



VIJAY TENDULKAR AND MAHESH DATTANI'S SELECT PLAYS: VOICING THE MARGINALIZED

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to discuss how Mahesh Dattani and Vijay Tendulkar have highlighted the miseries of women folk in society. The cruelty inflicted on women exposes the intricate working of a patriarchal system that is instrumental in marginalizing them by giving them neither the rights nor access to resources. Dattani and Tendulkar, have written at different times and their canvass has been different but both have raised this issue through their plays. Both reflect on role change and rise of the feminine gender struggling with the dominant discourses of the system to gain the respect and a space of their own. Issues and problems associated especially with females- have been staged with the motive of changing the socio-cultural psyche conditioned by the dominant discourses.

Keywords- Marginalization, feminism, Gender, women's perspective, power

INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani, for his collection of plays Final Solution and Other Plays, became the first playwright in the English language to win the Sahitya Akademi award in 1998. Since founding the theater company "Playpen" in 1984, he has directed a number of plays with subjects ranging from modern to classical Greek. He created his first full-length play, Where There is a Will, in 1986. He has been a full-time theater artist since 1995.

Padma Bhushan recipient Vijay Tendulkar was a well-known dramatist, screenwriter for films and television, literary essayist, and social commentator from India. Numerous of his pieces have been translated and presented in numerous Indian languages, and many of them have become classics of Marathi theater.

A key recurrent theme in both dramatists' works is feminist themes and the marginalization of women. In this essay, Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence* and Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* are discussed and analyzed! The Court has convened. This is an attempt to talk about how the tragedies of women in society have been emphasized by both playwrights. The violence committed against women reveals the complex mechanisms of a patriarchal society that contributes to their marginalization by denying them access to resources and rights. Despite writing at separate periods and with distinct subjects on their minds, Dattani and Tendulkar have both brought up this topic in their plays. Tendulkar wrote during a period when women's liberation was only beginning to gain traction. Women were unhappy and frustrated, but they were unable to act on these emotions because they were buried deep inside their





subconscious. Tendulkar's characters are earthy, taken from the street, whereas Dattani's are urban, educated folks; Tendulkar grasped the seething instability and gave expression to it. The female characters written by contemporary author Dattani are more autonomous both socially and intellectually than those written by Tendulkar. "No theater could sanely flourish until there was an umbilical connection between what was happening on the stage and what was happening in the world," theater critic Kenneth Tynan famously stated. One kind of art that is very important to our society is theater. Just as a story needs to be relatable to its audience in order to be liked and appreciated, theater needs to have a symbiotic relationship with society in order to be relevant.

The females must rise above societal norms and restrictions in their quest to discover their unique selves. The dramatists have focused on women's struggles and the covert power dynamics that support women in creating their own identities. The playwrights challenge the societal order that takes advantage of women in general and give voice to the oppressed by looking for the unique identities of their protagonists. In contrast to Aristotle, Vijay Tendulkar's protagonists are not heroes. These are actually anti-heroes with low morality and human frailties. In contrast to Tendulkar's figures, Dattani's characters are heroic in the sense that they exemplify the virtues of humanity. They spread social change at the level of gender and cultural norms. His plays always conclude with a discussion about letting go of gender standards in order to realize one's unique identity.

In actuality, power politics—which create gender norms that support patriarchy—are what govern gender norms. Subtle tactics that place the man at the top of the social hierarchy create their significance, marginalizing the female in the process. The actual entity goes through so many cosmetic changes that it consistently reflects what society wants to see rather than the true nature of it.

Dattani's powerful topics and incredibly inventive methods have transformed Indian theater. Similar to numerous other authors, he cannot be classified as a feminist who would advocate for a political agenda for women's liberation; yet, his sincere and unwavering concern for the status of women and the injustice they encounter in this patriarchal society is apparent. He is a socially conscious dramatist who understands his duty to the community. "Carrying on with the business of holding a mirror up to society" is how Mahesh Dattani sees it. He gently challenges his audience to consider the issues he observes in modern-day India, but he does not provide answers. He writes for middle-class metropolitan readers.

The drama *Bravely Fought the Queen* by Dattani portrays the domestic dynamics of a typical Indian joint family. It tells the tale of an urban upper middle class family that lives in Bangalore. There are two boys in the Trivedi family: Jiten and Nitin, and Baa. Praful, along with his two sisters Dolly and Alka, belong to another household. Dolly and Alka, two sisters who are married to the Trivedi brothers, are the central characters of the narrative. Dolly is wed to Jiten, her older brother. In the play, Baa is an elderly woman whose husband has passed away, but she is constantly plagued by flashbacks to the physical violence she endured at his hands. Every time, Baa encourages her sons to abuse their wives. Dolly gives birth to a spastic child named Daksha after Jiten beats her. Praful arranges for his younger sister Alka to wed Nitin, the Trivedi family's younger son. In actuality, Nitin and Praful are gay and intend to use their union as a cover for their extramarital relationship. Lalitha is a theatrical character who pays a visit to the Trivedi family. Lalitha is a contemporary woman who is completely enamored with bonsai. In symbolic terms, bonsai stands for Indian women who are denied complete freedom by patriarchal standards. The title of the play has been taken from a translation of a Hindi poem about the indomitable Rani of Jhansi who fought valiantly till the last breathe of her life. The play has Naina Devi's Thumri as the background music. The thumri in the background of the play has a symbolic meaning as Naina Devi, though the queen of Kapurthala but loved to sing thumri, a style characterized





by sensuality and usually sung by the tawaifs (whores). In the play, Alka, Dolly and Lalitha are planning a ball where Alka desires to be dressed as The Rani of Jhansi and Dolly wants to dress as a 'tawaif.' Later in the play we see Dolly as a strong character who stands up both for Alka and her own self. Their spirit can be seen in their conversation:

Lalitha. The poem was ...let me see.
 Alka (passionate). 'Jhansi ki Rani'.
 Dolly. Bravely fought the manly queen
 Dolly. For what reason is manly?
 Alka. Because she was brave.
 Lalitha. Full of manly valour. You know- it
 might not be a
 Bad idea if Dolly came as the Rani of Jhansi
 for the ball!Alka. I would like to come dressed
 like that! Dolly, can I
 Come as the queen instead of you?
 Please?.....
 Dolly. And we can all go- bravely fought the
 queen! (Alka stops swishing the imaginary
 sword) Full of manly valour... Lalitha. What
 would you like to come as, Dolly? Dolly. A
 tawaif.

Dattani uses the Trivedi daughters-in-law to show how the emotions, desires and feelings of females have no significance for men. The men are unscrupulous, self indulgent and dominate the lives of the women so much that the women are pushed to the brink of fantasy. Baa is old, widowed, bed ridden and lives alternatively with Dolly and Alka. She is full of contempt for her husband as he was dominating, hurt her physically and was brutal with their sons. Baa dislikes Jiten as he resembles his father and loves Nitin as he resembles her and is subdued like her. Baa represents the first generation of female victimization. Besides being a victim Baa is also the tormentor as she always instigates her sons to be violent with their wives. This attitude makes Baa the patriarch to her daughters-in-law. Dolly and Alka represent the second generation of female victimization. Dolly, the elder of the two sisters of Praful is married to Jiten. Jiten is a symbol of male domination. Jiten is violent with his wife, Dolly, and enjoys sexual relationships with other women. Dolly escapes her world by fantasizing about Kanhaiya, a cook of the house. Alka is a greater sufferer than Dolly as she suffers the cruelty of both her brother and her husband. Her brother, Praful, arranges her marriage to Nitin to continue his homosexual relationship with Nitin. Alka does not know this and leads a lonely and unconsummated married life. To escape from her realities she takes to alcohol. Even though a modern woman, Alka has deep rooted patriarchal influences on her psyche and does not raise her voice against the men who victimize her. She is ready to overlook Nitin's behavior and she says:

I admit that I haven't always been a perfect housewife. Furthermore, you haven't been a very good spouse. Who, however, is grumbling?
 Nobody is flawless! (laughs) Nobody is flawless.

Dolly and Jiten's spastic daughter Daksha is a symbol of the third generation of women who have been abused. The Trivedi family is hosting Lalitha as a guest. Lalitha is the reason why the viewer is able to peek inside Alka and Dolly's life. Dolly and Alka act as if they are performing for her. The outside





world, which is distinct from the Trivedi family, is represented by Lalitha. Lalitha has the autonomy to make judgments for herself, unlike Alka. She is in charge of deciding whether or if she and her spouse Sridhar should start a family.

By detailing how women have been utilized as a vehicle for the projection of sociocultural corruption, the demise of human values, and a representation of the lives of the helpless, Dattani and Tendulkar both sensitively draw attention to the suffering of women in society. Women suffer not just at the hands of males but also from other women who uphold the patriarchal system and, on occasion, from society at large. In 1967, Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* was performed. Tendulkar conveys how women had to suffer in silence and reflects the conflicting standards of society by using the stage inside a stage. Despite having some hatred against one other, they kept their voices down. Tendulkar saw the confusion in the women's thoughts. The drama is about a woman's struggle against the norm in society. Leela Benare, the main character, is a self-reliant and committed educator. "The Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association" is an amateur theater organization that she joins. Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkesh, Karnik, and Prof. Damle are the other members of this amateur theater troupe. Mr. Kashikar leads the association as its chairman, while Mrs. Kashikar is a stay-at-home mom who lives in her husband's shadow. The couple sponsors Balu Rokhde, an orphan, and does not have any children of their own. Karnik works as a performer in experimental theater, Ponshe is a clerk, and Sukhatme practices law. Prof. Damle appears in the play but is not seen. In order to undermine Leela Benare's reputation and expose her connection with Prof. Damle, a married father of five children, her fellow performers in the play plan to stage a fictitious trial. Sukhatme proposes that Miss Binare be named as the primary suspect. "Miss Leela Benare, you have been arrested on suspicion of a crime of a very serious nature and brought as a prisoner before the bar of this court," announces Ponshe. (CP74). The accusation of "infanticide" against Miss Leela Benare is made by Mr. Kashikar, who is depicting a judge. Miss Benare's personality is shown in many ways throughout the play. She is vivacious, independent, and fearless in the first act. She makes fun of Sukhatme, Ponshe, Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Prof. Damle, and even Mr. Kashikar. The phrase "Silence" and the sound of the gavel regularly silence her attempts to speak out against society throughout the second act. As the play goes on, Miss Benare is tortured by all of the participants in the pretend trial, which turns into a real trial. The sadist inclinations of a culture that enjoys causing suffering to others are exposed by this torment. She is tortured by Mrs. Kashikar in addition to Sukhatme and Ponshe. Ms. Benare expresses her disapproval of the society that has imprisoned her in a monologue that occurs in Act Three. She discloses that at the juvenile age of fourteen, she falls in love with her maternal uncle. Nobody wants to support her in her desire to wed him. After using her body, he abandons her. She develops feelings for a professor as she gets older. Although she has a deep affection for him, he also abuses her physically and abandons her. Although society forbids women from becoming mothers without marriage, she is expecting his kid. The two males are to blame for her suffering. Although the guys were uncommitted, society mocks her rather than raising concerns about them. Binare presents Professor Damle as:

Additionally, we have an intellectual. That is, a person who takes great pleasure in his knowledge of books. But he disappears the moment a real-world issue arises! covers his head. Today, he is not present. Will not be attending either. He wouldn't risk it!





Even though Leela Benare is innocent, no one seems to comprehend the fact that she is innocent. Because of her straightforwardness, she had faith in the two guys, but none of them appreciated her straightforwardness. Her innocence, simplicity, self-respect, and dignity are all being mocked by this. In Act III, she expresses her emotions as follows:

I did commit a sin. I was in love with my brother of the mother...Still, he was the one who approached me...I was just fourteen years old! I had no idea what sin was in the first place. I demanded that we get married...They were unanimous in their opposition to it. And my courageous guy turned his back and went away...I experienced love once again. When I was an adult lady. When I imagined that this would be different...

In other words, it is love for a peculiar mind. It is not really love at all; rather, it is adoration!

Upon the altar of my worship, I presented my body as an offering. My intellectual deity accepted the sacrifice, and then he vanished into the distance.

Silence! The Court is in Session, is an important play which throws light on the repressive nature of society.

This is Tendulkar's way of expressing his dissatisfaction with the societal norms that have been established by those in positions of authority.

Those who are suffering are the ladies. In spite of the fact that they have a desire to talk, they have never been allowed to do so.

Both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani make substantial contributions to the field of gender sensitization in their plays. Not only is this a big repeating topic, but it is also a significant contribution. A repositioning of women in India was something that the two authors desired to accomplish. In a sensitive manner, Tendulkar has brought attention to the plight of women people by stating that they have been used as a vehicle for the projection of socio-cultural corruption, religious decay, the death of human values, and immoral politics, which have strangled the life of all those who are helpless. People, regardless of their gender, are victims of power in general; yet, women are often the ones that suffer the most from this phenomenon. When compared to other playwrights in India, Dattani is a significant step forward in terms of addressing gender problems that are associated with the oppressed groups in society. He engages in introspection on the transformation of roles and the emergence of new marginalized gender categories that are battling against the prevailing discourses of the system in order to get respect and a space of their own. Issues and challenges that are particularly related with women have been presented with the intention of altering the sociocultural mentality that is conditioned by the prevailing discourses.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani's
2. To study Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani's select plays: voicing the marginalized

CONCLUSION





In the plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani, the marginalized emerge as central figures who break societal norms, often revealing the hypocrisy and rigid structures that confine them. Tendulkar's works, deeply rooted in Marathi theater, often portray the marginalized through gender, class, and social power dynamics. His characters, especially women, fight against oppressive patriarchal structures, seeking agency in a world that denies them autonomy. Plays like *Sakharam Binder* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* expose the vulnerabilities of individuals who, despite being part of society, are treated as outsiders. Tendulkar doesn't offer easy resolutions but instead presents the harsh realities faced by those marginalized by systemic inequalities. His plays challenge audiences to reflect on societal complicity in perpetuating these injustices. On the other hand, Mahesh Dattani's plays focus more on the contemporary urban middle class, addressing themes like sexuality, gender identity, and the invisibility of marginalized communities within a progressive facade. His portrayal of characters grappling with societal expectations and personal desires highlights the struggle of LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and other marginalized groups to carve out spaces of acceptance. In plays like *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani not only addresses the marginalization of these groups but also presents a critique of how society often ignores or erases their existence. He gives voice to those silenced, pushing forward narratives that challenge the status quo and reveal the deep-seated biases within the very institutions that claim to be progressive.

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