

From Devotion to Defiance: Tracing the Journey of Woman towards Agency in the Select Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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ABSTRACT

Now-a-days the proper definition of woman or womanhood has become subjected to several debates. Though the feminist scholars mostly discarded the traditional roles of women as submissive ones and posited the picture of women as independent human-beings. While it is apparent that in most of the cases the patriarchal hierarchies are responsible for women's identity crisis, feminist writers tried to prepare the ground for women where every unknown Judith Shakespeare would get the scope to enlarge her talent or capability. The situation of women in India is more severe than that of the Western nations. This paper tries to show through the women characters in Vijay Tendulkar's select plays how Indian women can retain their individuality irrespective of several external and internal obstacles.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Equality, Identity, Empowerment, Discrimination, Marginalised, Exploitation, Disolvency.

It has been considered that the field of Postmodernism have gained its distinctions since mid to late 20th century. Postmodernism as a term has suggested 'historiographic metafiction' because it negates any constructive notions of identity. Postmodern representation female emancipation shows disolvency of women's identity. It concentrates on gender differences in socio-economic discourses and also represents the women destroyed by dispossession from its equal rights. The postmodern feminist critics elevated the number of methodical

and political problems involved in the contemporary society. Postmodernist feminist theories have always developed the connection between white women and their indigenous counterparts. Conventionally women have been presented as obedient, timid and compromising characters. Women are supposed to play the second fiddle to men. The patriarchal society is still not ready to give women their rights and women are still struggling to share their part of equality. Though the situations is changing and women are coming to the centre by leaving their peripheral status. In this process of transformation, modern writers have been playing a significant role by presenting women as man's equal. One of these writers is Vijay Tendulkar. He is one of the most prolific writers in the contemporary Indian literature. He has written twenty-eight plays. His plays present the picture of the victimised and exploited women. Behind apparent exploitation of women there is more to it. Conventionally women are taken as complementary to men, i.e., women do not have any individual identities of their own. The role of woman is always measured in relation to men, Tendulkar questions this biased perception about women and gives women new identities.

Unlike the conventional good women who perhaps did not try to solve the riddles behind male atrocities, Tendulkar's women expose the brutal nature of the androcentric society. Through his plays like *Silence! The Court is in Session!*, *Kamala*, *Sakharam Binder!*, *The Vultures*, and *Kanyadaan* Tendulkar shows not only the plight of women but also their evolving new roles in this male-dominated society. This new identity is based on logic, rationality along with compassion for each other. In his plays, he traces women and their sufferings from different classes in India. Women, on the verge of constructing their identity, are one of the central themes of Tendulkar's plays. Besides being a journalist, Tendulkar tried his hand in articles, screen-plays, dramas, and in translations. In spite of showing his versatile genius in various fields, Tendulkar's fame rests on his plays significantly. He takes his plots from day-to-day life in middle and lower class sections

of society through his keen sense of observation. In his plays he always gives space for women to justify their anguish and frustrations. Women Empowerment is one of the chief concerns towards which most of Tendulkar's plays are directed. One of the most striking features of Tendulkar's plays is that initially women character are too immersed in their emotional bonding for their male partners but at the end they evolve to be knowledgeable ones. Women characters in his plays go through a series of epiphanies and at the end discover their inner souls to posit an opposition against the male domination.

In *Kamala*, Tendulkar also presents the jeopardised situation of women. In the play, Kamala and Sarita are presented as if they have no emotional and individuality. They are just mere puppets in the hands of the male-dominated society. The very beginning of the play shows the dominated image of Sarita who has been ordered by her husband, Jaisingh, to record the names of each and every caller for him. She does this servilely though she does not have any information where her husband goes. She even does not know when he will return. Still she is working as if she is a servant in the house. Tendulkar minutely presents the image of an Indian wife who forbidden to ask questions to her husband. On the other hand, Jaisingh represents most of the males in the Indian society who become offended when their wives try to give advice. Therefore, the dichotomy of gender is presented from the very beginning of the play.

The play also focuses the blind rat race to gain popularity, irrespective of molarity, as in the case of Jaisingh. The play shows women are nothing are nothing but mere objectives like in any grocery shop as Jaisingh buys Kamala from Ludhardaga bazar for two hundred and fifty rupees. He brings kamala with him not because of her plight but not to gain popularity before others as a sensational journalist. This shows the fact that women are continuously deceived by men who use them for their own sake. Jaisingh also represents the pretentious nature of the male-centric world as he forces Kamala to attend the press

conference. He does not even care about Kamala's torn sari as he just wants to expose Kamala before others. Kamala represents all those socially marginalised women who do not have their own voice. When Jaisingh is able to fulfil his long cherished dream of presenting women like Kamala before others in order to gain popularity, he goes on to send Kamala to women's home. This incident represents the opportunistic attitude of males who just want to use women for their own purposes only.

Due to Jaisingh's obsession for success, both Kamala and Sarita appear to be victimized. Tendulkar presents the rotten side of success-oriented people through the character of Jaisingh. He has taken Sarita and Kamala for granted. He never tries to hear their wishes. Thereby, he dominates both the women. In this play fresh trade is the dominating theme. On the other side, the life of Sarita, wife of Jaisingh, is not different from Kamala as it is bounded up only in domesticity. She cannot oppose her husband in any matter and always obeys his orders like a slave. In that sense both Kamala and Sarita are going through the same pathetic states. Jaisingh does not heed any advice provided by Sarita. Tendulkar uses the reference of the flash trade to show the exploited state of women in this society.

After watching the sufferings of Kamala, Sarita becomes anxious and starts to consider her role within the family. She comes to the conclusion that her situation is no different from Kamala. She starts to think of herself as a slave who has been thought of by Jaisingh through the ritual called marriage, as he says to Kakasaheb:

"Kamala showed me everything. Because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I'm a slave. Slave don't have rights, do they kakasaheb? They must only slave away. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says, laugh. Cry, when he says, cry. When says pick up the phone, they must pick up. When he says come to a party, they must go. When says, lie on the bed-they."
 " (p. 46)

Therefore, by raising voice against the exploitations done to her by her husband, Sarita breaks the traditional concept of the good wife. She starts to believe in her own individuality. She exposes the deceptive nature of the patriarchal world through the analysis of her husband. Being neglected for such a long time, Sarita gets her own voice to raise questions against the stability of the male chauvinism. Tendulkar through the character of Sarita tries to present his desire for an equal society where women would be able to consider themselves as independent beings.

In this play Sarita is going through a transformation from immaturity to maturity, as he speaks for the rights of women:

“Why? Why can’t men limp behind? Why women aren’t even the masters? Why can’t a woman at least ask to live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have the right to be man? Does he have an extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can.” (p. 47)

In this way Sarita from her downtrodden mentality and evolves to be a woman who has her own identity. Sarita does not expresses her problems only but appears to be a representative of oppressed women like Kamala. Tendulkar’s contribution to the enhancement of the position of women lies on the ground that his women characters have gained the access to the actual reality so they cannot be befooled anymore. Earlier women would not be allowed to speak against the trouble-makers in their lives and they had to suppress their inner voice but in Tendulkar’s plays women show the guts to mark those who are making their lives troublesome. Women would be able to utilise their own rights only when there would be an equal society. Sarita’s long suppressed voice speaks to deconstruct the traditional fixity of the patriarchal society as he tries to defines the so-called definition of ‘manly’, as he says:

“Those who do manly things should be equal to men. Those who don’t, are women. And there will be some among them who have beards and moustaches too. Isn’t being Prime Minister of India a

manly thing? And isn't it an effeminate thing to grovel at that Prime Minister's feet?" (p. 47)

Therefore, Sarita redefines the notion of manliness. Any women with potential could be as vigorous as men. Therefore the stereotypes of gender classification should be stopped and human being should be judged through their potentials. This type of liberal thinking comes out from Sarita. Thereby, Tendulkar's women can not only dream of an equal society but they also have acquired the power to express of play posit a problem, the rest of the play tries to solve the problem, as he mentions:

"In many plays, not just by Shakespeare, the play begins with a breakfast of the ordered world, and then the rest of the play is an attempt to restore or replace that lost order. In tragedy this is usually achieved through a death, in a comedy through a marriage." (p4)

This statement can be explained to the evolution of new role of Sarita in the play. *Kamla* begins with the problem of the exploitation on woman but it ends with a note of positivity as Sarita able to voice those disparities endured by her. Her long suppressed inner soul gets an outlet at the end of the play. Though Sarita does not discard her completely but there is a hint that from now on she will start to live her life in her own way. This is the reason when Jaisingh asks Sarita to attend a party, by showing her uninterested will she replies:

"Aren't I allowed to have a will of my own?" (p5)

Therefore, this is the challenge that Tendulkar wants to make in the society, i.e., woman should have their own voice. Though only through this raising voice against male atrocities women would not get the equal position in the society but this type of protestation can be taken as the starting line to make an equal society. While discussing the themes of Tendulkar's plays Bhagat Nayak says:

"In his plays he gives expression to the tormenting solitude and alienation of modern individual in urban society." (p68)

In *Kanyadaan* Tendulkar presents the hypocritical nature of the society through the characters of Jyoti and Arun. Primarily the play shows the psychological traumas faced by the common people. The playwright shows the conflict between upper class people and the Dalits. From the very title it can be assumed that the theme is marriage. The patriarchal society has imposed shrewdly certain rules and restrictions upon women in the name of ethics. These norms actually curb women's sense of independent identity. Jyoti is the daughter of Nath Devalikar, A Brahmin MLA, and Seva, a social worker. She has been brought up with her father's idealistic fascinations. Being influenced by her father's liberal notions, Jyoti decides to marry Arun Athavale, a Dalit youth. Her mother warns her about the consequences of the marriage as there is a stark distinction of class between Arun and Jyoti. Jyoti becomes so immersed in her father's dream to abolish the casteism that she remains adhere in her decision. In his context, the individuality of Jyoti is suppressed by her father's open minded notions regarding society. Before marriage her father sows the seed of idealism which to some extent is devoid of reality. Thereby, Jyoti becomes the victim of the patriarchal society from the beginning of the play.

In Arun's case also, society in which he brought up, posits a strong imprint in his mind regarding the oppression on the lower class by the higher. As per the role of gender is concerned, people like Arun have their own conception. They think man to be more superior to woman and to talk with a woman in the kitchen is not manly, as Arun tells Jyoti:

"No, men who sit chat in the kitchen are pansies!" (p.513)

This type of conception does not come Arun's mind naturally rather he grew up with such conceptions. He is not an outsider but a product of the society of the oppressed class. Even to beat a woman is a usual thing in Arun's class, as he himself beats Jyoti:

"Before, Jyoti can guess what's coming, Arun grabs her arm and twists it. Jyoti moans in pain." (p.515)

This continuous fluctuation of emotions sometimes leads the oppressed to reconstruct themselves and Arun's poetic expression is the result of such reconstruction. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, noted to some extent the similar picture by describing the nature of a Negro:

"Unable to be assimilated, unable to pass unnoticed, he consoles himself by associating with the deal, or at least the absent. And his associations, unlike his life, ignores the barriers of centuries and oceans. He talks with Marcus Aurelius, Joinville, Pascal, Perez Galdos, Rabindranath Tagore." (p.65)

The continual oppressions have warped Arun's mind in such a way that any support from the higher class would appear to him as mere hypocrisy. This disbelief leads Arun to torture Jyoti and humiliate Nath, Seva and Jayaprakash.

Nath on the other hand loves to live with his idealism and therefore he tries his best to make the marriage fruitful. By overlooking Arun's dark side, he inspires Jyoti to continue her married life. He even scolds Seva when she tries to break the knot and he thinks the marriage as a bridge between two cultures. For Nath this marriage is not like any other marriage, but through this marriage he wants to posit an example before others, as he says to Seva:

"Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! The dream which is struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust before our eyes! We must save this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti's sake... this has... a far wider significance... this experiment is a very precious experiment." (p.537)

Arun's stubborn mentality regarding his past does not allow him to improve himself to become a civilised man. He even does not want to change himself. When Seva says to Arun that Jyoti thought he would improve after marriage, Arun replies if she thinks so then she is nothing but a fool. Therefore, Arun

has already made up his mind that higher class people would not give him the space in their society, due to his low status. When Jyoti decides to go with Arun, Nath becomes really proud of her says:

“Jyoti, I feel so proud of you. The training I gave you has not been in vain.” (p.541)

As Arun's past is responsible for his antagonistic attitude towards life, in Jyoti's case her father's teaching of pure idealism is responsible for her misfortunes. If Jyoti was taught by her father about the loopholes of the society then perhaps Jyoti would think rationally. In that sense, Jyoti is victimised both by her father and her husband.

Being disillusioned about her father's idealism Jyoti transforms an idealist to a humanist. She can no longer be duped by the society. Like Benare and Sarita, Jyoti also speaks against the false utopian conception of the materialistic world where women are continuously deceived by the males. At the end, there is a trace of negations for her father's false teaching in Jyoti's voice while leaving her father's house permanently:

“I am not a widow. Even if I become one I shan't knock at your door. I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devikar now, I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, scavenger. I don't" say harijan. I despise the term. I am an untouchable, scavenger. I am one of them. Don't touch me. Fly from my shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable value.” (p. 566)

Jyoti no longer remains silent about the mistreatment from both Arun and Nath. She comes to know the actual reality of the society. Jyoti's discover of reality as like Lousia's breakdown before Thomas Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*. In both the cases, the daughters' lives have suffered due their fathers' blind faith. Jyoti leads her father to see actual reality. She discards her father's vain glorification of idealistic thinking. Through her speaking she wants to deliver the message that there is no place to be called a utopian world. The play unvels

the nature of the success oriented men in this society who only want to use women to gain some popularity even though it is their daughter. Jyoti's character reveals his deception. Even though she has not achieved her freedom from this male-centric world still she now can express her views on the disparity of the society. Samik Bandyopadhyay's comment in the introduction in the *Collected Plays in Translation* by Vijay Tendulkar can perhaps be applicable in this context:

"A strong ethical concern exploring and critiquing the relations of power in all their complex ramifications is the hub around which Tendulkar's major plays evolve." (p. XII)

Thus, Vijay Tendulkar with the touch of sheer realism presents the women characters in both *Kamala* and *Kanyadaan*. Tendulkar first portrays the tyrannised situation of women, and then he shows how those women fight heroically to emerge victorious from those terrible situations. After being suppressed for long time, they reconstruct their own identities. Thus, in almost all his plays, the theme of the struggle of victimised woman and her heroic resilience through which she constructs her final identity, the identity of an independent individual. Though there is no such demarcation of literary era in Indian literature in English as Postmodernism but the struggle of the select women characters in Vijay Tendulkar's plays match that of the British writers in the contemporary time.

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