

## RESEARCH ARTICLE



## VIJAY TENDULKAR'S "HIS FIFTH WOMAN" IS A PLAY OF METAPHYSICAL ALLEGORY

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**ABSTRACT**

Vijay Tendulkar, the author of 30 full length plays and 23 one-act plays, is a leading Indian Playwright of the present era. "*His Fifth Woman*" was written in English by Tendulkar himself though he was a Marathi playwright. This play graphically describes the injustices and inequalities suffered by women in this male dominated mundane world and explore the life after death. It is a meta-physical social allegory and prequel to Tendulkar's famous 1975 play '*Sakharam Binder*'. In this paper, I describe the play is a metaphysical solution of the gender biases in social construct. It is also the mockery of the insecurities in the gender based oppressive power mechanism, operating in man-woman relationship.

**Keywords:** Absend, adeptly, annihilation, antithesis, artificial, bemoaning, cajoling, chorus, contemptuous, demise, dick, egalitarianism, enigmatic, fantasy, furious, gratification, handcart, immensity, infection, impoverishment, irony, lobby, mockery, Mridanga, mundane, oblivion, post-mortem, persuasion, prequel, quit, rites, rituals, sanctity and virility.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) one of the leading playwrights of India has been ever critical of Social structure of his time. He depicts real-life situations that ordinary Indian families face. He also

frankly exposes politics pertaining to gender, class, caste and power. Like G. B. Shaw he was non-conformist. He was bloody opponent to all sorts of exploitations. As a keen observer of men and manners, he adeptly brought crude realities of life,

relationship and existence before the audience. In fact, he made drama as common man's property. He did not intend to transport his audience into an artificial world. His sole purpose in his plays was to bring about change in the society towards down-trodden people. He has been ever truthful to his people and true to his time. In this paper, Tendulkar's "His Fifth Woman" is taken to evaluate as a play of metaphysical transformation/ Metaphysical Allegory.

**The Preamble to the play:** *His Fifth Woman* is the first play by Tendulkar, the Marathi Playwright that is written in English. He wrote it especially for the New York Tendulkar Festival in October 2004. It was written only on a very short notice and it was completed only within six weeks. It was first performed on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2004 in a staged reading at the Lark play Development centre in New York City. This play graphically describes the injustices and inequalities suffered by women in this male dominated mundane world and explore the life after death. It visualizes a picture of the next world based on egalitarianism where there is no distinction between the rich and the poor and between the man and the woman. It is considered to be a prequel to his famous 1972 play, '*Sakharam Binder*' because it delineates the thoughts, behaviour and activities of Sakharam. Sturgis Warner, the director of the play writes, "I am happy to report that Tendulkar's 'His Fifth Woman' is a marvellous addition to the world of Sakharam Binder". About the message of the play, he observes, "as absurd as it is Tendulkar's explorations of death and after life". The theme of the play is enigmatic and it is difficult to draw definite conclusions about it.

**Theme of the Play:** The whole action of the play revolves round the bringing of the sick fifth woman by Sakharam and his friend Dawood to the hospital, her consequent demise and her last Hindu rites by Sakharam at the persistent cajoling of Dawood. In his course of description, the dramatist has unravelled the actual position of woman in the mind of men-folk that go about changing the company of them like their clothes. Sakharam just treats the fifth woman as a source of his physical gratification without any emotional attachment. At her death, he only thinks of the six women who have to come to take her place. The reality is ironically highlighted

in the words of the crow which describes about the scene in the next world. Here the man is found bemoaning at the loss of the source of virility which differentiates him from the female. The concept of heaven and hell is brought forward as per the mind-set of the people belonging to different classes who react to the same situation in different ways.

**The Structure of the Play:** The play is divided into 5 scenes. **The first scene** of the play begins with the description of Chilly winter cold night. It is the scene of dimly-lit lobby of the government hospital. In the darkness of night two characters appear with the sound of handcart entering the compound of the hospital. Dawood and Sakharam enter, carrying patient on the stretches and they put the stretcher on the ground. Both of them express their anxiety related to the condition of the patient. Sakharam as usual maintains his rough, aggressive and contemptuous tone. The ward boy was in fast sleep with a blanket over his face. Both Dawood and Sakharam pull the blanket away from the sleeping man. Sakharam is conscious of his responsibility towards the patient and he is furious towards the reckless ward boy who comments "People make a poor woman pregnant and leave her here to avoid the responsibility" <sup>3</sup>(p.49). Later Sakharam becomes philosophical and expresses his faith that all the accounts of human action are to be settled in the other world. Like a philosopher, he dictates Dawood that one should not deviate from the path of Justice and righteousness because God records all human action. Then the nurse comes and enquires about the nature of the relationship between Sakharam and the patient woman. Sakharam admits that he keeps a woman for appropriate food and security. Dawood wonders at Sakharam's honesty in his dealing. Nurse attends the woman and reveals that because of excessive cold, she has got infected and needs immediate intensive care. Dawood expresses his sympathy for the unfortunate condition in which the woman has been surviving. Sakharam's immense sympathy and generosity propose in his mind to stay in the hospital to attend the woman. Then Sakharam knows from the patient woman about her deceased husband's torture and humiliation. He tries to convince her that death brings an end of all personal relationships. Woman believes in the existence of the soul. So, the woman

is confident that her husband was his only saviour whatever pain he inflicted on her. This private conversation with the fifth woman was only a fantasy of Sakharam and it makes him to accept his defeat in life. When nurse appears there to inform about the patient, Sakharam was still dazed by the fantasy.

**The Second Scene** of the play opens at the cottage of the house of Sakharam, where he was busy in playing on his Mridanga. The woman died and after the post-mortem of body, Sakharam wants to deny the responsibility to make a claim of the body. Later Dawood's sentimental appeal makes him to own the claim of the dead body for the funeral rites of the fifth woman.

**The Third Scene** of the play opens at the burning ghats of Hindus, where the couple of dead bodies waiting for the last rites to be performed. In the conversation of the different group of people waiting for the last rites, Tendulkar presents a fine mockery of the growing commercial attitude against the immensity of death and the power of human sentiments. The one member of the group, comments that 'dying is going to be a costlier because there is a hike in the prices of the kerosene.<sup>4</sup>' (p.60) It reveals that there is no significance of the life of dead. During the last rites amid the chanting of Mantras, Sakharam is given the responsibility to play the role of her husband. He seems to have been caught in his vision of other world and the persuasion of her father. Then Dawood tries to pacify Sakharam and offers him some additional money to the Brahmin for carrying the funeral rites. Sakharam does not like the word "Brahmins" who are parasites of the dead men's relatives for money. The nervousness and resistance of Sakharam, greed and wickedness of Brahmin, innocence and practical wit of Dawood presents a humorous scene to the audience by Tendulkar. He also presents the minute details and Sanctity of Hindu rituals during last funeral rites. Sakharam was forced to carry the food in banana leaf and it was to be eaten by crows. The ritual of crow's eating suggests that the soul of the dead is happy in heaven. Sakharam puts the meal to the crows that dance around the food, but do not touch it. Brahmins enjoy the situation of nervousness of Sakharam. Brahmins prevail upon Sakharam to

reveal all the truths related to his life. It has almost been decided that they can't leave the place without the permission of the crows. Sakharam is more and more puzzled, but he finds no way to liberate himself from the tricky worldly ways. Brahmins still take hold on the nervousness of Sakharam and dictates and demands hundred. Sakharam with all submission adds that this woman had no ornaments and her belongings have already been burnt with the corpse. Sakharam in a state of bafflement considers that the crows are only the game. He is no longer ready to compromise with the whims of those Brahmins. So he declares that these Brahmins play games with the relations of the dead who come here to free themselves from the fangs of the death.

In **the Scene Four** of the play, there is an elaborate description of life after death. 'Crow is projected as the attendants of the heaven's gate'. It makes a welcome to the soul of the fifth woman of Sakharam. Suddenly one stranger appears there with an anxiety to search out something that he seems to have lost. The man was helpless to reveal the reason for his distress. It is only the creative crow who concludes that with death all his male organs and masculine pride has come to an end. The crow's final comment on the condition of distress of the man stands in contrast of the exultation of the woman. Through the reactions of crow, Tendulkar establishes that the life after death is free from the constraints of the gender discrimination. It was exceptional on the part of Tendulkar to introduce the other worldly life of a dead woman. The woman in heavenly regions finds herself light and cheerful. She finds it a place where she enjoys full freedom. She finds herself liberated from the traditional burdens of undesirable motherhood, sexual exploitation and physical torture. Her confession is the real manifestation of a woman against the traditional burden of femininity in the male dominated social order. With death, feminine weakness comes to an end and masculine pride diminishes. Crow becomes a mouth piece of Tendulkar's own conviction of the hollowness of gender battle existing in the society. The dialogue of the woman assumes a metaphysical dimension. Man has his own irritation at the loss and the woman feels sorry for his loss. It is a union determined by divine and its nature cannot be calculated in terms

of man-made considerations. The woman in spite of being summoned by Chitrugupta to enter the other world hesitates to go into oblivion. For her existence, she finds it essential to compromise with her male counterpart. Her vision at this stage presents a fine antithesis of the vision constructed in earlier parts of the scene. She denies the obligations of femininity and the triumph of masculinity, but now she seeks the possibility of recontemplating her views because in the denial of masculinity, she perceives the possibilities of the annihilation of her own existence. She declares, "How I wish, I had my body now! Could have enticed him into acceptance. All bother some things have their plus points too, one must accept"<sup>5</sup>(p.74). In this play, Tendulkar presents the vision of the fusion of seeming contradictions existing at the centre of the universe as the necessary condition of survival.

The Last speech of the Crow in this scene, becomes an epilogue to the play, crow assumes the significance of chorus to communicate the hidden message integrated into the vision of the dramatist. He suddenly reveals that this desperate fellow who makes a search of his dick is none else but the dead husband of the wife. It is the irony that with death all relationships come to an end and the idea of the "bonds of seventh birth" is waste and meaningless. The irony is explicated that they are not in a position to recognize each other. All relationships and obligations die. You are a stranger to your own skin. Crow's final consolation is that relationships die, but the cycle of life continues. It suggests that Sakharam, who is beyond the bondages of relationship, continues.

**In the fifth scene** of the play, Sakharam has again been able to get another destitute woman as Sixth Woman to take the place of the Fifth Woman. His game will continue till the woman needs shelter and food due to her economic impoverishment.

#### CONCLUSION

Tendulkar advocates the cause of the economic independence of woman, which will ensure their wishes and body may not be trampled down under manly vanity.

**CRITIQUE:** In the drama, '*His Fifth Woman*', Tendulkar has not been given any name as if she has no identity of her own. She is living in the house of Sakharam without having any significant position in

that household. Tendulkar appears to be emphatic in exploring corruption in the sphere of religion. The Brahmin, who is supposed to perform all the rituals with full sincerity, tries to avoid everything for the sake of money. Tendulkar takes a dig at the usual bliss of the people with regard to the eating of the crows of the food in a banana leaf. According to them, this means that the soul of the dead is happy and willing to quit the world of the living and leave for the world of the dead. And if the crows do not eat, this means that some of the desires of the dead remain unfulfilled.

Tendulkar also presents his version of life after death. There is a controversy about the real form of 'heaven' and 'hell' which are normally related to one's actions done in this world. But the playwright thinks that it is one's desire that transforms after life as heaven or hell, although it remains the same for all. In this way with the help of his naturalistic dialogues, Tendulkar has been able to present the reality of life in clear terms. The presence of 'Crow' is felt through the play, hinting at the misery of man's life on the earth.

Thus, Tendulkar "*His Fifth Woman*" is a metaphysical-social allegory. It is an epoch-making play in the history of Indian English Drama.

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