

**Woman And Alienated Self: A Study of Women Characters in Vijay
Tendulkar's Plays**

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Abstract:

This paper deals with the alienated self of women in the Indian society. The modern Indian literature witnesses the realistic picture of women. The modern playwrights influenced by Henrick Ibsen, have dealt with the domestic issues, man woman relations and the condition of women in the society. Vijay Tendulkar, Marathi playwright, is one of the prominent modern playwrights. He deals with women issues: their struggle for existence, alienation from the society and herself itself. The plays *silence!* *The court is in session*, deals with Leela Benare who fights against the rules and regulations of male dominated society. In the *Vultures*, Tendulkar exposes, through Rama, the core of the female heart and how a woman craves to become a mother. Motherhood is a blessing to woman. In *Kamala*, he deals with two female characters: Kamala and Sarita. In this play Tendulkar exposes the practice of social evils in the society. Kamal is brought in an auction by Mr. Jaisingh only to prove that there is still selling of flesh in the open market. But in turn, Jaisingh himself becomes an exploiter of his wife Sarita. The women, whether married or unmarried, are not living their lives as they wish. They have departed from their selves and subjugated to the male.

Key Words: Alienation, Self, Exploitation, Defiance.

The image of women in contemporary Indian literature has changed drastically. No more is woman considered or portrayed as a weak person, or falling at the feet of her husband or trying to please his always. Traditionally, a good woman is synonymous with a good wife. This is reflected in the most popular and well-known myths about women, for example in the stories of Savitri and Stayavan, Nala and Damayanti and above all in Sita-Rama legend. Others like Draupadi, Gandhari, Arundhati and Ahalaya are all seen in the contexts of their husbands. So overwhelming is this pattern that one is struck by the fact that the mother-child relationship features in the classical mythology, inspite of motherhood being considered a crucial factor in the shaping of feminine identity.

Modern writers have tried to transform this image of woman as seen in the myths by portraying them in a more realistic manner. One such writer is Vijay Tendulkar- the avant-garde Marathi playwright. In his plays *Vultures*, *Silence! The Court is in Session!*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Kamala*, he has given women different roles to play- very different from the roles played by women in traditional literature.

Bhagabat Nayak talking about the themes of Tendulkar's plays says "His early plays before *silence! The court is in session* focus on the suffering of the middle class people living in urban society with compassion and sentiments but his later plays express his concern for the violation of human psyche, ugliness in life and suffering of women. In his plays he gives expression to the tormenting solitude and alienation of modern individual in urban society. Tendulkar's dramatic concern is more with the middle class individuals set against the backdrop of a hostile society." (Bhagabat Nayak, 2011, P 68)

Silence! The court is in Session (1967) , the first Tendulkar 's play to become part of the new Indian drama phenomenon of the sixties and the first significant modern Indian play in any language to center on woman as protagonist and victim, locates its heroine Benare at an acquiescent receiving end, but at a point of conflict where as aggressive transgressor of the sexual mores of her community. She challenges the executioners or power in absentia. Benare's long monologue extends to ten minutes and to a different mode together, which expresses the

questioning attitude of women. Benare breaks her silence finally to defend her 'self' and defy and question the male domination in the society. Talking about this play Dr. Dubbe says "The play is conceived as game and the idea that all that is happening on the stage is part earnest gives it a theatrical edge. The mock element is all pervasive. What we are witnessing is a mere enactment of what is a rehearsal of sorts of nothing more than a mock trial to be staged. In Silence! The Court is in Session, the play and its structure revolve around the idea of a game and include the essential ingredient of reversal Benare, who is in the offensive in the beginning, finds herself trapped at the close of the play."(Dr. P.D.Dubbe, 1985,P 61)

In India teaching profession has got the best place among all the other professions. Teacher occupies an important place in the society since the ancient Gurukulas. Teacher has a key role to play in transforming the society. The future of the country is built in the four walls of a classroom. For a teacher his profession is god. To teach to the students is to teach to the society. To transform the behaviour of the students is to transform the society. To build the lives and characters of the students is to build the nation. Winning the adorations from the students with love is what a teacher desires. Sacrifice is what a teacher needs. Teacher is not jealous of students who grow greater than himself. In ancient India teacher profession was given the utmost importance in the society. Even the kings obey the teachers. But now the significance and importance of the profession is changing. Apart from earning money, teacher must devote himself to teaching. Benare words reveal her sacrificial nature. She wants to sacrifice her last drop of the blood for teaching. Teaching requires discipline, regularity punctuality and sacrifice. Benare is perfect as far as her teaching is concerned. But this has made her colleagues and the school management jealous of her.

Then in a different tone Benare ruminates on the enquiry the school management proposes to conduct. Her colleagues and the management are jealous of her popularity with her students. But what can they do to her. They are holding an enquiry on her 'just because of one bit of slander'. But her teaching is perfect. She has put her whole life into it. She has worn herself to a shadow in her job. She ponders if they can throw her out of her job just for that slander. She says that she has

not hurt anyone by her conduct. If at all she has hurt anybody, it has been herself. But she wants to know if they can throw her out for that reason. She asks who these people are to say what she can or cannot do. She asserts that her life is her own and she has not sold it to any one for a job. She wants these people to know that her will is her own and her wishes are her own. No one has got the right to kill those things. She will do what she likes with herself and her life. She will do what she likes with herself and her life. She will decide what is right for her and does not want anybody to dictate this to her even if they her employers.

“But what can they do? my teaching is perfect. I’ve put my whole life into it- I’ve worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slander, what can they do tome? Throw me out? Let them! ... Who are these people to say what I can or can’t do? My life’s my own – I haven’t sold it to any one for a job. My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those- no one! I’ll do what I like with myself and my life! I ‘ll decide...” (act-1,58)

Benare is defiant. As an individual, she must be allowed to lead her life the way she wishes. In any case, she is not worried about the outcome of the inquiry being held against her. She is vehement on keeping her professional life apart from her personal life when she refers to ‘one bit of slander’- her affair with professor Damle. The affair causes her to become a mother out of wedlock. That is the reason an inquiry is being held into her moral conduct and orders have already been issued for her dismissal .this weighs heavy on her mind. And she protests. In the argument Benare exposes her desire for her individuality self esteem. Everyone has his or her own passions, ambitions to achieve. We have freedom to live our lives according to our own wishes. It is for us to decide about our lives. No one can accept others authority and domination on his or her life. Benare stands as a representative of Modern woman who wants equality and liberty on par with men. They prove themselves to do what men do in their professions. In fact women are developing very rapidly. From the last decade there has been a great debate on women’s freedom and autonomy. “Just one in five women has her name on her house’s papers and four out of five need permission to visit a doctor,” the India Human Development survey revealed. (The Hindu, Dec19, 2014)

In Silence! The Court is in Session, an amateur theatre group arrives in a suburban village of Mumbai to stage a play on the trial of the American president Johnson for producing nuclear weapons. Members of this group represent the sub strata of society and their spiteful attitude towards the spinster school teacher Leela Benare , the protagonist of the play, reflects their malicious nature. A well targeted conspiracy is hatched against her and in the name of mock trial they expose and dissect her personal life. This reveals their basic hypocrisy and double standards. The play exposes the vulnerability of women in the traditional Indian society.

Before the play begins, they decide to play a game which is to stage a mock trial so as to familiarize the naïve Samant , a local boy , with the intricacies of court procedure. They select Miss Benare as the accused in the mock trial. As the trial proceeds everyone takes turns at exposing Miss Benare's personal life. Although Benare is a good teacher an enquiry has been instituted into her moral conduct by the school authorities as she is pregnant out of wedlock. She has suicidal tendencies as she carries a bottle of TIK-20, an insecticide in her purse. She has attempted suicide earlier when she was barely fourteen. She was thwarted by her own maternal uncle. She has tried to seduce and propose marriage to every male present there, and that she is to be dismissed soon on the charge of moral turpitude by the school where she works. The mental agony and anguish of Benare can be seen in her words. She says:

” But what can they do? My teaching is perfect. I have put my whole life into it. I've worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slander, what can they do to me? Throw me out? Let them! Who are these people to say what I can or can't do? My life is my own. I haven't sold it to any one for a job. My will is my own. .my wishes are my own.no one can kill these - no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life! I 'll decide...”(Act 1, 58).(6)

Something is obviously hanging heavily on Miss Benare's mind as she unleashes this tirade against those who are holding an enquiry into her teaching. Benare's opinion or belief about life is very clear. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It's very very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious. During the trial they charge her - “Miss Benare - you have been arrested on suspicion of crime of an extremely grave nature and brought as

prisoner before the bar of this court. Prisoner Benare, under section 302 of the Indian penal code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty of the afore said crime? To which Miss Benare is stunned as the atmosphere suddenly becomes extraordinarily somber. Sukatme getting under the skin of make belief character as counsel for the prosecution pounces on his pray, the unsuspecting and hapless Miss Benare. She is stunned by the change and is not aware of what is in store for her this mock trial. Miss Benare looks like a trespassed animal as she is in the clutches of an unfeeling and vicious Mrs. Kashikar, who regents her financial independence and lack of inhibitions in her conduct.

Miss Benare has been involved even when she was a child. As a fourteen year girl she has fallen in love with her maternal uncle and tried to commit suicide when he turned traitor and ran. Now she is a school teacher. She loves Prof. Damle, becomes pregnant but he rejects to marry. She has almost worshipped Damle for intellect 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. But Benare has experimented some blissful moments with him and she doesn't want to abort his childhood even though the mock law court orders her to do so. Her reply to all the charges against her comes out in a long monologue and when it ends, it is time for the actual show to begin.

Benare defends herself about falling in love with prof. Damle –“My body didn't die. I felt as if feelings were dead –but they hadn't died either then. Again, I fell in love. As a grown woman, I threw all my heart into it; I thought this will be different. This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It is not love at all—it's worship. And my intellectual god took the offering – and went his way. He didn't want my mind, or my devotion- he didn't care about them.

Arundhati Banerjee appreciates this out pouring of Benare's heart: “Leela Benare's defense of herself against the onslaughts of the upholders of social norms in along soliloquy, has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theatre. It is important to note here that Tendulkar leaves us in doubt as to whether or not Benare at all delivers the soliloquy, thus suggesting that in all probability what she has to say for herself is swallowed up by the silence imposed upon her by the authorities. In fact, during the court proceedings, on several occasions, her objections and

protestations are drowned by the judge 's cry of "Silence!" and the banging of the gravel. Benare 's monologue is reminiscent of Nora's declaration of independence but lacks the note of protest that characterizes the speech of Ibsen's heroine. It is a more self-justification than an attack on society's hypocrisies. It is poignant and sensitive and highlights the vulnerability of women in our society." (Arundhati Banerjee., p.ix) Tendulkar satirises the petty vanities and jealousies of all those involved in this mock trial. They seem to drive vicarious pleasure by torturing Benare and mouthing cliché-ridden platitudes about marriage, motherhood and woman's independence in traditional society.

In **VULTURES** also Tendulkar deals with Rama character who struggles to become a mother. He describes the agony and anguish of the woman who does not have children and how society looks at those women. Motherhood is such a great blessing and fulfillment of her 'self' which makes her feel complete.

Rama is an ordinary woman and is one of two woman characters in the play, the other being Manik, her sister in law. Rama is a new bride, wedded to Ramakant. Ramakant is the elder son of Hari Pitale known as Pappa in the play. Rama is young, she is very thin, but still quite good looking. In her bearing there is the innocence of a deer. She starts praying devoutly to the basil. The couple are waiting for children. They go to many temples and swamis and doctors. That day also Ramakant wants to take Rama to Achalananda swami, but she asks him what the use of it is? Ramakant says "use... what bloody use? You are a fool! So far we have kissed the feet of at least twenty swamis. In other words we should have had twenty kids, at least! Rama dead, it's all luck. You know. Man proposes, God disposes. But let's just go. This evening. Just for bloody fun!" (Act 1, Scene ii, 212).(1) Rama doesn't bear her husband taking the issues so carelessly and easily. Ramakant says it is luck to get children. Rama knows very well going to swami waste of time and money. But on the other hand Ramakant is spending lot of money and going everywhere and doing all sorts of things. But he never identifies that the original problem is with him only. He has become impotent by heavy, unending drink.

Rama is an ordinary woman who always desires as a normal woman after getting married. She wants to be called as mother. Actually she is waiting for that call. For no fault of her, she undergoes so much of pain. There is no one to share her feelings. Ramakant never spends time with her to talk. That leads Rama to Rajaninath, her brother-in-law. Rajaninath is an illegitimate son of Hari Pitale, and stepbrother to Ramakant. She treats him as a friend, he is the only relief to her that's why she tries to open up and share her inner anguish with him. She says "It's my fate to find everything without savour. Insipid. Tasteless. No colour to anything. No beauty." His reply puts out the inner side of Rajaninath. Both of them feel the same. Both lives are similar. Rajaninath is a poet and he uses his art to express his thoughts. Rama encourages not to worry and wishes him to get fame and recognition in the world, but he says "I myself don't know who I am."

She outbursts her inner pain. "Every day, a new death. Every minute, a thousand, million deaths. A pain like a million needles like that, each second. Endless seconds like that each day... never ending cruel year. So many years like this I've endured. So many a life time" but Rama never expressed her displeasure, and no complaints. Her question is how much more must she endure? How long must I carry these needles in my heart? How long must I dam up my tears? These questions are answerless. She thinks one day definitely she will lose control and then streams of blood will flow from her eyes. Her frustration is endless. She is fed up of visiting swamis. But Ramakant takes her everyday to a new mystic, a swami, an astrologer, a doctor. He says her to rub the sacred ash, ash of incense, talisman and performing whatever useless vows or diets they may give her. The truth is known to her heart only and to god. She tries to tell her husband but telling doesn't help her. It doesn't bring any understanding or comprehension between the wife and husband. Her hopes are consumptive and her efforts to become mother are more terrible than leprosy. She knows very well that her husband has become a victim of liquor. She can't understand how people drink so much. She wishes that all the learned men, healers, doctors, saints and sages of the world vanish from the earth. She hopes even then at least he will come to his senses to see the reality but in vain.

The reason for her barren womb is not the doctors, saints and sages. It's not even her fault. She says with utter despair and disparity "This womb is healthy and sound, I swear it! It was born to become a mother. This soil's rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root. If the seed's soaked in poison, if it's weak, feeble, lifeless, devoid of virtue – then why blame the soil?(Act2,Scene ii, 241).(3) She says even god doesn't help it. Her womb will decay without giving birth to a child. All the dreams, hopes will flow away one day. She says "Not once, not twice, but many, many times,, the same, the same thing! That the soil should be on fire with thirst... and should have to endure a fast without water." She asks Rajaninath directly and boldly if land doesn't get water day after day, month after month, year after year, season after season it will dry up. Then what will happen to people if thirst of their soil doesn't fulfill. Rama even remembers the practice of Sati. In ancient India and until the British come to India we had the practice of sati. Wives used to burn themselves when their husbands die. She praises them because they were very loyal to their husbands. But she cries for the living death of her wifehood. She feels she is committing sati every moment—"I burn! I am consumed!. Rama wants to get out of it once for all in what way is possible. The pain she undergoes whenever her husband talks of babies, whenever he makes disgusting drunken love to her, whenever he talks of astrologer, healer or a new swami. She knows what she is in need of but doesn't know how. It remains a dream for her to become a mother. She wants to remain in the same pitiable condition. "I know what to do. But not how. I don't have the courage to find out. I don't have the luck for it. I feel let me keep intact whatever wifehood I won. If the joy of being a mother is not to be mine, then let me at least live as a good wife. I am weak. I am timid. Despicable. Useless. Quiet. Quite useless"(Act 2,Sceneii,242).(4)

She willingly submits herself, her ever thing to Rajaninath. To the world it may seem as an illegal affair but for Rama it is her life's ambition. For Rajaninath he is a means to fulfill her desire. She doesn't think about virtue and vice at that moment. She wants to make her barren soil fertile and fruitful.it is a debilitating frustration that seeks redemption on consummating the

relationship with Rajaninath. For Rajaninath, too, it is a release from his sense of shame about his connection with the family of vultures. In *The Vultures* it is the pack of human vultures pitched against a defenseless female character, the wife of Ramakant. In *Silence!* It is Miss Benare against a pack of middle class vultures. In *The vultures*, Rajaninath, the basted brother, suffers for the defenseless female in the play. In *Silence!* It was the character of Samant who did it for the psychologically mauled Miss Benare.

In **KAMALA**, Tendulkar has raised the issue of subjugation of woman in the Indian family system. He depicts how Sarita, wife of Jaising Jadhav, is treated as slave by her husband who does not hesitate to buy a woman to expose the reality of a fresh trade and tries to present a sensational news at the cost of her dignity. Tendulkar exposes the excruciating pain and the psyche of Sarita in this play. Jaising Jadhav, a well-known young journalist working as an associate editor in English language daily, lives with his Sarita in a small bungalow in the fashionable New Delhi neighbourhood of Neeti Bagh. The opening scene of the play itself shows the position of Sarita in her house. When her uncle receives the phone call from someone, she asks for the name of the caller, not for the sake of knowing, but to inform to her husband as she was instructed to do so. The phone rings several times and she records the name of the caller. We come to know from her talking on phone that her husband doesn't give much importance to her and so he never informs where he goes and when he returns. She comes to know about his arrival through an office phone call. She says that she has been habituated to that. She tells her uncle "often my husband isn't at home. And I would not know where to look for him. I've got used to it."

Sarita, who has been an independent girl before her marriage, has come from a princely house. It's very evident in the play that Jaising's friend Jain calls Sarita 'lovely bonded labourer.' Any rebellion on the part of wife is bound to show her real place in her home. An Indian wife is not supposed to open her mouth before others. That's why Jaising, when he has to answer to the questions of Kakasaheb, loses his temper. When Sarita tells him that she had to tell Kakasaheb because he had asked her, Jaising retorts rather sorely why don't you admit that you told him?

We have many instances of loose temper and humiliating ways. Jaisingh is just like most of the menfolk in a patriarchal society who does not have the least respect for any woman be it his own wife or any other woman. He buys a village woman kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees to create sensational news about the selling of human beings. He brings her to his home only to exploit and deceive her. When he brings kamala to his home he says to her to think of that house as her own. The open auction for women at Luharguda discloses the pathetic plight of women.

Jaisingh: The men who want to bid - handle the woman to inspect them. Whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel in the breast, in the waist, in their thighs and... (14)

He is impatient to take kamala to the press conference as she is , in her torn and dirty sari, without allowing her to have a bath. When Sarita says, she's a woman, after all. And her sari is torn, the voice of Jaisingh rises, I know, I know! You don't have to tell me, understand. I have a very good idea of all that. Again in the second scene when Sarita objects to his decision of taking kamala to the orphanage, he says, " it is I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else." Poor kamala, being an innocent village woman thinks she has been brought to love in this house for ever as she was told by her master, Jaisingh. Her sympathetic words for Sarita open latter's eyes to the reality of her status in her own house. Sarita realizes that she is living a life of slave in her own house. she says, "I saw that 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 . slaves don't have rights, do they, kakasaheb? They must only slave away. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says, cry. When he says pick up the phone, they must pick it up. When he says , come to party, they must go. When he says, lie on the bed, they ... I will never think that this is my home.(46)

Kakasaheb concerned tries to console her saying that there is nothing unusual in Jaisingh's behavior and that the behavior of most of the male in our society is like that. He even accepts that in his times he was not different from Jaisingh as a far as his treatment with his wife was concerned. His arguments reveal the mentality of patriarchal society and the discussion between

the niece and the uncle can be called a fine example of the views prevailing in such a society on the issue of right to equality for women.

The restrictions on women in India are not to be found anywhere in the world. The wife can not leave the husband, if she crosses the boundaries the society does not respect her. She has no courage to break the walls suffocating patriarchy forts. Because of her qualities of compassion, endurance benevolence, sacrifice and love for her family and her husband, she cannot leave her husband in adverse circumstances. She yields before her fate and always chooses the traditional path to be humiliated again and again. That's why when Jaisingh faces the threat of dismissal from his job, Sarita postpones her revolt. The play reveals the fact that the annihilation of self of woman. Freedom, for a wife, is the fruit of forbidden tree. If she dares to taste the fruit , she will have to be ready to be expelled from her heaven by her god to be devoured by so many hungry wolves.

Silence! The Court is in Session and The Vultures and Kamala are ample examples to Tendulkar's wonderful insight into the relationship between man and woman and the status of woman in this patriarchal society.

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