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## MALE CHAUVINISM IN TRANSLATED SELECT WORKS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

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### ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is a well-known playwright in contemporary Indian Theatre along with Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar. This study aims to study women characters against a hostile patriarchal society set-up with special reference to the famous Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar's works. Tendulkar in his most of the works explores the socio-political matrix of Indian subjectivity of Indian society.

A careful perusal of his major plays reveals that all human relations are power relationships where one uses force, words gestures or other means to hurt, humiliate or subjugate the vulnerable resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or verbal abuse. Key Words - position of women, patriarchy.

### 1. Introduction

The Indian society in ancient days reviewed women as role bound possessions whose sacrifices preserved the sanctity and well-being of the family. The roles allotted to women in the patriarchal set-up are purely domestic - daughter, wife, and mother. Often her role is sentimentalized and idealized but she is, almost everywhere, largely ignored as a human being, being denied of her individual distinctive visibility. Women as Shakuntala or Sita are passive objects bearing the brunt of male injustice but remained entrenched within the codes of patriarchy. This picture of Indian women as meek, submissive, patient who subordinated their will and desires to those of the male unselfishly and never questioning to the patriarchal moral codes dominated the literary scenario. Anita Desai can be unmistakably called one of the most prominent luminaries of the present day fiction. She applies these strategies widely to her essays, and *Voices in the City* signifies a bright example is the imaginary transition of Indian women from a deeply enrooted tradition to fast-changing modernity: Monisha closes up in her own world, while Amla, so cheerful and positive about the change at the beginning, sinks into the depression after her personal relationship failed. Confusion and vulnerability follow these women who decided to blend in with the modern world which does not want to accept them, the

world where rapid industrial development makes people harsh, selfish, and cruel. The characters seem to find it difficult to understand how their own country can be so different. The Himalayan village they come from and the city of Calcutta present two lives of one soul. In her essay Anita Desai tries to investigate as well as broaden the perception of human beings (particularly, females), their self-understanding and psyche.

## **2. Change in nature**

The indication of change creeps in with the emergence of women novelist like Mahashweta Devi in her short story Rudaali, we find exploring the Indian version of feminism a story of a woman named Shanichari, who was abandoned by her mother after her father's death which does not seriously challenge the male order yet tries to carve out a distinctive identity. However, the picture of the women in the post-independent India has changed radically. In the field of drama this emergence is first noticed in Marathi theatre in 1950s. Tara Varanese's Kaksha portrays the emergence of the New Indian Women who abandon the stereotypical icon of femininity and express themselves as dissenters questioning the patriarchal moral codes and demanding liberation from patriarchal oppression. The same attitude is seen in Vijay Tendulkar. The first major play of Vijay Tendulkar, Srimant (The Rich), was written in 1955. Since then up to 1983, up to Kanyadan, he has written many significant, controversial and much debated plays which have brought to the fore the Women's Question, her dumb agony, her harassment and helplessness. The accusing figure of Benare at the males in society in Silence! The court is in Session, Sarita's emancipated vision about the actual position of a wife in a household and her voice against the dominance and oppression of the house in Kamala, the strong challenge to manhood in the form of Champa in Sakharam Binder—all these varied facets of women characters appear in Tendulkar. Deviance from the Code: case of Benare Silence!

## **3. Law as an instrument**

The Court is in Session is the most eloquent in depicting a woman's claiming her visibility. Leela Benare is young, intelligent, educated and economically independent. She boldly asserts her individuality, Miss Benare. "my life is my own...my will is my own...i'll do what I like with myself and my life! I'll decide..."(p-58) But ironically it is not she but the 'system' that ultimately decides her fate. It is significant that among the other member of the theatre group she alone can claim success in her professional field (others are proved failure in their jobs); but that she is a successful teacher never accounts for to judge her as her private sexual behavior accounts for. Female sexuality is a taboo and sexual independence of women is regarded dangerous and destabilizing. In fact, the icon of womanhood is built round the virtues of sexual fidelity and sacrifice.

It is noticeable that she does not challenge male authority but seeks satisfaction in it ("...a father to call his own...") but it is also a fact that Tendulkar is writing of a woman of fundamentally orthodox middle class of mid 20th century. It would be to some extent unreliable in the existing social circumstances had Tendulkar allowed Benare to decide something as single motherhood. It is easy to understand that society does not allow her to be a mother. It sees her

love child as a dangerous force threatening to pull apart the very fabric of the tradition Kashikar and Sukhatmes are so fanatically protecting. So Kashikar gets angry with Benare, Kashikar. A sinful canker on the body of society... (P112) And at the news of the dismissal of Benare from her school, Sukhatme like a sadist gets pleasure, Sukhatme .Tit for tat! As you sow, so shall you reap... (P-113) Thus, male dominated society always wishes to suppress the visibility of a woman as an individual identity and also cherishes viewing her on trial. Interestingly, despite the fact that the society indicts Benare for immorality, it is silent about the role played by Damle .Simon de Beavoir calls this the “erotic fate” of the woman in her celebrated *The Second Sex*. Therefore the punishment falls on Benare for an act which is accomplished by two.

#### **4. Language is indicative too**

The sentence follows as such, Kashikar. No memento of your sin should remain for future generations...the child in your womb shall be destroyed. (P-119) Thus, “the accusation brought against her at the beginning of the trial, that of infanticide, turns into the verdict at the conclusion” and “this very reversal in the attitude of the ‘authorities’ expresses the basic hypocrisy and double standards on which our society is founded.”<sup>2</sup> “Na striswatantryamarhati” is the attitude of society towards woman. Benare is not fitting in it. She from the very beginning is very much active, full of life. We find her taking an active part in wooing for marriage and that too for mercenary reasons. Most importantly her effort to enjoyment and contentment out of life is not going with the typical image of reticent, bashful Indian woman and thus claims attention. But as we see, her claiming of visibility is ignored by society represented by characters like Kashikar and Sukhatme and she is silenced metaphorically like that of Stanley in *The Birthday Party* by the State Apparatus. She is accused, betrayed and insulted. The patriarchy that presented woman as ‘shakti’ or an archetype of power, the spring well of creativity when threatened by female sexuality, responds by counterattacking with a rare ruthlessness. And so the lines reverberate in the mind of the audience, “And the wound that’s born to bleed Bleeds on forever, faithfully. There is a battle sometimes, where Defeat is destined as the end. Some experiences are meant No taste, then just to waste and spend...”<sup>4</sup> (p63) Nilanjan Chatterjee puts Benare’s situation in following words, “Benare is therefore a victim of a revengeful and myopic society that does not tolerate deviance from its mores...the system does not tolerate her efforts to be an individual. She does not commit any sin by aspiring not to be conventional. Rather convention is at fault for dogmatically following crusty rules and for giving tradition a primacy over life and its desires”<sup>5</sup>

#### **6. Woman’s protest**

There are ample references of her effort to come to forefront but repeatedly her effort is suppressed by her husband .Mrs. Kashikar does not take such suppression of her mind and spirit quietly. She mutters angrily. One suspects that, had she had the economic power that Benare has, she might have protested more actively. However, the way things are, there is no choice for her but to be a participant in the patriarchal system. From within their Imposed Invisibility: Kamala and Sarita, In Tendulkar’s *Kamala* also, the theme of claiming visibility by women in society is too much evident. It rises to the surface through the discussion of Jaising and his mercenary

journalism, seemingly the focal point of the play. Kamala is bought by Jaising, the flamboyant investigative journalist of English daily from Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar to enhance the publicity of his newspaper and in turn his own name. Kamala is actually used by Jaising in the way a capitalist society uses a commodity for profit. That Kamala is commodified is very much palpable in Jaising's speech: Jaising. '...I bought her dirt cheap.'(P-14) Even her basic human need is denied for the sake of materialistic gain. Sleep is denied to her lest it could bring any change to the image suitable for the presentation of such 'piece'. Jaising expects Kamala to appear at the press conference in her soiled and torn cloths to suit his sense of dramatic.

Kamala in the press conference arranged by Jaising presents herself and narrates herself during the interaction with other journalists. It is Kamala's claiming visibility but according to the pattern set and desired by Jaising. It is thus the male version of women's claiming which in turn accentuates the visibility of Jaising as an able journalist. So far his interest remains, Kamala is paid attention, but after that she must leave the scenario and gets invisible. Jaising. "...she must go there tomorrow. Once today's press conference is over, she has no business. It's all been arranged."(P-26) So, the constructed nature of Kamala's becoming visible is explicit. Patriarchy for their own sake keeps women invisible and only brings them in visibility when they themselves need to cash on it. For example Jaising's wife Sarita is all the time when the play opens is seen to be a 'husband's wife' doing daily drudgery and carrying out her husband's orders. She is also used by Jaising but she can't understand it at first. Jain first makes this point visible, but not very much reaching to Sarita's understanding as much appealing for the intellect of the audience/reader. Jai. "Hai, Bhabhiji, I mean, an English 'hi' to him, and a Marathi 'hai'\*to you. This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He's made a drudge out of a horse-riding independent girl from a princely house. Hai, hai! [theatrically, to Jaising]Shame on you! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes slave of wife!"(P-17) Sarita is an educated 'slave'. Basically there's no essential difference between Kamala and Sarita, between an auction of an illiterate rural woman and the marriage transaction of an educated urban woman. Infact the language proves so many things. The use of 'must' is noticeable, Jaising. "You must tell me. I must know. Don't I have the right to have my wife when I feel like it?"(P52) In the mutual relationship of love a husband is asserting his right as a husband whereas his wife's right as a human being (her will to have or not have sex) is not even thought of. Actually in our patriarchal social set-up, women are taken for granted to have no other opinion than their male counterpart. That they may have any opinion and more importantly that theirs may clash with them is a thing which makes them surprised and not happy. Jaising. You don't want to come? Why? Sarita. That's my will. Jaising. Your will? (P-44) The most significant and climactic scene is the conversation between Kamala and Sarita. It is through this conversation that Sarita comes to a new vision. Now she realizes, because of an innocent question asked by a scared, illiterate village woman Kamala, "How much did he buy you for?"(P-34) how close their respective positions in society are underneath the surface difference of class

### **7. Society's approval of illtreatment of women**

‘The political Economy’ of Sex. Kakasaheb, though promises to be different, ultimately he also is not ready to welcome Sarita’s now emancipated vision. I would like to cite Vikram Gokhale’s (the actor who played Jadhav in Kamala) “Why does the old-question concerning Kakasaheb man who argues against exploitative journalism, not argue equally vehemently against exploitative husbands?”<sup>7</sup> When Sarita asks for a change of the ‘system’, Kakasaheb finds no option but to plead for power of understanding from Sarita when actually (and ironically) he seeks the blinding of it because power of understanding leads Sarita to this vision.

In the case of his women characters; Tendulkar seems to capitulate before the Establishment and its reactionary value system. One wonders if it is because the dramatist himself turns his back on the vital relationship between the value system and the social structure which strategically inhibits and restricts the full development of a woman’s personality. This is a somewhat frightening thought in as much as it forecloses the very possibility of amelioration. “Tendulkar has of course put before the world the frightening truth about life but what disturbs me is the signal that his plays send out: they seem to say that there is no escape from this frightening reality”<sup>8</sup>.

However, one possibility is that this capitulation and negation is the inevitable consequence of the middle class social context within which Tendulkar as a dramatist and his dramas are essentially rooted. Thus, the suggestion is there but not the fulfillment. Claiming visibility is obviously there but they are not sanctioned, often denied and largely ignored.

### **Conclusion**

Vijay Tendulkar, a controversial modern playwright, has galvanized Indian theatre with his provocative explorations of socio-psychological realities of human life fraught with conflicts and violence. He broke from the habitual sentimental, melodramatic and narrow drawing-room themes and self-regarding complacency that dominated the mainstream stage and objectively explored and exposed human nature in all its diversity and depths. Physical violence perpetrated against the body of the victim in brutal forms is exemplified by the way Sakharam beats his women like Laxmi and strangles Champa to death in Sakharam Binder.

Abundance of abusive language in *The Vultures* has scandalized Tendulkar’s audience not only for their vulgarity and obscenity but also for the venom of hatred and violence. Tendulkar also draws attention to psychological factors, revealing how violent childhood experiences make Sakharam grow into a violent individual. The system of patriarchy, the repressive social gender norms and institutionalized system of domination and control over woman by man are important factors responsible for violence prevalent against women.

His plays also provide us with the pleasure that comes from the discovery of knowledge about things which lie buried in the dark recesses of our minds. Even the brutal scenes of bestiality, when seen from an aesthetic distance evoke in us a reaction, yielding pleasure of thought, reflection and even rejection of the immoral.

Tendulkar’s aesthetics of violence, thus, suggests that what makes him a successful playwright is his kaleidoscopic range, keen sense of observation and clinical understanding in

depicting different forms of violence, human instincts and motives and varying responses to the complex situations in a graphic and powerful way, thereby, imparting the element of universality to his art As the dominating male characters adopt the conventional middle-class gender terms, they deprive the female characters of any meaningful textual role outside parallel gender stereotypes, which dictate that the chaste but violated female move toward self-sacrificing, punitive, masochistic degradation

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