[At some point, Tendulkar instinctively refers to himself in third person and when this happens, it's almost as if he's standing outside himself, being self-critical and at times even self-defeating.]

#### REALITY, CHANGE

As you can see, there is no more a young man; an angry man, yes – he is angry; at times he is maddeningly angry.

(He was called the angry young man of Marathi theater, three decades back) I am angered about my reality, which I don't like at all, barring certain aspects that one cannot isolate.

There are few people making a difference – they were there all the time and will be there, and they will probably be our hope. But the harsh reality is that at the moment they are unable to bring changes, they are unable to make a major impact on the present situation. And that's my worry. Many of them are my friends, and I have tremendous respect for them, but where is their work leading, and is the work making any major kind of impact on society?

I am not worried about normal existence any more. How reality affects me, is in comparison, a minor issue. But how it is affecting the people around me, who are more or less unprotected, because they are at the receiving end of everything all the time – they cannot insist on anything, they're not asked even.

This is not necessarily a personal anger; the anger is more of a general nature, because they call us consumers but they don't care for us. They are so confident that they will push everything into our minds and brains by repeatedly shouting about it. Their confidence is frightening. 📌

#### [AWARDS]

*Maharashtra State Government Award* (1956, 1969, 1973)

*Sangeet Natak Akademi Award* (1971)

*Filmfare Award for best original screenplay* (Akrosh in 1980, and Ardha-satya in 1983)

Lifetime achievement in the literary and performing arts recognized by the Government of India's *Padma Bhushan* (1984)

*Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar* (1990)

*Janasthan Award* (1991)

*Kalidas Samman* (1992)

*Saraswati Samman* (1993)

*Maharashtra Foundation Award* (1998)

*Pandit Mahadev Shastri Joshi Award* (1999)

*Dinanath Mangeshkar Award* (2000)

*Nehru Fellowship* (1973- 74)

*Honorary Doctorate* from Ravindra Bharati University, Calcutta (1992)

*Lifetime Fellowship* from National Academy of the Performing Arts, New Delhi (1998)

*Co-founder and President* of the experimental theater group, Avishkar (Bombay)

*Board of Directors* of the National School of Drama (New Delhi) and

Bharat Bhavan Rangmandal (Bhopal)

*Member of the Advisory Council* of the Shriram Centre of the Arts (New Delhi)

*Trustee* of the National Book Trust (New Delhi)

*President* of the National Centre for Advocacy Studies (Pune)