

Exploration of Female Characters in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays

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Abstract. Feminism is a political, economic or cultural movement which started in 1960s which aims at equal rights for women. Feminist activists started this movement for women's legal rights such as property rights, voting rights etc. There are some literary works which deal with feminism. Vijay Tendulkar is one such noticeable Marathi playwright who has taken up the cause of woman in his plays. He is not only a playwright but also screenplay writer, essayist, journalist and social commentator. His works mostly revolve around the lives of women and their problems. His prominent works where he has dealt with woman's cause are *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Kamala*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Kanyadaan*, *The Vultures* etc. He tries to show all methods of politics to gain power and it goes on the way of treachery, sexuality, immorality, violence and religion in his plays. *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Kamala* which made him a popular playwright are experiments of an extreme and deeper desire to act and not just a matter of superficial ideas of new things. A type of new independence and acquittal are seen in these plays. The phrase "sex and violence" is very loosely attributed to, in the discussion of these plays.

Keywords : Foreground; patriarchy; pawn; subjugate; plight; aggression; trample.

Feminism is a political, economic or cultural movement which started in 1960s which aims at equal rights for women. Feminist activists started this movement for women's legal rights such as property rights, voting rights etc. There are some literary works which dealt with feminism. These works include *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* by Bell Hooks, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* by Lucille Clifton etc.

In the society women are traditionally considered as inferior to men in body and mind both. According to the society women are made for household purpose. They are not allowed to engage themselves in the outside work. They are trapped in their house among their people. Women have to face domestic violence. In 1946 UN Commission established equal political rights, economic and educational opportunities for women throughout the world.

Many centuries and decades have passed and women are still suffering on account of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, degradation, aggression and

humiliation. In Indian constitution women are considered as legal citizens and they have been given same position as men have. But patriarchy did not accept them as they want to maintain their dominance and supremacy over women. Women have to suffer with poor health and they even have to work in fields and also engage themselves in domestic work. They have deliberately been kept as illiterate. Notion of Indian society about women is that they are born to serve their father, brother and husband throughout their life. They are even abused on daily basis. Several Indian writers have represented the pathetic lives of woman. Vijay Tendulkar is one such noticeable Marathi playwright who has taken up the cause of woman in his plays. He is not only a playwright but also screenplay writer, essayist, journalist and social commentator. His works mostly revolve around the lives of women and their problems. His prominent works where he has dealt with woman's cause are *Silence!* *The Court is in Session*, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Kamala*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Kanyadaan*, *The Vultures*. (Tendulkar 2) We can see in his plays how women are used for power and how they are dominated by men. The paper will first capture the image of a woman in Indian society through his plays. In most of his plays, women are at the centre. His female characters have to face a loss of identity, power etc. because of male characters. Female characters are always in pitiable condition because they are dominated by patriarchy. Tendulkar's plays are like glass in which we can see the image of inner and outer world. In some of his plays, evil practices of human life like violence and cruelty are shown. Vijay Tendulkar has witnessed or observed various aspects of life and scrutinized them. His plays raise questions and do not give answers. It is left for the audiences/readers to make their own changes.

In the play *Ghasiram Kotwal*, Vijay Tendulkar tries to show all methods of politics to gain power and it goes on the way of treachery, sexuality, immorality, violence and religion. In the play, Ghasiram is searching for his identity in the world of power. It's actually a common man's search for identity. In the modern society everyone is running behind the power to be most powerful in the world. Everyone wants to be superior and to rule over others and for power everyone is doing violence and exploiting others. If we go back to the history of any empire and Hindu Scriptures like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, all these exhibit politics power. In *The Ramayana*, Kaikayi and Manthara played the game of power. In *The Mahabharata*, Shakuni and Duryodhan played the mind game for power. Draupadi is insulted in front of everyone. In most of the cases women are used and abused for power.

Ghasiram sacrifices his daughter, Gauri to Nana to become Kotwal of Poona. To take revenge from the Brahmins of Poona, Ghasiram thought to become Kotwal of Poona. After becoming Kotwal of Poona, he will gain power to exploit people of Poona. He wants to take revenge because the Brahmins of Poona discarded him as he is from Kanauj. They don't consider him Brahmin as he is considered an

outsider. Ghasiram somehow, comes closer to Nana. Once Nana appeared in kirtan and saw Gauri and he became passionate for her.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala* is a naturalistic play. Its story is taken from a real life incident—the Indian Express exposure by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference. Ashwin Sarin, a journalist, investigated into flesh trade in Madhya Pradesh and purchased a girl, Kamala for Rs.2300 to establish the trafficking of girls in Shivpuri village. Vijay Tendulkar scripted the play by name *Kamala* totally based on the Indian Express revelation and staged it for 150 times in 32 cities and in seven languages. The play *Kamala* is about the state of women, who are bartered as an object. Jaisingh Jadhav, a young and dynamic journalist purchased Kamala for Rs250 from Lohardaga Bazar in Bihar and now in Jharkhand flesh market. He wants to expose the racket of selling-women as a slave. Jaisingh's wife fails to appreciate him in doing this. Sarita, wife of Jaisingh is slave in the hands of her husband; she performs all her household works. Jaisingh wants to take Kamala to the press conference to prove his point. But with great surprise, Kamala revealed the attitude of Jaisingh towards his wife, Sarita. Sarita took courage to put forward strong resistance against male domination and proved her capability.

In the play *Sakharam Binder*, Laxmi, one of the major characters of the play is portrayed as an ideal woman like Savitri in the mythological story. Her husband has beaten her because of which she is not able to conceive a child by him. Afterwards, Sakharam is her husband for her. She tries her best to fulfil his every need in spite of the fact that he even fails to understand her expectations and exploits her physically as well as psychologically.

Sakharam Binder, Ghasiram Kotwal and Silence! The Court is in Session made Tendulkar a popular playwright. A type of new independence and acquittal are seen in these plays. The phrase “sex and violence” is very loosely attributed to, in the discussion of these plays. None of these themes of sex and violence are superficial as they form an important part of the content of the plays. The theme of violence permeates quite flagrant in most of his plays. Tendulkar is influenced by Artuad's idea of relating the theme of anguish to the theme of violence.

In most of his plays Tendulkar projects women as victims. The plays highlight the gender stereotyping that is forced upon them. The roles allotted to women in the patriarchal set up are purely domestic – daughter, wife and mother. From birth the girl-child is subjected to the negative reinforcement of her vulnerability to rape and assault. As a girl she is under the protection of her father/brother; after marriage her husband is her lord and master and in old age her son becomes her protector. As part of the gendered difference that is emphasised from childhood, the girl is taught to believe in the importance of ‘family values’- values which are presumed to be her responsibility and not the male's.

In *Kamala*, Jaisingh expects Sarita to submit to his desire for sex whether she wants it or not. While Sakharam beats up Champa when she refuses to have sex with him, the educated and socially committed Jaisingh calls Sarita 'bitch'. Yet Sarita meekly accepts her subordinate position in the house and willingly follows every instruction to the last detail.

In the post-Independent Indian theatre, Vijay Tendulkar has brought a wide change in the world of theatre as he frustrated the conservative audience by projecting the harsh realities of life, relationship and existence. Trying to present the modern society with its real value, quandary, challenges, difficulties and complexities in true colours, his characters are drawn on the canvas of originality without any attempt at moralizing. He has discussed and touched every side of life, not only the happy, jovial but also human weakness, follies and idiosyncrasies.

While projecting the women characters who play important roles, as important as men, Tendulkar shows them as exploited, oppressed and humiliated in almost all his plays. Even education doesn't bring any considerable change in their life. It produces sophisticated slaves like Sarita or the social victim, Leela Benare. Sarita in *Kamala*, Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session* and Jyoti in *Kanyadaan* are the characters who are educated, sophisticated and they occupy the focus of the play in their revolt against the outdated conventional moral values.

Silence! The Court is in Session is "a play within a play" or a play in the form of rehearsal. The play is social satire with the tragedy of an individual victimised by the society. It deals with the problem of unmarried motherhood. The action of the play takes place with Leela Benare, a female protagonist, who stands as a rebel against the established values of the essentially orthodox society. Tendulkar treats the character of Benare with great sympathy and desires to help and understand her while projecting her against the selfish, hypocritical, and brutally ambitious male dominated society.

Benare breaks her silence in Act III and shares with the audience, with her soliloquy. Benare's soliloquy allows the audience to explore her situation from different viewpoints. If we see, literally and metaphorically, the society in which she lives does not hear her. Her voice falls on deaf ears and frozen hearts and brains. She is accused of doing a crime and she is informed that the child in her womb will be destroyed. Benare's last image on the stage is that of a woman who struggles to move, but cannot. The play ends here with a song of a very sad sparrow whose established world has been damaged by predators.

Vijay Tendulkar's plays foreground the plight of female characters as these characters are suppressed and subjugated by the patriarchal system prevalent in our society. All these female characters – Gauri, Laxmi, Champa, Leela Benare and Kamala have one feature in common i.e. they all suffer because of the patriarchy.

In all the four plays of Vijay Tendulkar women become mere pawns in the hands of their male counterparts. Vijay Tendulkar has portrayed biases against women in his plays. Women in the society are subjugated and suppressed at the hands of males and their ideological biases that women have to suffer. The family, education system, marriage system etc. become the apparatus in the hands of men to dominate women. They are exploited in the so called civilized society by their husbands and men and outside by their masters. The plays of Vijay Tendulkar reflect contemporary Indian society, its problems, and its challenges. Most of them depict the issue of the white-collar and middle-class people.

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Work Cited

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