



MANIFESTO OF WOMEN'S STATUS IN SOCIETY WITH REFERENCE TO THE PLAYS OF JOHN OSBORNE AND VIJAY TENDULKAR

PROF DR. MOHD. NAZZAR

Supervisor

KAVITA

Research Scholar,
Dept of English
BMU, Asthal Bohar, Rohtak
(HR) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Women are usually exploited and suppressed in the normal pecking order of patriarchal society. They are treated as a commodity or object in certain communities. They are suppressed, subdued and restrained in the shackles of matrimony. They are exploited physically, psychologically, economically and sexually too. A woman has to go by way of the will of her husband in her whole life. Even wedding band seems too weighty to wear not of its mass but because of her matrimonial constraints. But she wishes to liberate herself and be bold and dominant like the other sex. However there are some cases when woman does not accept meekly all the suppressions and protest against the male-dominated society to achieve her identity and place. Sometimes she stands parallel to masculine gender or even outmaneuvers him by her wits and actions. It is seen that woman is involved in the two opposite phases of contentment and resistance, of capitulation and rebellion. Literature does show the different phases of woman's position in the society in the different ages. John Osborne English playwright and Vijay Tendulkar, Marathi playwright have shown the woman undergoing through both the processes in his plays. If Laxmi is submissive then Champa is aggressive. Tendulkar's Jyoti and Osborne's Jean are described as daring resolute whereas Vijaya has been presented as alpha female who leads the male world.

KAVITA

DR. MOHD. NAZZAR

1 Page



Alison and Sarita are made up of the same material. The paper is being designed to discuss the female characters in the famous plays of Osborne and Tendulkar by analyzing their struggle for their survival.

Key words: *submission, rebel, suppression, masochism, feminine, tradition.*

INTRODUCTION

The present paper is an attempt to discuss the woman psyche when she wishes to get her rights and fights on different grounds. Gender bias is universal as women possess fewer rights and prospects than men. The word 'gender' describes socially assigned roles and responsibilities to men and women where later has lesser job opportunities and lesser political representations as the society maintains conservative thoughts for women. Gender inequality can be observed at all levels from home to workplace. Violence against women is just like a pandemic that affects the entire world. The data speak that about 35% of women suffer physical, sexual or psychological mistreatment.

Literature has played a key role in influencing the social attitudes to lessen the miseries of womankind. Vijay Tendulkar, the famous Marathi playwright, exposes the different states of women in the patriarchal Indian society through his major translated plays *Silence! The Court is in Session, Kamala, Sakharam Binder, Kanyadaan, Encounter in Ubugland, Vultures etc.* The playwright has justified his female characters. If Kamala, Laxmi, Rama, Gauri are portrayed as subjugated and suppressed, Champa and Vijaya are manifested as leading woman while Sarita and Leela Benare desire to rebel against male society and deny to give in. Leela Benare and Sarita simmer against their male-counterpart though not openly. Sooner or later this simmering would take the shape of volcano that can burst at any moment and would present the essential image of the woman of twenty first century. If we talk about the plays of John Osborne, the place of woman is secondary either as preposition just for the help of masculine or to keep him in superlative position.

Conventional Subjugated Woman

Laxmi in the play *Sakharam Binder* manifests the picture of a conventional conservative woman whose survival is impossible without the support of her spouse. She believes in patriarchal codes. She has exceptional power of tolerance. In spite of bearing the torture first from her husband and later from Sakharam she wishes to live in the male company. The decree of Sakharam, however unusual yet accepted by Laxmi as he says:

I like everything in order here. Won't put up with slipshod ways. If you're careless, I'll show you the door. Don't ask for any pity then. And don't blame

KAVITA

DR. MOHD. NAZZAR

2 Page



me either. I'm the master here. I don't care if they treat me like dirt outside. But a house must be a home, you understand? (125)

Sakharam further says in same arbitrary and imperious tone to Laxmi,

"May be I'm a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper. Why may be? I am all that. And I drink, but I must be respected in my own house. I am the master here. . . . And one last thing . . . you'll have to be a wife to me" (125-126).

She readily follows all the instructions given by Sakharam at the very first day of her entrance at his home. She takes him as her husband, master, savior and even God and wishes to be dead in his lap.

Tendulkar presented another woman Champa in the same play as a foil to Laxmi. She is not subjugated and suppressed like Laxmi but aggressive and angry young woman who deserts her alcoholic husband willingly for his ruthlessness. She never scared of her husband and of his beatings rather she hits and abuses him. But the playwright presented Champa as the product of patriarchal society who requires male aid for the survival and thus she gets shelter in Sakharam's house, a kind of compromise or her utmost need in the world full of pack of wolves. Sakharam also asserts the fact while persuading her,

". . . you'll have to live like a bitch then sleep with every fellow you meet. Yes, sleep with all of them!" (171).

Champa remains as the victim of conservative society. Her relations with Dawood are not approved by Sakharam. However he does not possess any legal right over her but puts her to death due to the offence of illegitimate relations with Dawood that proves hegemony prevalent in male society.

John Osborne in his play *The Entertainer* shows the same dependent behavior of Phoebe and Jean's mother however, Jean is portrayed as modern. Although Jean mother knows the illegitimate relations of her husband Archie Rice yet she bears and respects the matrimonial relations. But she undergoes through a psychic struggle and dies of heart failure. Archie Rice brings Phoebe in his life as second woman but does not respect and loves her. He always teases her by making fun of her. He spends a little time with her and craves for sex with other women. Archie reveals his will of getting married to a girl of the age of his daughter Jean. The status of phoebe or Jean's mother is not much better than Laxmi or champa of Tendulkar's female character. Jimmy's thinking about women in the play *Looking Back in*



Anger shows the stereo-typical conservative thoughts of the patriarchal society. Female characters are portrayed as flat and the victims of hatred of manliness.

Modernized New Woman

Tendulkar another famous women character, Sarita of the play *Kamala* is an image of modern woman who is always seduced by male counterpart, and compelled to suppress her wish to be free and courageous to raise her voice. The latent fierce feelings remain smoked with internal conflict owing either to fake dignity and decorum or eventual horrifying aftermaths. Sarita, an educated wife of journalist Jaisingh Jadhav serves him like a slave as she fulfills his social, physical and domestic needs without any complaint. She attends and writes every telephonic call for her husband in his absence. But a simple question asked by an illiterate woman Kamala awakens her from the slumber of slavery. She comprehends the hypocritical behavior of her husband and wishes to expose his real character publically through a press conference. She says to her uncle Kakasaheb:

. . . I have no rights at all in this house. Because I'm salve, 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 he says pick up the phone, they must pick it up. When he says, come to a party, they must go. When he says, lie on the bed-they. (46)

Kakasaheb being male representative takes it as a tradition and belief of the society. As Steven Goldenberg observed that patriarchy has a base in biology as woman is weaker than man in power. Exactly, Arundhati Banerjee says in the Introduction of *Five plays of Tendulkar*:

From the formal point of view, *Kamala* has nothing new to contribute to Marathi theatre. But then, Tendulkar has always claimed that it is the content of his work that determines the forms. And it is difficult to think of any alternative structure into which the central theme of *Kamala* could be cast. But the evaluation of the role of an Indian woman within the institution called marriage, considered to be the holiest of the holy in our society, definitely provides a completely novel point of view showing that women are still mere slaves to their male owners in Indian society in the latter half of the twentieth century. One should take note here that all the three female characters in *Kamala* are in some way or the other subjected by the dominant male character Jaisingh Jadhav, who occupies the centre of the plot. (*Introduction*, xvii - xviii)



There is a little difference between Tendulkar's Sarita and Osborne's Alison. Both are hailing from privileged and educated upper class yet dominated by their husbands. Both have framed themselves into domestic world. Alison even endures Jimmy's invectives and verbosity. Just like Tendulkar's male characters Osborne's Jimmy describes Alison as a 'monument to non-attachment' (21) and little later calls her 'Lady Pusillanimous' (22). He criticizes her for being too noisy and says:

She is so clumsy, I watch for her to do the same things every night. The way she jumps on the bed, as if she were stamping on someone's face and draws the curtains back with a great clatter, in that casually destructive way of hers. It's like someone launching a battleship. (24)

Alison's tolerance to Jimmy's moods and whims is highly admirable. Unquestioningly, she annoys and hurts at Jimmy's sarcastic and abusive remarks about her family, yet like Sarita and Leela Benare she remains silent.

Leela Benare, female protagonist of Tendulkar's most famous play *Silence! The Court is in Session* has been described as a free-lancing educated woman who little cares the people and the society. She is teacher by profession and economically independent. She is perfectly dedicated to her teaching. Every action she performs is just for her students and their well-being and receives respect and love in return. She is the member of artist group 'Sonar Moti Tenement' and her devotion to duty, enthusiasm and dynamism to life generate jealous amongst her companions.

Unlike other women characters of Tendulkar, she does not depend upon any male associate for livelihood and shelter. She decides herself her wishes and aims and knows well how to fulfill them without bothering about traditions and customs of society. She asserts,

"My life is my own—I haven't sold it to anyone 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!" (58)

Modern, educated and self-reliant Miss Benare becomes helpless when the society hurts her emotionally. She is sexually exploited by her male-co-actor Mr. Damle, a professor and family man. In the mock-trial where Miss Benare is treated as chief accused because of her pregnancy out of wedlock but professor Damle goes scot free and is called only for witness. But the allegation of infanticide that is used just for rehearsal turns into a verdict. Mr. Kashikar announces the punishment at the end. He says, "Prisoner Miss Benare. Under Section No 302 of the Indian Penal Code, you have been accused of the crime of infanticide.



Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime?" (*Silence!* . . . , 74) She is sacked from the job of teacher that means snatching her loving part of the life.

Miss Benare yearns to speak against the conservative customs of society but does not dare to do the same. The soliloquy that occurs at the end of the play puts the hidden concealed desire of a broken woman on view against her male companions and the established principles of the social order. Here, we find that Miss. Benare's circumstances disturb her mentally and emotionally but she is powerless to change the society with double-stranded people who dishonored her first physically and then psychologically on a public level. Such disturbed situations are the common occurrences for the women that lead the individual to spread chaos and frustration. It shows masochism in society where woman's wish does not exist.

Jyoti Yadunath Devalikar another feminine character of Tendulkar's play *Kanyadaan* has been presented as a new woman. Unlike Leela Benare she does not suppress her feelings but accepts the consequences earnestly. Jyoti Devalikar, an educated young girl belongs to socialist parents who believe in idealism and work for removing the miseries of oppressed people. Her mother Seva and father Nath Devalikar both struggle for the rise of marginalized and fight against the evil of 'untouchability'. Jyoti captures her parents' dream as the truth of life and set it as a goal. She decides to marry a Dalit youth to make over the dream of equality into reality.

However her parents allow her to get husband of her own choice, but Arun Athavale, her Dalit husband presents the picture of masochism. She has been caught in the trap of an aggressive fellow that cannot bear the upper class superiority of his wife. He treats her like an uneducated woman of his community. Jyoti, being the woman of indomitable courage, does not believe in running away but to face the situation. She accepts the cruel behavior and the beatings of her husband without any complaint. She experiences the harsh realities of life. She can understand the difference between the idealistic world shown by her father and the real world presented by her husband. She comes to know that beastliness and goodliness go side by side. One cannot free himself from intrinsic mores and practices. She alleges her father that he did not teach his children the realism and has made the twenty years of her life waste in ignorance. On the other hand, Arun's crude conduct makes her familiar with the real cruel world that changes her into a new woman. What Carden said about 'New Woman' exactly approves the potential of Leela Benare and Jyoti:

I want to have part in creating a new society . . . I want women to have something to say in their own lives . . . I have never reached my potential because of social conditions. I'm not going to get the reward, I have been



crippled. . . . I want to see the kind of system that facilitates the use of potential. (12)

Jyoti's last words illustrate her potential to change the world by dissolving her identity. Her utterance, "I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devalikar now, I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger" (70) is worth praising that keep her in the category of New Woman. Her resolution to bring a change in society happens to get success at some extent however it takes away her upper class identity.

Osborne's Jean , Archie's daughter in the play *The Entertainer* does not perform the role of puppet. She discovers her own identity and does cherish her longings. To make her financially independent she teaches the group of boys against the reluctance of Graham her fiancée. She comes to a decision of break up with Graham due to his dominance and unnecessary interruption in her decisions. Graham objects as her success might threaten his dominated world. She also advises her father and scolds him when he thinks to deceive his second wife Phoebe. Exactly, she has been described as a new woman.

Modern Alpha Female

Vijay Tendulkar also presents the virtual image of the woman of twenty first century. As we know modern woman is quite different from traditional one. She is not only the epitome of love but a creator, preserver and can be a destroyer too. Today, she plays multiple roles in a single day of her life. If she is a boss, principal, manager at her workplace, is a nurse cum teacher (for children), friend cum psychiatrist (for husband) and a house keeper too. Even she can surpass her male counterpart in intellect and wits. Such a woman has been demonstrated by the playwright in the portrayal of Vijaya, the Princess of Umbugland in his play *Encounter in Umbugland*. She beats five experienced ministers of the island by her wit. The girl, who is secluded and careless in the beginning and needs help of her attendant in all matters, becomes an skilled diplomat, seeking the obedience of courtly manners. She takes main decisions of the state autonomously. Arundhati Banerjee in Introduction of *Five Plays* utters:

And of course, there is the indomitable Princess Vijaya, herself the daughter of the autocratic king, who turns the tables on her advisers and refuses to be their pawn. Tendulkar has portrayed this character with utmost care. There is a definite development in her from a headstrong, self-opinionated but politically inexperienced young princess to an intelligent yet whimsical ruler who devices her own (successful) methods of vanquishing her enemies. (xi)



The journey that begins for the well-being of the people, for uplifting them turns into power politics. She would not let anyone to treat her as a puppet so she executes her powers on ministers and asks them to bow before her and to address her as 'Your Majesty'. She makes a plan to raise the status of the tribe and resolves to execute it intently since she perceives her stature rising as the plan commences. She says to Prannarayan:

The plan will raise my stature on the island. I will get the credit for achieving what has never been achieved before. This plan will make everyone understand that I am not just my father's daughter, nor a puppet ruler. From now on I plan to rule in earnest. (317)

Here, a new phase of Queen Vijaya has been presented that reveals her inherited diplomacy. The acts and counteracts of ministers and Queen, her rendering wit and diplomacy give hold of power in the hands of Queen Vijaya. The ministers feel elated at the anticipated death of the Queen by the angry mob whereas Vijaya with her bureaucratic intelligence and with the help of her people in the mob transforms the brain of mob against the ministers. This is the victory of Vijaya's championship that presents Vijaya as an alpha female who is not subjugated and suppressed like conventional woman but seizes her power and position from masculine society.

CONCLUSION

Both the playwrights have discussed different phases in the journey of women's status through the female characters portrayed in his plays. The journey starts from conventional suppressed woman who has no individual identity but serves only as preposition of male counterpart. The educated woman gets her identity and economic stability but retains her silence due to adverse aftermaths. It is the second phase of woman's journey towards freedom and equality that is a bit far from the alpha female. The modern phase describes the woman like Vijaya who can lead the male world. The playwrights set an ideal model of woman for the women of contemporary society through the example of women characters like Jean, Jyoti and Vijaya.

WORK CITED

Banerjee, Arundhati. "Introduction". *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*. OUP, 1992.

Corden, Maren Lockwood. *The New Feminist Movement*. Russel Sage Foundation, 1974.



Osborne, John. *Look Back in Anger*. Faber, 1957.

---. *The Entertainer*. Faber, 1995.

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, The Vultures, Encounter in Ubugland*, Trans. Priya Adarkar, *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

---. *Kanyadaan*. Trans. Gouri Ramnarayan, Oxford UP, 1996.

---. *Sakharam Binder*, Trans. Kumud Mehta and Shanta Gokhale, *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, Oxford University Press, 1995.