

# A Feminist Lens on Cultural Identity in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

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**Abstract:** *The current study is a massive attempt to investigate feminist and feminine sensibility in a few of Vijay Tendulkar's plays. In addition to addressing the underlying reasons of gender inequality in the male-dominated social structure, it seeks to understand women's role and status within it. It is a brief examination of strong and weak female characters who forfeit their individuality and independence in order to conform to society norms and their masculine counterparts. In addition, it portrays a deplorable image of the morally bankrupt patriarchal societal system, as well as the grim side of middle-class existence in modern-day India, where women endure a litany of agonies and long-standing tortures. In the context of many earlier centuries, it really highlights the worst and most obscure perceptions of women. It also depicts the efforts made by women to achieve their dream of being freed from the constraints of conventions and traditions. This research aims to analyze, in light of a few chosen plays, the psychological issues, conundrums, conflicts, and many pains and tortures experienced by women at different levels. It also addresses women's demands for independence, dignity, equal rights, and perfection, as well as their struggles to survive with honor and respect.*

**Keywords:** Vijay Tendulkar, Gender Representation, Women's Roles, Societal Norms

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most favored mediums for creative expression is drama. It is the tasteful fusion of poetry, folktales, music, dance, and movement. It is the most enticing way to get instructions, a lovely source of amusement, and a magnificent work of visual art. It is intended to be performed on stage, with the performers adopting roles and speaking the scripted language. B. Prasad says, "Drama is a composite art, in which the author, the actor, and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect." in this respect. Drama, being a performance art, may have its roots clearly in religion. There's a chance that the decline of drama has strong religious roots. Religious rites dominated the development of dramatic arts over the globe. It is important to note that poetry and drama are regarded as the two most illustrious genres to emerge from ancient Greek civilization.

Aristotle extolled the virtues of dramatic art and its principles in his Poetics, whereas Plato regarded poetry in his Republic. The word "dramas" originally came from a Greek word that meant "action," "to act," or "to do." It is characterized as a particular kind of fiction that is performed. "Drama is an old story told in the eye, a story put into action by living performers," as William J. Long correctly points out. Drama seems to be distinct from other literary genres in that it is primarily meant for performance rather than reading.

The dramatist uses action to depict human feelings and thoughts in their plays. Drama, in this sense, is a manner of fictional representation via conversation and performance, as stated by M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham, who contended that "Drama is the form of composition designed for performance in the theater." Drama is a literary work that tells a tale via dialogue in rhyme or prose. A wide range of dramatic techniques are also included, including acting, chorus, music, stage direction, character development, and dramatic talent.

The primary goal of theater is to entertain and educate its audience. Its broad appeal must pique the curiosity of people of all ages. Stated differently, it should possess a profound understanding of the preferences and dispositions of the target audience. It should also have a realistic quality and artistically depict the current situation while preserving traces

of the past. English theater evolved steadily from Miracle to Mystery plays, then from Morality to interludes, and at last took the shape of ordinary drama.

Of all the drama genres, tragedy and comedy are the most engaging. Whereas the later deals with lighthearted and humorous life experiences, the former deals with serious and melancholic matters. Therefore, a genuine theater and live audience are required for a play to provide the whole live dramatic experience.

India has a rich history of theater dating back thousands of years. One may investigate the roots of Indian play in the Vedic Era. It predates English drama by a great deal. Thousands of years ago, Indian theater reached its pinnacle. The Sanskrit plays, among which the *Natyashastra* is the earliest work containing the principle of theater, are where Indian theatre originated. The sacred texts of India, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are rich examples of dramatic art. Krishna Mohan Banerji introduced Indian play to the English language with *The Persecuted* (1837).

Prominent Indian playwrights like Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt went on to flourish the legacy of Indian theater in English in later years. During the times of Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore, it achieved significant advancements. Prominent Indian dramatists including Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sirkar, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad established a cumulative dramatic heritage in the history of Indian play in English. This group of writers expertly addressed the socio-cultural, political, and societal issues and conflicts in their plays against a rich backdrop of modern Indian English theater.

One of India's most prominent playwrights, Vijay Tendulkar is a keen observer of Indian social realities and is recognized for his distinctive inventiveness and great sensitivity. With his social commentary on current events, he gave Indian theater a new shape and substance. Tendulkar depicts feminist and feminine sensibilities as well as the emotional and physical anguish that women experience while living in unfriendly environments. In addition to highlighting the difficulties faced by women, he exposes the complete lack of a moral code in Indian culture, where women are only valued for caring for their families and preparing meals. He shows empathy and compassion for female characters. His female characters, who play important parts in his plays, are from the lower and middle classes. His plays' themes and topics are very genuine. He uses soliloquies to reveal the deepest emotions and sentiments of women. He introduces them anywhere as teachers like Leela Benare, homemakers like Sarita, slaves like Kamala, and intelligent girls like Jyoti.

His female characters have a disposition that leans toward femininity and feminism. In his plays, he reveals the diversity of women. They have the appearance of being both smart, rebellious, aggressive, daring, self-assured, aware, and completely sensitive, as well as conservative, selfless, uneducated, sufferers, obstinate, and orthodox.

The chosen plays depict a social structure setting where women's personalities are characterized by feminist and feminine elements. While some of them seldom seem to be rebellious, daring, revolutionary, and heroic in temperament, others seem to be quiet victims of deceit, greed, and cruelty in a male-dominated world. Seldom do they speak out against injustice, discrimination based on gender, and gender inequality. Tendulkar's combined efforts make a sincere effort to investigate and learn more about the underlying causes of gender disparity in the context of male supremacy. Furthermore, his plays highlight the spirit of women who want independence, respect, individual rights, self-identity, and freedom from the agony of ongoing torments.

He portrays a lady called Leela Benare in his play, *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, who defies the socio-moral code of sexuality that men have constructed to regulate women's bodies. It is important to recognize Leela Benare's feminist sensibility, her silent demand for gender justice, and her voice of protest against male rule. The drama is on the conflict between Leela Benare and her opponents, who are led by the traditional Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar and their friends. Although she was raped as a teenager by her own maternal uncle and deceived by her beloved Prof.

Damle, she risked to fall in love with him but was afraid to reveal that she was pregnant. Benare embodies both feminist and feminine ideals in this drama. Tendulkar is also a symbol of Mrs. Kashikar's traditional worship. She adopts long-standing patriarchal traditions and conventions and upholds them as the standard of moral behavior in society. In this drama, Mrs. Kashikar is the only embodiment of feminine sensibility and she opposes Benare. Because she is an unwed mother, the female heroine is called "a canker on the body of society" by her friends. The whole drama centers on Benare's valiant attempts to overthrow an oppressive middle class power system.

*Sakharam Binder* is regarded as one of Tendulkar's most contentious pieces. It is an incendiary play in terms of theme, vocabulary, and substance. Tendulkar is the one who expresses how males govern society and how they regard women.

The man-woman dynamic in a lower middle class culture is another area of emphasis for him. It is a vile critique of rigid ideas about morality, marriage, and sexuality, especially as they relate to middle class culture. It is a manifesto for the full and complete exploitation of women, including in the home, in society, in the psyche, and in their bodies.

Tendulkar's feminine invention, Laxmi, is more than just obedient; she is also ethically conscious. Sakharan Binder has Laxmi's complete surrender. All she has is the skeleton of a body. It is her duty to do what he commands. Even to answer his simple queries, she seems really shy. Sakharan is depraved and harsh to this poor woman, forcing her to cooperate with him against her choice.

Laxmi is a devout, traditional lady who lacks the courage to speak out against injustice or to take risks. Tendulkar, on the other side, presents Champa, a strong feminist figure, as an assertive, fearless woman who does not value morality in her life. Champa has a straightforward, bland demeanor. She perceives sexual pleasure according to her own standards and determines a man's "maleness" objectively.

Her speech is boisterous, disobedient, and booming. The drama therefore presents women as Champa and Laxmi, and vice versa. Laxmi is shown as a voiceless victim, whereas Champa is subjugated yet has a rebellious voice.

In his realistic play Kamala, Tendulkar sketches the picture of a young, naive slave girl with a feminine face called Kamala, whom he purchased from a rural flesh market and displayed at a news conference. Jay Singh Jadhav treats women like objects in this instance. At two hundred and fifty rupees, he bought Kamala in order to advance in his career. In the drama, Kamala, an Adivasi lady, is portrayed as an innocent victim who suffers silently. Sarita Tendulkar exposes the domination of males over women.

She is Jay Singh Jadhav's wife. Sarita admits in the play's conclusion that she is nothing more than her husband's sophisticated slave, capable of fulfilling all of his opulent desires without being an individual. Sarita's desire to be freed from the hardships of upper class life and her sincere endeavor to escape such a cramped space must be praised, even though she accomplished nothing. Tendulkar created Kamala and Sarita, both of whom are feminine.

Because women in Indian culture are still seen as subordinate to men, their image is still distorted and vilified. The most contentious play by Tendulkar, Kanyadaan (the title alludes to a lady offering a gift to someone), examines individuals who fall prey to their own hollow idealism and pretense. Jyoti, the embodiment of a modern lady with a feminist mentality, sees her joyful existence turn into a burden upon marrying Arun Aathvale, a Dalit.

At the start of the play, she is shown as the most liberal, sensitive, and open-minded character who trusts in her own judgment and instincts. However, as time went on, she lost her voice and continued to be subjugated by her own man. She often rejects the limitations imposed by race, religion, caste, and culture. Her choice to marry outside of her caste has made her more pragmatic and accepting. The clash between two distinct parts and their hollow and phony ideas is highlighted throughout the drama.

## II. CONCLUSION

These chosen plays depict women's subjugation, discrimination, sexual and domestic abuse, subservience, and their bravery in speaking out against these injustices and silently opposing societal norms in favor of equal rights. We have seen how unfriendly environments, long-standing traditions, and male supremacy rendered women increasingly helpless and weak. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 71 in *The Second Sex*). Some works just aim to raise awareness about women's condition in society and to make a plea to free them from the bonds of mental slavery. Examining women's voices and their impacts on the evolution of society is the study's importance. It would undoubtedly need a great deal of work for the suggested research to comprehend how women will shape the destiny of the country. The current research will aid in raising awareness of the need to rebuild a positive, healthy connection between men and women. It paints a striking picture of Indian civilization, where women are treated worse than animals in some places and revered as deities in others. Therefore, the research's only value is that it focuses on women's self-determination struggles.

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