

Contrasting concepts of womanhood in Vijay Tendulkar's Selected plays

Depiction of contrasting concepts about womanhood in Vijay Tendulkar's
Silence! The Court is in Session, Sakharam Binder and Kamala.

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Abstract

The issues of patriarchal system and gender stereotypes in Indian culture are widely discussed topics. Many Indian writers, through their writings addressed these issues from different perspectives. Vijay Tendulkar is a notable playwright; his plays are critique of patriarchal values and institutions and shows how the judicial system operates as an instrument in silencing women's voice. Through his plays Tendulkar not only illustrates how the patriarchal society victimized and exploited women, but also how the Indian women blindly hold these patriarchal values and give immense importance to practise it. Tendulkar's plays depict how the female society act as a barrier for the concepts of women empowerment by sticking into the outdated customs and blaming the women who try to make changes in this male domination. The article analyses how Tendulkar in his plays demonstrates the two sides of Indian culture through the female characters, in which one holds the patriarchal social values and remain as orthodox and the other struggles to break such customs to establish a progressive society.

Keywords : Patriarchy, Victimization, Objectification, Feminism, Repression

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar was a leading Indian playwright, movie and television writer, essayist and social commentator. He is best known for his plays, *Silence! The Court is in Session, Ghashiram Kotwal and Sakharam Binder*. The most acclaimed figure in modern Indian drama, Vijay Tendulkar, through his plays rebelled against the anti-progressive attitude of contemporary Indian society. He tried to challenge the ideas of orthodox and patriarchal setup that existed in each layers of Indian Culture. Through his plays Tendulkar demonstrates how society act as an obstacle for women's freedom and deprives their human rights and how they were exploited and victimized in our society. He delineates the taboo themes of deviant sexuality, violence in family life and the rude treatment of women in traditional society. Tendulkar through his plays explored the themes of violence in domestic, sexual and political field. Most of his plays derived inspiration from the harsh realities of real-life incidents and

social upheavals. He is a most influential writer in the modern Indian drama. His plays also focused suffering and pangs of women in an orthodox patriarchal society. His plays, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Kamala* and *Sakharam Binder*, clearly depicts the true picture of several female characters who got tortured and exploited.

Through his play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar very enthusiastically rebel against the established values of a fundamental orthodox society. The play is in three acts. A group of amateur actors comes to a rural village in Mumbai to stage a play concerning the trial of American President Johnson for producing nuclear weapons. The main plot of the play centres around the central character Miss Leela Benare, a lively spinster school teacher in her thirties. There are eight players in the troupe who belonged to different professional background. The malicious nature of members of the group reflects through their activities and their spiteful attitude towards the school teacher. They planned a conspiracy against her. In the name of a mock trial, they expose her personal life. That incident reveals the basic hypocrisy and double standards that exist in our society. A mock charge of infanticide is levelled against her by others. All of a sudden, the mock play become an accusatory game when it springs up from the play that, Miss Leela Benare is carrying an out of wedlock child and maintained an illicit relationship with a married man, professor Damle. The members of the group purposefully act against her in order to make believe her that she is accused in front of the society. Mrs Kashikar, is envious to her as an independent working woman who is not accountable to a husband like Kashikar. She derives a secret pleasure by joining the company of others in order to torturing Leela. Benare is a victim of love, everyone around her including her own people and lovers has betrayed her. She had earlier been betrayed by her on maternal uncle in love and attempted suicide when he cheats her. The professor Damle, whose intellect she worships but he has also been after her body. He obviously can't marry her since he is already a married man and has five children. Benare's deep respect and love towards him made her reluctant from aborting his child even though the mock court orders her to do so. When the other members of the group blatantly accusing her by charging different crimes, Miss Benare strongly defence their arguments and says that her personal life is her own. She is devoted to her profession and pay justice to her works. She questions, in that case, why the authority should dismiss her from the job. The play very clearly depicts the double standard of morality in society. Here, Professor Damle is also an accused one but he remained free from those accusation and Leela stand alone as the culprit.

The play *Sakharam Binder* grow around the central character Sakharam, a book Binder. Though a Brahmin, he is against the general idea of a member of high caste. He considered the moral values and codes of the society as outdated and enjoyed the life in his own way. The play depicts the theme of male domination in our society and portrays how it leads to objectification of women. Sakharam, give food and shelter to the abandoned wives and in turn he demands their body for sexual gratification. Tendulkar presented two caste off wives Laxmi and Champa, their relationship with Sakharam represented in a contrasting way. Laxmi is presented as religious women who is devoted to the man who gave shelter to her, at the same time she gave immense importance to the concepts like institution of marriage, husband and all the moral codes. Champa on the other hand was a revengeful woman. She had intense hatred against her husband and blamed him for her exploitation. She walks through so much sufferings and miseries in her life, so it makes Champa a different character who denies all the social norms that make her life pathetic. At the same time, she is not depicted as a truthful or devoted woman. She is exploited by everyone. We can see the domination of the character Champa over others in several parts of the play, but that

domination is only by her sensual beauty and sexuality. In the end Champa was killed by Sakharam and she became a scape goat of Sakharam's intense desire of sex. The play depicts the pitiable condition of Indian women in society. Here, Sakharam was a parasite who depended heavily on the social evil of cast-off wives. Sakharam has two different sides, Sakharam of Laxmi is different from Sakharam of Champa. Sakharam's brutal and violent attitude towards Laxmi is animalistic, but he became a meek lamb in the hands of Champa. Through the character Sakharam, Tendulkar delves into the illustration of lust as well as violence in human beings.

Kamala is a realistic play by Vijay Tendulkar. It is inspired by real life incident in the Indian Express, a journalist who actually bought a girl from the rural flash market and presented her at a Press Conference. The play is in two acts. The main plot of the play centres around the theme of flesh trade and flesh market. It throws light on a young journalist who yearns for being successful in his profession. Here also Tendulkar exposes the characteristic sufferings of the Indian Woman who have made to suffer by the selfish hypocritical man. Jaisingh Jadav, a self-seeking journalist actually treats the woman (Kamala), whom he purchased from the market as an object that can buy him promotion in job and reputation in profession. He was not concerned about her feelings or its consequences. The real problem in the play arises when, the characters Kamala and Jaisingh's wife Saritha juxtaposed in the play. Saritha came to understand that there is hardly any difference between the two. Jaisingh presents Kamala in the press conference in her rags to make the news more sensational. Kamala is an ignorant, illiterate woman and she is totally unaware about what is happening around her. Saritha later came to realize her actual position in their life, as an object for sexual satisfaction and social status for Jaisingh. The play delineates the sordid condition of women who got trapped in a male dominated society.

In these three plays, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Kamala*, Tendulkar very clever fully represent two female characters that contradict in one way or other. Through these two opposing characters in each play, Tendulkar portray the two sides of our culture. One side represents the progressive and feministic side who tried to come out from the shackles of repression and the other portrays the orthodox and patriarchal culture and also the people who tightly hold the outdated values and customs. In the play, *Silence! The Court is in Session* the central character is Leela Benare and here the playwright presents another female character who is not less important one, that is Mrs Kashikar. Leela is represented as a vivacious and lovely young woman who leads her life in her own choice. She is independent beloved teacher, who is very committed in her job. In the play she is stand among all the other mediocre, who are suppressed characters who didn't have their own say in their life. They felt jealous to her as a result of the frustrations and suffocation they faced in their professional as well family life. From the very beginning itself, it is clear that Benare is upset, and with her initial conversation with the characters Samant, we can understand she is accused of something and is under pressure. In the game of mock trial, her personal life is laid bare by her colleagues. They dissect her personal problems and analyse it in a very rude way. They accused her for being an unwed mother and presented her as shameful being in the society. Even though it began as a mock trial, she came to understand that it has been carry too far becoming more personal. She tried to escape from that vulnerable situation but she got trapped there and become a prey for them. The suffocation and frustration of her colleagues leads them to derive a sadistic pleasure by torturing Leela by accusing her with illicit relationship. Leela is in fact a strong rebel for all the other characters in the play in profession as well as in personal life. She is a teacher, respected and loved by everyone, at the

same time she is a strong woman who live and stand in her on feet. She didn't get married or lived under the shelter of a man. Tendulkar in this play represent these two contradictory characters in which one lives her life by confirming to the society's norms and codes and the other in her own ways and rules. Mrs Kashikar is exact opposite character from Leela Benare that is clearly portrayed in each section of the play. At first, Leela Benare is addressed as Miss Benare as well as teacher by others on the other hand Mrs Kashikar doesn't assume any such designation. She is a typical Indian married woman who is known in the designation of her husband as Mrs Kashikar. Her name is not mentioned in anywhere at any time in the Play. She didn't have any job and when then Benare lived by doing a good job, Mrs Kashikar felt jealous to her for being an independent woman. Benare has education and she has her voice and way of life but Mrs Kashikar is only a puppet in the hand of her husband and she plays and speaks according to the whims of her husband.

Mrs Kashikar also join with other male characters in the play for accusing and torturing Benare. The sole reason behind this activity is her frustration and failure in her personal family life. She doesn't have any job and at the same time her inability to produce any children is also a torment in Indian society. She is a woman with incapability and dependent thinking. She blindly follows patriarchal codes and values without bothering about its negative consequences. This patriarchal society also blames Mrs Kashikar for her failure to produce a child. Every human being wishes to be independent in their life, when that independence is unavailable or hindered, it makes jealous in them when others enjoy that independence and freedom. This is the only reason for Mrs Kashikar for talking against Leela Benare. Tendulkar satirizes the petty arrogance and jealousy of all those involved in mock trial. They derive sadistic pleasure by torturing Miss Benare and talking the cliché dialogues about marriage, women's independence, motherhood and the importance of being a good woman in traditional society in the light of the serious charge levelled against her. Mrs Kashikar comes across an orthodox traditional bound woman who drives indirect pleasure out of Miss Benare's sufferings by her accusation of infanticide at the mock trial. In all these times she acts as a foil to Mrs Benare. Mrs Kashikar's jealous towards that independent woman makes her to join others in denigrating and persecuting her who refuses to confirm to the prevailing norms of society. She is a submissive wife of Kashikar and he treats her as a subordinate one, for he is always snapping at her and snubbing her.

In Sakharam Binder the female characters Laxmi and Champa are also two different entities. Lakshmi is a pious as well as a shrewd woman. Champa is more strong character who defeats the superior male characters in the play with her sensual beauty and voluptuous body. Both these women came from different family background and culture. Laxmi was the daughter of a 'Munsif'. She is religious and submissive woman. She married a man and he abandoned her when she was failed to deliver a baby. Laxmi is a meek and tender woman who inherits all the essential qualities of a typical woman. She was picked up by Sakharam from a 'dharmashala'. He offers food and shelter for Laxmi and demands her body. Laxmi is a cultured and well-mannered woman, so Sakharam failed in front of her spiritual strength, even though he physically mauled her. The life of Laxmi in Sakharam's house is pathetic. She is regularly beaten by Sakharam. But at the same time, she pays much respect for the man who gave her shelter. Laxmi fight against all the odds in her life with her spiritual strength. She wore a 'mangalsutra' on her neck of Sakharam's name. An Indian woman submits her virginity and chastity only to the man whom she marries. She never indulges in sexual pleasure with any other man. At the same time, she observes pooja as well as fast. She loves to be in company of nature and animals. One day Sakharam noticed, Laxmi is talking

with an ant and laughed uncontrollably. All these behaviour of Laxmi irritated Sakharam and he brutally punishes her for all her doings. Sakharam shows a tyrannical behaviour towards Laxmi and obtained sadistic pleasure by giving physical pain for her. He forced her to laugh in her anguish and agony. She got her feet burned with coals and he was compelled to laugh loudly while she had acute pain. Sakharam is heartless and indifferent to Laxmi. Laxmi's ardent devotion to god and its severity stop Sakharam's friend Dawood to performing 'aarathi' in their religious festival. Sakharam was heavily enraged by Laxmi's act and he terribly torture her for it. In that way Sakharam always behaved in a very rude way to Laxmi but she forgives it and remained faithful to him in the entire play. She remained truthful to her principle of life and never deviated from the path of honesty. Here, Tendulkar portray Laxmi as an embodiment of the Indian woman's womanhood.

The character Champa in the play is represented as a real woman. She had all the human frailties and weakness. She plays an important character in the play and act as a foil to Laxmi in several ways. She was married to a Fouzdar named Shinde. She came to Sakharam's house when her husband was sacked from job. Unlike Laxmi she didn't know any household works or even to make a tea. In Sakharam's house, she didn't follow any rules that is framed by him. She would not bound to any rules in her life. Champa possess an alluring body and she enslaved Sakharam with her body and sexuality. Later, both Sakharam and his friend Dawood were willing to do anything for her. Champa was an aggressive, drunkard and sexy woman who is against the so-called embodiments of typical woman in a traditional society. Sakharam's rules and regulations blown in the air after the presence of Champa. Her body and vitality made him blind and he wanted to possess her alluring body. An inner conflict started to arise in Sakharam's mind and feel jealous to Dawood when she praised him. He was too much thrilled to enjoy her and he became almost insane and failed to control his senses before her beauty. He became obsessed in her body and became less concerned about his job. Champa maintained a series of sex relationship with different men. She got married to police, Shinde in her teenage and he exploited her and derived maximum sexual satiation from her by brutally torturing her body. When he visited Sakharam's house to meet Champa he was beaten brutally by her. She dislikes the presence of her husband in Sakharam's house. Laxmi was religious and God-fearing woman and she is devoted to Sakharam and also to the husband who left her. But Champa didn't maintain any commitment or faith in any relationship. When Laxmi observe fast and doing Pooja in Dussehra festival Champa took wine on that pious day. She believed neither in God nor in vices. she believed that life of senses had more significances than the world of spirituality. She became revengeful towards Laxmi for her doings against her and she made a sinister plan to throw Laxmi away from Sakharam's house. She became successful in her dirty plan buy challenging his vigour and vitality. Later, from Laxmi Sakharam came to realise that Champa is unfaithful and she is maintaining a relationship with Dawood in the absence of Sakharam. That unbearable truth made Sakharam mad and in that frustration, he killed Champa. We can see e another Sakharam in Champa. In his life Sakharam give shelter to a dozen of cast-of wives and had sexual relationship with them. He also didn't give any generosity honesty or commitment in a relationship. Here Champa is also walking through the same path of Sakharam. She has also maintained relationship with several men and she is exploited by them. She is no more an imaginary character and is against the general concept of traditional Indian women. Tendulkar presents these two female characters as exact opposites. Lakshmi gave so much importance for religion and religious beliefs on the other hand Champa didn't believe in any external forces. By standing in the mid of all such sufferings and miseries she

tried a lot to preserve her honesty and faithfulness. Champa, as a real human being live her life by enjoying it on every second. She even didn't bother about its consequences; she acts upon her own choice. But in the end Tendulkar portray the pathetic plight of such women in our society. She killed with the hands of Sakharam for her unfaithfulness.

In the play *Kamala*, Tendulkar portrays the character kamala in a quiet realistic way. She is a victim of flesh market business. Jaisingh bought her from the flesh market for his own profit. She is an innocent ignorant woman who is unaware about the surrounding world in which she lived. She is fond of her master although she knew that he is not going to marry her. She tried to adjust in that home and she see Saritha, Jaisingh's wife as another slave whom her master brought from the market. Kamala inherits a patriarchal way thinking. According to her, if a woman can't produce a child, then she is worthless for a man. She offers that she will bring children for Jaisingh and do all other household works, then Saritha is educated, so she can make merry with him and go for outings. Here, Kamala is sharing their duty among them without understanding why she had arrived in their house. This incident shows the simple side of Kamala who didn't knew the world around her and admire men for their hard work to maintain a family. Then Saritha starts to think about her existence in her house. She came to realize that there isn't exist any difference between both of them in that house. For Jaisingh, Saritha is only needed for satisfying his physical, social and mental needs and for doing household works. He treats Saritha not as his wife but as a slave. For Jaisingh Kamala is an object for his success in profession. When he comments Kamala to join him for attending the press conference, poor kamala is unaware about its reason. She wished to change her torn old rags but Jaisingh didn't allow it. There, the inhuman nature of Jaisingh is clearly seen, he wanted to present Kamala not as a human being but as a victim or prey. He never concerned about her feelings or emotions and boastfully exhibiting Kamala in front of everyone as an object.

In *Kamala*, Tendulkar caricatured the real picture of Indian wife in a patriarchal society through the character Saritha. Saritha is the wife of a successful journalist. She is educated woman but it didn't make any difference in her life. she is also a submissive wife who has to obey the rules of her husband and lived under his feet. Even though she is educated she is considered as inferior to man. She is a typical wife who is always busy in her domestic works as well as doing everything for her husband. She carefully understands Jaisingh's needs and do it dexterously. She is assigned to attend phone calls and note down the details in Jaisingh's absence and to prepare tea and coffee when he demands. These are the major duties of Saritha in that house. She didn't have any opinions of her or if she put forward anything Jaisingh neglects or ignore it simply and always warns her to obey what he said. At the end of the play, she reacts against the subservient position of women in the institution of marriage and the societies injustice towards them. At the end, Tendulkar gave a rebirth to the character Saritha who came out from that oppressed state by breaking the shackles that surrounded her.

Conclusion

The characters like Mrs Kashikar, Champa and Sarita are privileged one in that patriarchal society but their privileges remain questioned while observing their life and life situations. On the other hand, the characters like Leela, Laxmi and Kamala who are underprivileged and forced to face the barbaric attitude of the society that stand against them. In all these three plays Tendulkar cleverly portray two female character who in one way or

other contradicts each other. At the same time, we can see the situation of all these characters remain same there. Even though the character Leela Benare and Mrs Kashikar oppose in several ways in their education, marital status etc, the main difference lies there, in which one follow the social norms and the other live her life in her own choice. There, the patriarchal society praised womanhood and motherhood by imposing so much restrictions in their life and hindering their freedom and rights. But here, Mrs Kashikar too gets blamed by the society for her inability to produce a child. In Sakharam Binder too, both the characters Laxmi and Champa have so much indifference but the society can't accept a woman who act against its codes. When a woman came out of such imposed norms, she will definitely be punished for it. In the play it results the death of the character Champa. In Kamala, the character Kamala follow the patriarchal views and confirm to its rules. By depicting two female characters, Tendulkar presents the idea that male domination and patriarchy continue to exist in our society only because a major part of our female society supports it and wish to live by following the patriarchal system. Several recent incidents in India prove this idea evidently and, in that way, it is really difficult to completely wipe out such social evils from our society.

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