

The Theme of Misogyny: A Study of the Select Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract

This study is an investigation of the theme of misogyny as represented by the female characters in the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar. The study argues that the Indian cultural context leaves space for man to be superior and woman to be inferior. The term misogyny denotes hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women, manifested in various forms such as physical intimidation and abuse, sexual harassment and rape, social shunning and ostracism, etc. In most of the plays of Vijay Tendulkar women stand to be the objects of subjugation in the hands of their male counterparts with whom they happen to connect with in the hope of leading their normal life. Tendulkar's plays display a wide range of complex behaviours those constitute different forms of violence – physical attacks and verbal abuses. A thorough analysis of the situations and circumstances related to women in Vijay Tendulkar's plays reveal that the domestic, personal, political and social ambience in which the characters live in contribute them much violence physically, sexually, psychologically and verbally. As Tendulkar's plays stand for the middle class society, the man in his plays quite often is brutal towards his female counterpart with his deep rooted ideologies. The paper's finding speaks on how the woman characters evolve to be strong individuals amidst their adverse ambience.

Keywords: women, violence, suppression, victimization

Vijay Tendulkar's plays are by-products of real situations and real people. As he has written his plays, the characters who have come out of his pen are models of men and women around him. Men, are more dominant, conservative, cruel, indifferent and materialistic, who victimize, exploit and torture women. His plays depict women as mere commodities of men and they are the victims subjected to violence whether physically or emotionally. He is the champion of revealing and exploring the relationship between men and women at different levels. He stands to be a man with an uncommon talent to explore the unexplored recesses of man and woman's mind that he portrays them with the fullest of their nature as he says, 'I see them with my inner eye. Their protest, I feel, goes to the extent, I visualised. It doesn't exceed the limit. However, in one sense, I feel, despite the change in generation, man doesn't seem to be involved in the relationship in the manner, woman is' (Wadikar 150).

Tendulkar has highlighted men's superiority complex and his perverted attitude in his relationship with women. The term

‘misogyny’ as it means hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women, manifested in various forms such as physical intimidation and abuse, sexual harassment and rape, social shunning and ostracism, etc., it is quite applicable for most of the woman characters of Vijay Tendulkar. Each woman character in his plays suffers due to the insistence of cultural norms on them. Benare’s unmarried pregnancy is a great blow to the Indian custom. Saritha’s realization of her condition as a slave – wife through which she has been so far, Mitra’s psychological and physical trauma being a lesbian, which is quiet an unpardonable stigma for the Indian community, Jyothi’s unequal marriage with a Dalit boy, Rama’s position as a barren wife – all these women undergo great trouble in balancing their self, relationships and society.

The subordinate status of women, considers much of gender violence as normal and it has been, a regular occurrence in its normal milieu. The different dimensions of violence include physical aggression through blows, burns, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats and control over speech and actions. Sometimes, this also results in death. In Indian scenario, these occurrences are often found in a man-woman relationship with the family, state and society. The sub-ordinal status of women is often been praised and maintained as a mark of patience in them. To ensure obedience in the household physical violence as well as varied forms of aggression are used by the members of authority and power. At every stage of the evolution of mankind, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control.

In most of his plays, Tendulkar projects women as victims. From birth, a girl is subjected to the negative reinforcement of her vulnerability to rape and assault. As a girl, she is under the protection of her father or brother; after marriage her husband is her lord and master and in old age her son becomes her protector. As part of the gender differences that is emphasized from the childhood, the girl is taught to believe, in the importance of family values’. A girl or a woman is expected to be meek, submissive patient, and she should subordinate her will and desires to those of the male unselfishly. Such sustains sociological conditioning inhibits and restricts the full development of a woman’s personality. The problem of violence cannot be resolved without changing the biased concept towards women. The basic view of women as inferior, servile, self- sacrificing and as essentially of sexual gratification and reproduction is a great barrier to solve the problem of violence against them. These characteristics of women are praised and elevated as divine nature in women through mythological literatures and Holy Scriptures. Tendulkar’s portrayal of women is a depiction of questioning these ethical values that affect her life and soul completely.

The present research is a critical analysis of the victimization of protagonists in the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar namely *Silence! the Court is in Session*, *The Vultures*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Kamala*. He portrays the images of women crushed under the forces of a patriarchal system. The present study concentrates on how Tendulkar presents the plight of the Indian woman in this so-called modern society. The women in Tendulkar’s plays have no identity of their own; they are mere puppets in the hands of their male counterparts. As a playwright, Tendulkar is immensely concerned with the exploitation and victimization of women in a patriarchal society. In order to analyse deeply from the point of view of an oppressed, who is at the saturation point and raises her voice against all oppressors and paves a new way for the oppressed, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, has been chosen for the study. In order to highlight the extreme level of the kind of tools of suppression, *The Vultures* has been chosen for the study. In order to understand the clear portrayal of male dominance, reasons for man’s nature to oppress the subordinates, *Sakharam Binder* has been chosen for the study. In order to analyse how a suppressed woman remains unchanged throughout her life time and bears all sorts of humiliation for the sake of survival, *Kamala* has been chosen for the study.

The story of the play, *Silence! the Court is in Session* is a direct critique of patriarchal values and the power of conservative school in silencing the voice of a strong-willed woman. The title of the play denotes different connotations at different levels. On one hand, it speaks literally about the judge's frequent banging of gavel against the table to maintain silence in the court. But on the other hand it presents how male chauvinism silences a woman's voice and mental energy by its frequent attacks and stable conspiracy against her. Benare longs to lead a free and bold life to raise her voice not to heed to any patriarchal values of the society around her. As Nitika Garg says, 'Tendulkar, through his plays, asserts that gender has been defined by the patriarchal fathers as a social construct. As sex is a biological phenomenon, the attributes of the masculine and feminine are constructed through gender paradigms which is to give sense of identity to the individual in a society. Gender politics is a universal problem'(Garg).

The major crisis of the play is Benare's bitter experience in love with two men – first with her maternal uncle and the next fall is with Prof Damle, with whom it is 'intelligent', 'love for an unusual intellect'. But for these men only her body is important not her mind and a life with her. And above all these bitter encounters, only Benare is cornered but not the men who are responsible for her plight. Tendulkar is very particular about the society's double standards and gender discrimination. The mock court condemns and ridicules her in disguised charge, by volleying a number of questions pertaining to her private life and people, to break her confidence and dignity. It maligns the character of Benare. The people who adorn the jobs as judge and lawyer make the noble place of court, a place of life-sacrificing altar that kills the self of Benare and they deviate from their place of protectors to elements of threat and malice. Benare's spirit, which is seen in high-esteem in the beginning of the play falls down and crumbles to pieces in front of the century-old-norms of the patriarchy. They crush her individuality by criticising with special woman-moral-codes attributed to woman and branding her as a 'sinner'.

The members of drama troupe who are agents of patriarchy stand to be men of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery. They are the representatives of middle class society, its codes, conduct and life and they are portrayed as ineffectual and discontented individuals. Their verbal and non-verbal language prove that they are sadistic, conspiratory and treacherous. Except Samant, the innocent villager, all the male character - Mr. Kashikar, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik experiment their cruel and inhuman power on Benare. While motherhood is praised in contrast with underlined unmarried pregnancy, Prof Damle is left scot-free as if he is a privileged gender. These 'protectors' of moral values, give verdict on the character and conduct of a woman, to curb her freedom. Tendulkar has presented a long monologue through the voice of Benare to echo the irony, sorrow and personal loss of a woman. Her long dialogue stands to be an expression of self-pity and self-justification. It is also an exposition of voice lowered being weakened from the position of straight-forward and assertive voice. Women are thus being chopped of their energy by constant underlining of patriarchal values, which stand for an ideal woman.

The play is a fruitful attempt to liberate a woman whose justified voice to bring up her child in her womb borne out of wedlock. It is a major crisis in the context of the mergence of tradition and modernity. It is also an alarm to in stil the awareness about biased punishment for woman and not for man who is responsible for the same crime. The playwright, is successful in his attempt in the portrayal of cruel patriarchal values in cutting a woman's body and soul to chop her honourable place from family and society.

The title of the play *The Vultures symbolically* stands for its meaning – the bird that preys on corpses and carcasses. Tendulkar is quite selective and intelligent to apply this title, for men who inflict suffering on anyone to get anything that benefits from other's sufferings. The title is very suitably given to portray how a man's savage nature can lead to bruise the relationships both

physically and mentally, which may even break blood-relationships. Man's excessive greed for materialistic world lead him to lose his human nature, going back towards developing primitive instincts and strips him of all human and moral values. Today's materialistic world provides vast space and ambience, where man runs after money and other pleasure-centred needs that lead him to abandon all his moral values. Media and newspapers coming out with news of violence, brutality, unbelievable murders and rapes are the best examples to relate his vulture-like instincts.

The play *The Vultures* is Tendulkar's courageous venture in revealing brutality hidden in every man. Man in the words of Tendulkar, 'Occasionally, he appears to behave like an animal and not like a human' (Wadikar 154) and this truth is revealed through the male members of Pitale family. The play presents two contradict situations. On the one hand it presents man's greed for money at the cost of human relations and on the other, it depicts of a silent woman's longing for motherhood. The play is a successful portrayal of the bizarre relationship among the family members of the Pitale family – Pappa Hari Pitale-the father, Ramakant, Umakant-the brothers, Rajaninath-the illegitimate son of Hari Pitale, Manik-Pitale's daughter and Rama, Ramakant's wife.

The title of the play – 'the vultures' implies the deadly nature inherent in man's mind that devours others and preys on them for his selfishness. Ramakant and Umakant – the businessmen brothers are devoid of all tender human feelings for their sheer greed for money. At all times, they target only towards money found among the family members, and they go to any extreme to extract the money from outsiders also. They get it from their father to whom they force to drink and attack violently to bleed. Their sister Manik pregnant, who has been broken of her leg by them in order to swindle money from her rich lover, Raja of Hondur and later they hit her belly to abort the child. These are the evidences of high density of their violence found in the members of the same family. These characters are characterised by wickedness and sensuality as part of their violent nature.

In contradiction to these vulture-like people, there exists Rama and Rajaninath, who represent love and tenderness. She is a doe, trapped among the vultures helpless, submissive and tender-hearted. Her illicit-relationship with her half brother-in-law raises the question of morality as she is portrayed as an ideal woman embodied with religious, virtuous and submissive natures. However, Tendulkar pours all the ingredients of their humane part for Rama and Rajaninath to come close that results in her pregnancy. She as a timid woman is found helpless, alone and alienated among them.

The play, in its portrayal of its characters, their actions, settings and language is extremely gloomy and morbid. It is a great shock for the conservative audience to witness the scenes of violence, the open exhibition of sexual relations and the abusive language on the stage. They have never experienced nor witnessed such violence in the Indian theatre. But the play activated the introspective mind of the audience to comprehend the tendency of man in a new angle. All the characters except Rama and Rajaninath use obscene language like 'swine', 'bullies', 'bugger', 'bastard', 'ruffian' etc. The unrefined characters of the members are very obvious through their way of speaking, their behaviour, their habits of scratching bodies, their thoughtless spitting and their way of eating habits. The lighting technique that is employed in the play is a perfect method to show the violent and blood-thirsty characters.

The play, though speaks about the nature of middle class people in the context of amassing money, it is also applicable to 'high-class, affluent industrialists' (Wadikar 96). The climax of the play is a clear indication of how tender and submissive people are ruthlessly crushed by the crooked and strong-minded people in the society of contemporary India. Manik involves in her attempt to abort Rama's child. Rama has to follow her drunken husband like a toy. If the people are weak physically, morally and spiritually, elimination of evil is very difficult and the world would be the abode of only vultures to live in. The play is a successful delineation of domestic violence where women are the victims of male-world.

The play is a clear reflection of suppression and oppression of women, who happen to live and survive in the middle class milieu in India. Middle class social set up is rooted with patriarchal moral values, and they have their own impact in the mind and attitude of these women. A man in a middle class milieu is mostly viewed as an economic up raiser of a family. From his birth itself, he is moulded mentally only as a great object of economic developer. Thus a man in such a social set up views himself to be more and more responsible to raise and gather wealth to lead the family. The society respects and admires him according to his level of success in raising money. A middle class man is thus entirely shaped and tuned to view himself only through the skills and ways to raise wealth. A man is treated as an asset of the family whereas a woman in the family is treated as a liability. This disparity or a concept is deeply rooted in the minds of both men and women. Hence men are dominant and women are ready to surrender or submit themselves to the oppressors for the sake of survival. Women of this society are entirely rooted to moral doctrines and principles as stated in holy scriptures. They have depended undoubtedly on men as father, husband or son. For years and generations, they have been rooted with this impression and those who rebel or break this system are considered bad and abnormal women. This moral principle constrains a woman's mentality and psyche, and she trains her self to adapt to live with an environment wherever it may be and whatever happens to her. Rama's tormented and oppressive life in the house of 'vultures' is the representative portrayal of many Indian women who suffer silently and her voice is their voice. Tendulkar displays this through her characterisation. Her disgust and hatred towards her husband's greediness, cruelty and drunken love is not only hers but a number of hopeless, desperate and oppressive women who live their silent saga of suffering to carry on the value of family and relationships.

The Vultures is an enlightening play both for men and women to understand and realize the moral values as the play serves as a speed breaker to make the society to pause and comprehend the impact of cruelty in men and the consequent loss of female happiness and the following moral degradation in them is the major threat to the security of family system. Oppression, thus, if exceeds through the oppressors, then it retaliates with same energy through the oppressed, as depicted through the characters Rama and Manik.

The play *Sakharam Binder* is a clear portrayal of a selfish man's excessive physical lust and helplessness of women, that compels them to bear physical and sexual violence of their master. The play depicts Sakharam as a man of cruelty, aggression and violence. But he has his own laws of personal morality for being honest and frank. He openly admits his business contract with helpless women as a justifying act of fulfilling mutual needs – his house a shelter for a woman and fulfilment of his needs by the woman. Laxmi, who stands to be a similar version of Rama in *The Vultures* – loyal, docile, religious, hard-working and tender-hearted. But so tactful that she becomes hard towards Champa's death. She is stronger than Sakharam mentally in hiding the secret murder in the end. Champa though stands to be strong, sensuous and stubborn shows kindness and support towards the fellow woman Laxmi. She convinces Sakharam to get place for Laxmi. Champa's husband FauzdarShinde's repeated visit to meet Champa as a masochist is Tendulkar's bold portrayal of man as an embodiment of lust and brutality.

The characterisation of Laxmi and Champa - through the eyes of Dawood reveals what these women are embodied of. He admires Laxmi for her traditional bent and the change of ambience in the house with her religious practices and in the habit of Sakharam offering pooja to the images of gods. On the other hand, he is very much attracted towards Champa for her physical appearance. Sakharam as a non-believer in the institution of marriage takes women who are deserted by their husbands or who have walked out of their home due to their intolerable suffering. He shows manners of being religious and domesticated in the presence of Laxmi and in association with Champa he is transformed into a sensuous, rude drunkard obsessed with the thought of sexual pleasure.

The play moves around the triangular relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam-Champa. Each character is abnormal in his/her own way. The play, is though centre daround Sakharam and his personality as a brutal man with all justifiable reasons, it is an undeniable fact that it is about women who are more affected who come to his proximity. They are traumatized and victimized for his sheer selfish needs. Their helplessness is taken advantage easily and it is a cheap business bargain to accomplish his needs. He represents male chauvinism and patriarchal values and the women under him represent the suppressed women of their kind in the society. Tendulkar's portrayal of Laxmi and Champa represents how women are thrown out as objects both by their husbands and Sakharam. Laxmi is sent out due to her barrenness and Champa runs out of her husband, being intolerant towards his physical tortures. Their sufferings are typical with many women who undergoes silently and passively. The women characters of this play serve as a voice to speak out the silent sufferings of such women. Thus this play is a clear protest against male chauvinism enrooted in patriarchal society that is indifferent to woman's suffering.

Sakharam Binder is the most uncommon play that reveals an untold story of a stranger, Sakharam and his life with the women he brings to his home. The play clearly depicts the unimaginable plight of neglected women who are forced to lead a life of survival losing all their human values, individuality and independence by surrendering themselves to an illogical and cruel tastes of a man. The play is a clear delineation of the raw message, that a woman is just a tool, abused and extracted. Throughout the play this message is conveyed every time when the women come in proximity with the three men of the play, Sakharam, Dawood and FouzdarShinde.

The play *Kamala* highlights the crucial fact that a newspaper, the most important medium of social reform is transformed into an object of getting fame, position, publicity and money. Jaisingh represents the publicity and success seeking society, who is unmindful to sacrifice human values in the pursuit of his goals. A woman like Kamala becomes a scapegoat in such a man's hand. The play is also an account on Indian family system with patriarchal values, where women are used as slaves, menial servants or stepping stones by their male counterparts. Women, too, without realizing their position and place, submit to the condition of such system. Sarita, though, on realising the selfish hypocrisy of her husband, stays with him and provides emotional support, when he is oozed out from his job.

Tendulkar represents Sarita and her position to expose the male chauvinism that is inherent in the modern Indian male, who believes himself to be the saviour of women. Sarita, for Jaisingh is an object of physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. Kamala's entry into the house reveals the bitter truth about the insignificance of her existence. She does not immediately rebel against her husband. But slowly expresses her denials to his selfish requirements. She hopes to attain independence sometime in the future. Kamala and Sarita are almost the same kind as Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Rama in *Gidhade*, and Laxmi in *Sakharam*.

The major message Tendulkar attempts to convey is the evolution of the Indian woman within the domestic milieu.. It is important to note that all three woman characters of the play Sarita, Kamala and Kamalabhai are suppressed by the dominant male character Jaisingh Jadav – the journalist. The play *Kamala* depicts psychological/mental and sociological oppression operated on women. The mode of oppression is gender abuse/exploitation and power, where the oppressor – Jaisingh, manipulates power to oppress the women who comes under his control – Sarita, his wife and Kamala, the woman brought from flesh market. The oppressor abuses these women for his professional upliftment and domestic pleasure. Sarita is abused in domestic milieu and Kamala is abused in professional milieu. Besides these women also like another woman – Kamalabhai, the servant-maid of Jaisingh household, comes under the control of both the oppressor – Jaisingh and the oppressed – Sarita, but she is not much in focus.

The play *Kamala* is a well-crafted and comprehensive play that powerfully showcases the mechanism of oppression on women. Kamalabai, as a servant-maid of Sarita has to undergo and bear the family tensions and to leave behind her home to carry on her life. Kamala, as a slave from flesh market remains a victim of abuse and oppression and Sarita, as an educated house-wife is oppressed as a domestic- labourer to her husband Jaisingh and later being enlightened to realise the reality, decides to stop acting slavery. These three women characters represent three different oppressed society, who play their inevitable role in the upliftment of the society and men. Through their role the play conveys the message that ‘The need of this hour is a nation-wide movement that will arouse everyone and encourage them to strive in the desired direction, a movement that will make them sympathetic towards the woman’s pain so that these cruelties that are a blot on the human race come to an end. Otherwise, for women, womanhood is indeed a curse’(Varma, 35).

Tendulkar, thus, is very clear about what he writes. Women though being victimized, they proceed to live their life with the men who are their partners. But in their experiment of life with them, these women mould, shape, enlighten and transform into strong and resilient with the capacity to learn from their experiences. They become brave and self –confident individuals with the capacity to proceed their life in the patriarchal world. They evolve from the state of ignorance, innocence and simplicity of perception and response to that of consciousness and knowledge about men, people and world. Above all, they stand memorable with their subtle display of wide range of characters, behaviours, human-instincts, feelings, and thoughts with which they face all odds with positive attitude.

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