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Character Portrayal: A Comparative Study of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad's Plays

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Abstract: ***India has the richest tradition in theatre which is closely related to ancient rituals and seasonal festivities of the country. The earliest contribution to the Indian theatre dating between 2000 BCE and 4th century CE is Bharata Muni's 'Natya Shastra' which describes a theory of theatrical performance based on the style and motion. Theatre in India started as narrative with recitation, singing and dancing become an integral elements of the theatre. A search for an authentic Indian theatre had begun within fifty years of William Jones' translation Shakuntala in 1798. Some of the notable Indian playwrights are Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Kalidasa , Badal Sarkar , Mohan Rakesh, Rabindranath Tagore. The objective of the paper is to study and compare the various women characters of Tendulkar's 'Kamala', 'Sakharam Binder', 'The Vultures' and Karnad's selected plays 'Nagamandala' and 'Hayavadana'. Karnad and Tendulkar are the giants of Indian theatre , who explored the overt and covert violence in human beings and revaluated the socio-cultural , historical , gender , caste and abided the consciousness of vulnerability in Indian social hierarchy (V.M Madge and Tutan Mukherjee).***

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian theatre was supposed to be the classical theatre. It has rich tradition in theatre which is closely related to the various art forms like dancing, singing and narrative, becoming the integral elements of theatre. With the translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* Indian theatre gained fame worldwide. Bharatamuni's *Natyashastra* was the earliest and most elaborate piece on dramaturgyand performing arts he also describes the theory of theatrical performances based on the style and motion. The early modern Indian theatre was an imitation of British theatre when several new concepts were introduced which altered the nature and tradition of Indian theatre. The first modern play in India was staged in Calcutta towards the end of the eighteenth century. The play was in English and was directed by an European. The first play in English written by an Indian is *'The Persecuted, or Dramatic Scenes of Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo society in Calcutta'*(1831). Indian and Marathi theatre took a quantum leap. It discarded the decorative, entertainment-oriented attitude that existed in the middle class commercial theatre.. Vijay Tendulkar is considered to be the father of Modern Marathi theatre movement. He has been a forefront of the Marathi drama and stage. He is the most notable of the first generation of the post independence writers in India. His works focused on man's fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert and overt violence in human beings. His women characters are among the most convincing in Indian theatre. He wrote twenty eight full length plays, twenty four of them as one act plays, twenty film scripts, two novels and numbers of essays, short stories and pieces for columns that he used to write in newspapers. Some of his notable plays are *'Silence! The Court is in Session', The Vultures, Kamala, Sakharam Binder, GhashiramGotwal, Baby.*

One of the major characteristics of post-independence Indian plays is to use myth to make a contemporary statement. Girish Karnad was one such writer who was deeply influenced by traditional myths and also by the Marathi and Kannada literature. Karnad is one of India's finest creative writers, acclaimed nationally and internationally. He is an example of multi-faceted brilliance that contemporary has produced. His drama's reflects both continuity and innovation. The world of his theatre has flexible limits, he moves on with his creative explorations into new aspects of life and philosophy, art and technology. He also reflects political, social and historical happenings in his plays. His plays also exemplifies the combination of drama, dance and music. *'Tughlaq', 'Nagamandala', 'Hayavadana', 'The Fire and the Rain'* and *'Tale-danda'* are his most notable works.

II. PATRIARCHY OR THE MALE HEGEMONY.

In Sexual politics (1970) Kate Millet introduced the feminist use of term*'Patriarchy'*. It is the concept of the radical second wave feminist, Sylvia Walby define it as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploitation women". Tendulkar projects the image of women under crushed under the forces of patriarchy, women in these plays have no Identity of their own, they are just puppets in the hands of their male counterparts. Tendulkar immensely delves with the exploitation and victimization of women in the patriarchal society. In his play *'Kamala'* Tendulkar presents woman as victim of power and focuses on patriarchal order in social set up.

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Kamala is a two act play, it was first produced in 1981. Self seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, the male protagonist of the play has absolute control over his wife Sarita and Kamala who has been purchased from the flesh market. Jaisingh: *"It is I who make decisions in this house and no one else. Do you understand" (Five plays 42).* He acts as a master of the house who has prerogative to rule over other. The women in this play are powerless and voiceless. In '*Sakharam Binder'*, Tendulkar portrays the voilence of patriarchal society.

This play consists of three acts first staged in 1972, these acts revolve around the relationship between Sakharam Binder, Laxmi and Champa. Sakharam does not believe in the institution of marriage and arranges a contractual cohabitation based on the convenience of single women who have been deserted by their husbands or have walked out on them, he shows tendencies of being religious and domesticated when in contact with Laxmi. In his association with Champa, he is transformed in to a sensuous, lewd drunkard with thoughts only of sexual enjoyment.

Sakharam Binder regulates some rules and principles in the opening scene, he restricts and marks the limits of women in all their activities. Sakharam: *"I am the master here ….. if someone calls, you're not supposed to look up and talk. If it is a stranger you'll have to cover your head and answer him"(Five plays,125,126).* Laxmi and Champa are also vulnerable to sexual, physical violence and exploitation under the bondage of male hegemony. Laxmi experiences physical violence from Sakharam. Champa is portrayed as a victim of sexual violence, Champa: *"My body can't take it, not anymore"*, Sakharam: *" Drink drink, drink some more, open your jaws…..come on drink" (Five plays 193, 194).* This play explores the world of domestic violence and victimization of women by the patriarchal system.

The lives of women have been manipulated by patriarchy in all ages and cultures in various ways by prescribing values, norms, gender roles, and ethics to keep the male dominated society intact. Sylvia Walby, in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The play *Nagamandala* by Karnad evidently portrays a patriarchal society. The play is about Rani, who was married at an young age to Appanna, he confines her in the house and spends his day with his concubine. Rani yearns for her husband's love until a Naga, who takes the form of Appanna fulfils her desires. Appanna treats Rani as a mere servant and abuses her emotionally and physically and when he comes to know that she is pregnant, Appanna shames her in front of the whole village. Appanna *: "Aren't you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in and you manage to find a lover. Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off?*" (*Three plays, 52).*

He questions her chastity and the villagers ask her to prove her innocence by taking the snake ordeal, to which Rani agrees. It is always the women who is questioned about her chastity. The concept of chastity again is a creation of patriarchy which always applies to women. Karnad weaves a societal truth of a male-dominated society, where only the woman has to be observed and prove her chastity, while the man remains unquestioned about his own loyalty to his wife.

III. GAZE THEORY AND OBJECTIFICATION.

The concept of gaze is closely related to the '*Freudian theory of scopophilia'* which is the ''*pleasure of looking*''. In Karnad's play, *Hayavadana*, Padmini draws the same pleasure by looking at the body of Kapila, he is the object of her pleasure. Padmini : *"Such a broad back, like an ocean with muscles rippling across it, and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless"*, Padmini : *"He is like a celestial being reborn as a hunter. How his body sways, his limbs curve – it's a dance almost"*, Padmini : *"No woman could resist him" (Three plays 96).* Padmini longs for a physical relationship with Kapila although she is married to Devdutta, she flirts with Kapila infront of her husband and praises his figure

In *Kamala* by Tendulkar, Jaisingh Jadhav treats Kamala, an adivasi woman whom he purchased from the flesh market of Luhardaga as an object that can procure him a promotion in his job and reputation in his professional life. Jaisingh: *"They sell human beings at this bazaar, they have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages…. The men who want to bid, handle the women to inspect them. Whether they are firm or flabby… how they feel in breast, in their waist" (Five plays 14).* The women in the flesh market are the victims of objectification.

Kamala has also been objectified in the press conference, reporters and Jaisingh took advantage of Kamala's innocence and they mocked at her womanhood and chastity. In Sakharam Binder, Sakharam is infatuated by the body of Champa, he was not able to control his eyes, his eyes kept on gazing at the body of Champa. Sakharam gained physical pleasure by gazing and he was lured by her body. In *Vultures*, Rama unconsciously gazes the bare chest of Rajaninath. Tendulkar portrays the sexual desires of Rama regardless of her position in Rajaninath's life.

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IV. SLAVERY AND SEXUAL FREEDOM

Tendulkar's *Kamala* clearly pictures the status of Indian women revealing how marriage is a sacred institution that enslaves women. Virginia Woolf theorizes on the slave like tendency of women to their husbands as: "*Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; infact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her fingers…. In real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell and was the property of her husband*". Sarita is a representative of educated Indian women who are caught in the shackles of marriage, Kamala's entry in to the household reveals to Sarita the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and insignificance of her own existence. Sarita unlearns about her position in the family as slave. Sarita: "*Because I'm a slave, slaves doesn't have rights, they must only slave away. Dance to their masters whim. Laugh, when he says laugh. Cry, when he says cry" (Five plays 46).* Tendulkar in this play portrays the *Master-Slave* relationship in the concept of marriage. Marriage for Sarita is more of bondage because her individuality has been completely erased by the dominion of her husband.

It has always been controversial to discuss women's sexuality, women are limited to express their desires publicaly in fear of being tagged as characterless, it is because patriarchy has taught women to be passive in their sexual expression. Karnad liberates his women from such patriarchal norms and explicitly portrays women's sexual desires in his palys. Padmini has always been in her quest for her sexual and physical satisfaction, she yearns for Kapila, and she makes her quest evident even in the presence of her husband. Rani, who is neglected by her husband Appanna, also yearns for her husband's love and his touch. Kuruddava : "*Has your husband touched you?"(Three plays 31).* She even goes to an extent to give him the magical roots (love potion) given by Kuruddava. When she mixes the roots for the second time, but pours it in an ant hill, in fear that the roots might harm Appanna, the Naga drinks the potion and falls in love with Rani and fulfils Rani's desires of becoming a complete woman and wife.

V. REALISM

Tendulkar is realistic in the portrayal of problems of common man, intricacies of human relationship and discrimination against women in patriarchal society. *Kamala* is a naturalistic play, it focuses on the changed role of women in the society. He was inspired by the real life incident – the *Indian Express* expose by Ashwin Sarin, who bought a girl from natural flesh market and presented her at a press conference. Ashwin Sarin, a journalist, investigated in to flesh trade in Madhya Pradesh and purchased a woman Kamala for 2,300 to establish the trafficking of women, in Shivpuri village. In *Sakharam Binder,* Tendulkar portrays *Genderviolence, man – woman relationship* prevailing in the society.

VI. FEMALE PSYCHE

In his play 'Vultures' Tendulkar depicts the mental trauma of Rama, who has been tormented by her husband for not having a child. The title of the play is suggestive in the sense to represent the brutal men in Pitale family. Rama is married to Ramakant, eldest of Pitale's family. Everyone in the house scolds her, she is terribly disturbed and afflicted by the frequent quarrels in the house. Rajaninath, brother in law, being sympathetic to her secretly observes her suffering that she undergoes in the family. Rama could not tolerate the pain and grief which creates disappointment, distress and empty space in her life which is revealed in her soliloquy. Rama: "*Those women long ago commit sati, we're all praise for them. They used to burn themselves alive …. But only once …. But I bhaiya – I commit sati every moment ! I burn ! I am consumed!"(Five plays 242).* Tendulkar reveals Rama's mental turmoil and trauma of unfulfilled desires, which unconsciously made her to have relationship with Rajaninath. Her relationship with Rajaninath, exposes the thrust of psychological sufferings upon her. She fulfills her sexual desire through him unconsciously which gives comfort in her afflicted state. In this play, Tendulkar portrays the psychology of women, who has been tortured by her husband and family members.

Critic Tutan Mukherjee notes that Padmini, in the play *Hayavadana* commits a *Freudian Slip* of attaching the wrong heads to the bodies of Kapila and Devdutta. Freudian slip is an unintentional error regarded as revealing subconscious feelings. Padmini's subconscious, that is her desire for Kapila's body makes her commit the slip, eventually attaching the heads to the wrong bodies. In Nagamandala, Rani takes the snake ordeal to prove her chastity, later it is revealed that Rani knows that the person who spends the night with her is not Appanna, for "*no two men make love alike'' (Three plays 60).* Rani's subconscious has always been weaved around a fantasized world, the world of dreams, her deep-rooted desires are revealed through her dreams, she dreams of a land where she is carried away by an eagle "*Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles'' (Three plays 28)* to her parents. The ignorance of Appanna makes Rani yearn for some love, it has affected her psychologically which is evident through her dreams.

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VII. DEPENDENT WOMEN

According to William Thompson, "*A female is first supported by her father, then by her husband and later she is supported by her son*". In these plays Tendulkar portrays his women characters to be dependent on men for all their needs, through which he also explores the patriarchal norms and practices which is deeply rooted in the minds of women. This is evident in the dialogues of Laxmi, who is deserted by her husband and nephew, and seeks shelter from Sakharam. Laxmi: "*please don't send me away. Nowhere I can go …. I don't ask for anything just a roof over my head" (Five plays 182).* Laxmi is now forsaken by everyone, she seeks the help of Sakharam, because she is not learnt to be self – reliant. The society trains women to be dependent on men.

In contrast, Karnad's women have a mind of their own. Padmini has her own desires and dreams she is not restricted by the men around her. After the snake ordeal Rani is accepted as a divine being by the villagers and her own husband.

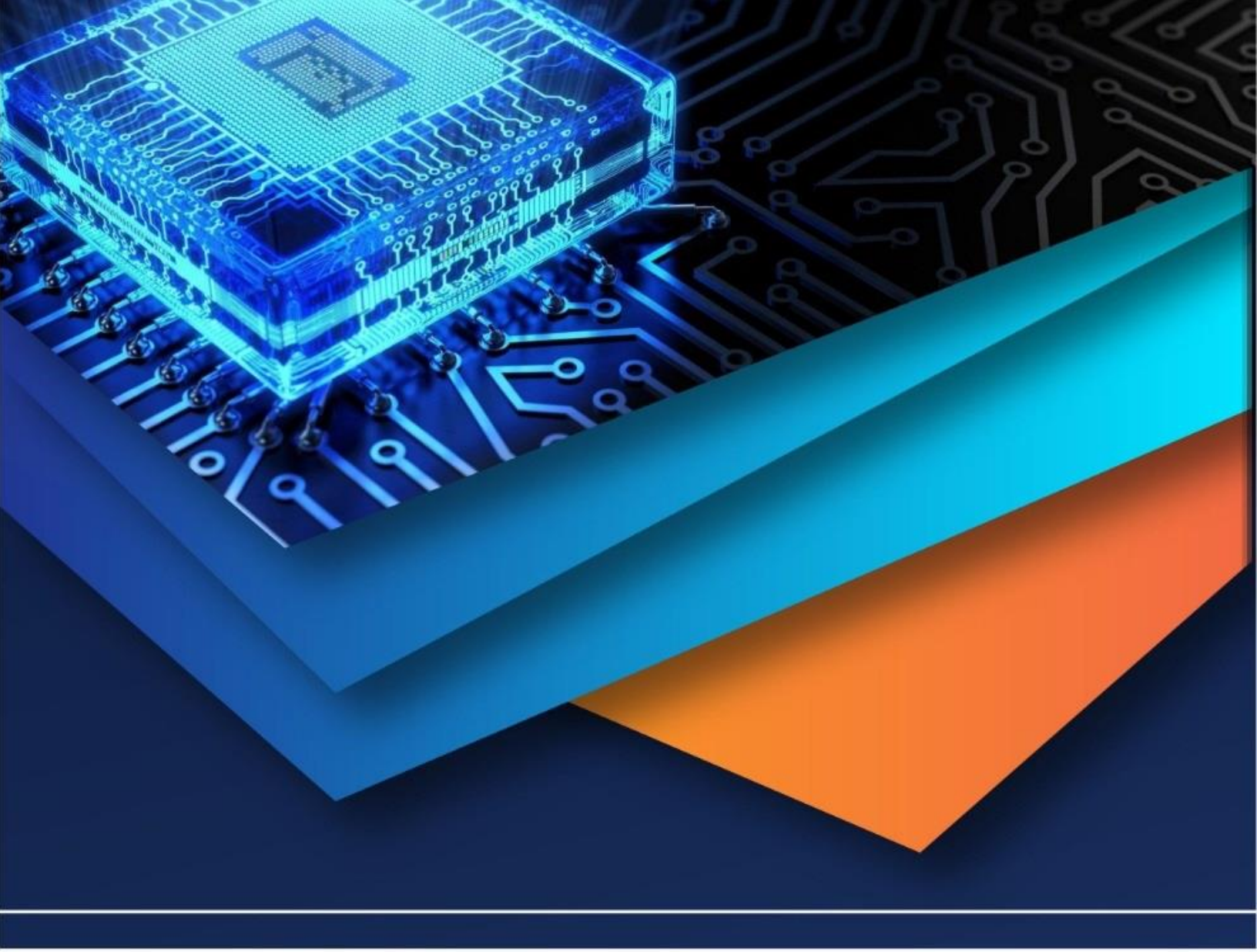
VIII. CONCLUSION

There are many similar characteristics of the portrayal of women characters in the plays of Karnad and Tendulkar. Both the dramatist has made noteworthy contribution to the Indian National Theatre Movement. Their ideas and the social themes in their plays provoke the audience to think and question. Both of them explore the physical, psychological and sexual suppression of women in their plays, their exposure to sex and carnal instincts is one of the major characteristic of their plays. Karnad's plays were more accepted for the mythological references. Tendulkar plays are more controversial and created bitter reactions among the audience.

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