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Society and Gender Norms in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad

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Abstract:
A dramatist writes on the bases of things which he has seen or experienced. He cannot write in vacuum. He has to depend on the society for his subject matter. Some dramatists write with purpose to show the evils prevalent in the society and some for the sake of entertainment. This study concentrates on the selected plays the dramatists- Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. Both the dramatists present the evils of the society prevalent in contemporary society.

Key Words: Concentrate, passionately, promiscuity.

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar presents society through his plays which are based on some real life incident or imaginary one. Vijay Tendulkar's statement quoted by Samik Bandyopadhyay is relevant here, "As an individual- or rather as a social being- I feel deeply involved in the existing state of my society (because I am affected by it through not immediately in some cases or not s much as some others are) and in my own way brood over it…As a social being I am against all exploitation and passionately feel that all exploitation must end". Ram Sharma rightly points out in the article titled "Social Issues in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar", "The best thing about his plays was that they could be related to the real life of a middle class man". Karnad presents the evil of the society through the use of myths.

Society never allows a girl to lead a comfortable and respected life without marriage. Girls who get married at the proper age only get respect in the society. If their marriage delay because of some reason, then everyone who lives around her get a chance to criticise her. But if a boy remains unmarried for later age, nobody objects his unmarried state. Why society made different rules for a boy and a girl. In Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* Miss Leela Benare, a teacher by profession is an unmarried girl of thirty four. She is criticised by the group of amateur artist for her unmarried state. Mr. Kashikar, the chairman of the amateur group, even wants to revive child marriage. He says, "Our society should revive the old custom of child marriage. Marry off the girls before puberty. All this promiscuity will come to a full stop" . Mrs Kashikar's comment is relevant to Sudhir Kakar's statement when he talks about the traditional ideal of marriage, "A girl should be married soon after her first menstrual period, for it is fared that 'if she remains long a maiden, she gives herself whom to will'.

There is no place for women in the society who develop an illicit relationship. But her male member has no responsibility about it. Only she is criticised and not the male. Because of this relationship, only a woman has to suffer. In Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*; Miss Benare becomes the centre of criticism because of her relationship with Prof. Damle "Professor Damle is a family man…He has five children" . But nobody speaks even a single word about Prof. Damle. Ram Sharma says about Vijay Tendulkar for this play in the article titled "Social Issues in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar", "He was marked out as a rebel against the establishment values of a fundamentally orthodox society". Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* also presents the same situation. Rani, the wife of Appanna is presented before the elder people of the village because of the blame her husband posed on her. She has to undergone a trial to prove her chastity. But nobody question about the chastity of Appanna, her husband who lives with a concubine of the village. Kurudavva, Appanna's mother's friend, tells Rani about Appanna's relation with the concubine, "There is a woman, a bazaar woman. She has your husband in her clutches. Squeezes him dry". Why a man and a woman is treated differently for the same crime. Linda L. Lindsey points out in her book *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, "The women's reputation is more threatened by the exposure of the affair, with fewer penalties accruing for her married counterpart". Karnad's *Bali: The Sacrifice* presents the adultery of the Queen. She has to sacrifice her life for this adultery. In Karnad's *Yayati*, Yayati develops a relationship with his queen Devayani's maid, Sharmistha and declares before her, "I am making you my queen". Because of this, Devayani has to leave her home and go to her father. In the same play Swarnlata, the wife of The King Yayati's chariot has to lose her husband because of the suspicion of her husband that she had an illicit relationship with the Brahmin boy. In his suspicion he made his life worse. In the words of the king, Yayti who tells Puru about the chariot, "I had a charioteer. He was married to this maid, Swarnalata. One day, suddenly, he decided to become a worm. Went berserk- women, drinks, asceticism, opiates. Nothing brought him peace of mind. Finally he committed suicide" . In this way, only a woman has to suffer if she develops an illicit relationship not her husband. It is she who has to suffer for both the situations. Linda L. Lindsey rightly points out in her book *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, "Women are less likely to agree with standard and are judged more strictly when they engage in any non-marital sex".

Motherhood is a very necessary role of a woman's life. If she is unable to perform this role, her life becomes a curse. Society never accepts a woman who is unable to bear a child. Linda L. Lindsey points out in her book, "The belief that a woman's fulfilment will be as a mother is a powerful socialization message girls hear very early in life". She also says about women, "Motherhood is the necessary ingredient for making them complete". Motherhood makes a woman complete woman. Without being a mother, she is not respected by her husband and mother in-laws. A barren woman is even considered inauspicious in religious ceremonies. Lowleen Malhotra points out in her article "The Dialogical Plays of Vijay Tendulkar", "The two most important models of female gender role closely tied in kinship in Maharashtra are that of a wife and mother. When they violate these rules, the society attacks them".

In Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* Laxmi becomes the victim of the society because of her bareness. Her husband throws her away from the house for not bearing a child. There is a proverb about a barren woman 'Better be mud than a barren woman'. Karnad's *Bali: The Sacrifice* also presents the suffering of Amritmati, the Queen. She is hated by her mother-in-law, the Mother-Queen for not bearing a child. Once, she realised that she was pregnant. But, later it was discovered that it was a false pregnancy. At

this, she is made fun by the maids of the palace, "A hen doesn't need a cock to lay eggs… She can do it on her own". Kumkum Roy gives the reference of *Kamsutra* and points out in her book titled *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, "A childless woman was expected to encourage her husband to remarry". The Queen also suggests her husband to marry again for bearing child, "You could have taken another wife… purely for bearing children. Then I could make love to you-for its own sake-to make love".Tendulkar's *Kamala* also shows the state of Sarita who is also unable to bear a child. She has to lead a life of loneliness because of her this state. Kamala realises Sarita's futility for not bearing a child and says, "It was an expensive bargain, memsahib. If you pay seven hundred, and there are no children… Then he has to pay for cloths, and for food. He must be very unhappy. Really". Mrs Kashikar in Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* is also a barren woman. She also craves for a child. That's why they adopt Balu. Through all these women characters-Amritamati, Sarita, Laxmi, Mrs. Kashikar, the dramatists show the tryst of Indian society where women has no position as a woman. She needs to prove herself as a wife or as a mother. Her being is accepted only when she is a mother without that she is useless even in society, especially Indian one. There is no place of a barren woman. Through both the dramatists, it is clear either one see the primitive society or contemporary a woman has to produce child which is her primary duty and motive of life. In the words of Manu, "Women were created to bear children and man to carry on the line; that is why the revealed canon prescribes a joint duty (for a man) together with his wife".

On the other hand, unmarried motherhood is a curse for the society. But the society does not describe any punishment or rules or code conduct for unmarried fatherhood. There is no place for an unmarried motherhood in the society. Miss Benare in Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* seduced by the Prof. Damle. She becomes pregnant because of this relation. She is humiliated by her own group of members of the amateur artists. All the people of the group criticise only her for this relationship and does not say a single word for Prof. Damle. He is also the equal victim in this crime. The Educational Society decided to fire Miss Benare for her crime. Mr. Kashikar heard Nanasahib, the Chairman of the Education Society telling someone on the phone about Miss Benare, "It's a sin to be pregnant before marriage. It would be still more immoral to let such a woman teach, in such a condition! There is no alternative- this woman must be dismissed. Send the order for my signature this very day". But there is no action is taken against Prof. Damle who is also the equal partner in this crime. Why society made the different rules for a man and a woman? Why should they not suggest Prof. Damle to take the responsibility of the child? Not only socially, biologically also a woman suffers. There is no sign present publically for the adultery of a man but a woman's adultery presents publically in her pregnancy.

Sujata Sen points out, "A woman becomes the husband's property after marriage" . A woman is considered the property of her husband. He has all the rights on her. He can love her, beat her anything else he can. In Tendulkar's *Kanyadana* Jyoti, the wife of Arun Athavle is beaten by him without any reason also. He beats her very cruelly. He even beats her in the sixth month of her pregnancy. He behaves very brutally. Jyoti bears all this silently without any revolt to continue her marriage. Linda L. Lindsey writes, "Males are less committed to the relationship than females" . Her husband says her that he got this nature in his inheritance. His father beats his mother very cruelly. Arun have felt the pain of his mother beaten by his father. Then why should he not thought about the pain of his own wife? Tendukar's Sakharam also beats the woman who lives with him as a wife. He used them for his benefit.

He beats Laxmi very badly because she is unable to fulfil his physical and sexual need. In her own words, "How much more can a person bear. I haven't had a single day's rest… Nothing but work, work; work all the time. You torture me the whole day, you torture me at night, I'll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end". Tendulkar himself points out about this cruelty of man over woman that is quoted by Samik Bandyopadhyay, "As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited- exploiter relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end".

Man always ready to use abandoned women. He uses them for his personal gain. Publically, he presents himself the benefactor of such women. But in reality, he used them for his sexual gratification. Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder presents such character. Sakharm gives shelter to abandoned women and used them for household work and sexual gratification. He keeps only one woman at one time. She has to do his domestic work as well as perform the duty of a wife at night. He keeps her as well as she is able to satisfy him. When she is failed, he leaves her and seeks for another such woman. Publically he presents himself a good man but in reality he exploits those women in the name of food and shelter. A woman who has no shelter after leaving their home has to live according to his conditions. She has no option but to follow his orders. In the play, Sakharam exploits first Laxmi and then Champa in the name of their patron.

Loneliness is that part of a man's life in which he can go to a wrong path. Mahout in Karnad's *Bali: The Sacrifice* is an ugly man. He has inferiority complex because of his ugliness. Nobody wants to talk to him. That's why he has to lead a lonely life. But he has the gift of sweet song. When he sings a song, anyone can be attracted towards his voice. Amritamati gets attracted towards his voice and commits adultery under the spell of the sweet song. The main reason of her this adultery is her loneliness because of not bearing a child. If she has a child, she will busy in caring it. She is also under pressure to bear a child because of her mother-in-law, the Queen-Mother and the people of the kingdom. A woman with children compared to even goddess by Manu, "There is no difference at all between the goddesses of good fortune (sriyas) who live in houses and women (striyas) who are the lamps of their houses, worthy of reverence and greatly blessed because of their progeny" .

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