



10

**FREE AND FAIR WOMEN IN SELECT PLAYS OF G.B.SHAW AND
VIJAY TENDULKAR: A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE**

Madu Sree BP

Ph. D. Research Scholar

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Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu

Associate Professor and Research Supervisor

PG and Research, Department of English

Muthurangam Government Arts and Science (A) College,

Vellore, TN, India

Abstract:

*This comparative study examines George Bernard Shaw and Vijay Tendulkar's views on the New Woman in theatre. It compares their methods using secondary sources, finding surprising similarities despite different circumstances. Shaw's unconventional image promoted women's intellectual equality and liberty. Tendulkar, inspired by Western movies and playwrights, portrayed powerful women fighting injustice. Both authors used theatre to reflect and criticise society. They promoted gender equality and women's empowerment via Shaw's *Candida* and Tendulkar's *Benare*, *Sarita*, and *Jyoti*. Their art inspires optimism of women embracing male features and breaking free from customary restraints. This comparative study shows that the New Woman idea continues to challenge social conventions and promote gender equality in theatre and society.*

Keywords: *George Bernard Shaw, Vijay Tendulkar, New Woman, Playwrights, Portrayed Powerful Women Fighting Injustice, etc.*

“Life on the stage should be as it really is, and the people, too, should be as they are and not on stilts” - Chekhov

With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the naturalistic movement emerged, exerting a profound influence on various domains including history, art, culture, criticism, and theatre. The concerns and realities of modern society are transformed into the themes that permeate literature and art. By reflecting actual, real-life situations, the plays achieve a naturalistic quality. Innovative concepts and devices employed by playwrights such as Ibsen, Shaw, Sean O'Casey, T.S. Eliot, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and others contribute to the enrichment of the realistic play tradition. While depicting and discussing in detail the problems that plague people's daily lives, the playwrights do not offer any solutions to those issues. Consequently, the audience assumes an engaged role in the process of appreciating the performances.

All of these Euro-American playwrights employ the medium of theatre not merely for the purpose of entertainment, but rather to transform the way in which individuals consider. They aim to provoke introspection in their audience and motivate them to reflect on the challenges they face in their daily lives so that they may devise their own resolutions. French novelist Emile Zola is persuaded that the theatre can only be revitalised and made contemporary through the use of



naturalistic movement. Shaw aptly describes Henrik Ibsen's approach to drama—using it to provoke thought rather than provide definitive solutions—as "a contribution to an ongoing struggle to present people with fresh perceptions of truth, which they would initially find unsettling." The audience is made aware by Ibsen's characters, including Nora, Bark man, and others, that freedom can only be attained or actualized by those who possess the fortitude to perceive the world objectively. Because of Nora's uprising against her spouse, neither she nor the audience can appreciate the concept of "home, sweet home." The womanly woman endeavors to confront the harsh realities of the real world, which are replete with adversities and difficulties. Her protest significantly influences both British and Indian playwrights, as she not only shuts the door on her own residence but also on all aesthetically pleasing dwellings. In the manner of Ibsen, the Natyamanwantar Theatre of Marathi playwrights continues his legacy.

However, the theatrical industry experienced a complete resurgence of problem performances after 1956. Consider *Back in Anger* by Osborne is a critique of the problematic plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, and others. Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad, among other Indian playwrights, address issues of contemporary living. They depict life in its truest form, devoid of any attempt at moral or philosophical interpretation. The comparative analysis of the notion of the new woman was conducted by gathering data from secondary sources such as Google and Google Scholar. The research started by examining the fundamental notions put out by both writers, which were then condensed and presented in the following findings. Undoubtedly, however, this second New Theatre, which was shaped by the works of Ibsen and Shaw, effectively implemented the two principles that the first New Theatre of Problem Plays had established: naturalism and the notion of the New Woman. Tendulkar is an ardent opponent of the maxim "Art for the sake of art." Contrary to proponents of aestheticism, he holds the view that art functions as a form of propaganda. However, it is not accurate to refer to him as a mere propagandist. As a result, he depicts life in his plays precisely as it is—complete with all of its vices, shortcomings, and frailties. His dramatic works decline to provide strained coherence or illuminate a path to enlightenment. Strictly adhering to Emile Zola's tenets regarding naturalism: "It is necessary to accept nature as she is, without modifying her. The work becomes an official record, nothing more; its only merit is that of exact observation of life as it is" (Wadikar, 32)

Ibsen and Shaw believed that the effectiveness and value of a play were determined by the degree to which it brought about personal growth and change. Their primary aim is to instigate a paradigm shift within the psyche of an individual. They are certain that it could not be executed in the current theatre and that instead 'a new house of drama' sustained by 'the pillars of truth and freedom' would be required. In a similar vein, Tendulkar resorts to the medium of theatre to challenge antiquated prejudices and preconceived notions. His intention is to alter not only the content, structure, and form of his plays, but also the audience's perspective; he is an iconoclast. Like Nora, Leela Benare is a member of the New Women who empower us to confront with the harsh realities of real life. Ultimately, however, liberation is attained through the sacrifice of enjoyment. Women have long served as a source of inspiration for a multitude of imaginative writers in the realm of literature. This phenomenon particularly evident in the writings of the twentieth century; consequently, the literature of the turn of the century exhibited a profound fascination with the psychology and personality of women. The dramatic works of the initial half of the twentieth century feature a diverse and intricate array of female characters. The playwrights deviate significantly from the conventional portrayal of women, turning them into various personas: a femme fatale, a New Woman, a hysterical housewife, a grande matron, a barmaid, a flapper, or clothing. Diverse sorts of depictions of horsewomen have been rendered in various hues. The term 'New Woman' gained prominence with the introduction of George Bernard Shaw, whose work challenged and undermined society's traditional and customary ways of



thinking. Shaw's unconventional mindset and scepticism towards conventional attitudes and institutions regarding the position of women in society and the domestic sphere necessitate further examination and reassessment in the present day. Shaw's concepts pertaining to women were iconoclastic. A woman was the focal point of every dilemma in his plays; she was delicate yet resolute, stunning yet commanding, and invariably pragmatic. Consistently, she emerged as a pivotal and intricate character throughout the entire play. The women portrayed in Shaw's works serve as a representation of his unconventional perspective, which challenged established norms and institutions concerning the position of women within the household and society. Candida, Ann Whitfield in *Man and Superman*, Louka in *Arms and the Man*, and Barbara in *Major Barbara*, besides, a number of notable performances include those of Vivie in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Joan in *Saint Joan*, and Hypatia in *Misalliance*.

The concept of the 'New Woman' is evident in Tendulkar's plays, as it appeared that he was significantly influenced by Western cinema and playwrights during his youth. The portrayal of the New Woman archetype in the characters of Miss Benare in *Silence* is aptly executed. Princess Vijaya is in *Session*, Sarita is in *Kamala*, Mitra is in *A Friend's Story*, Jyoti is in *Kanyadan*, and Laxmi is in *Sakharam Binder*. A woman assumes a pivotal position in the dramatic works of Tendulkar. The female protagonists in Tendulkar's plays are the focal point of the action. Various characters, including Benare, Sarita, Jyoti, Vijaya, and Mitra, are the central figures in the performances. Due to the fact that they are all well-educated and refined, they all reject outmoded and traditional moral standards and refuse to be intimidated by males. The playwright's social attitude is evident in their rebellion against established values; they are anti-romantic, anti-sophisticated, and anti-establishment. The female characters are portrayed with empathy and compassion, despite the fact that Tendulkar, who does not consider himself a self-aware feminist, occasionally engages in feminist slogan-mongering.

Throughout history, women have been considered objects, while men have been subjects, deliberately choosing partners and lovers without regard for their desires and intentions. They lack the authority to choose and articulate their emotions of affection. However, Shaw has inverted the situation by granting his female characters an unrestricted forum to propose their own potential partners. They, in contrast to other Victorian female characters, never experience unfavourable outcomes. The Shavian woman evaluates and makes decisions independently, devoid of any delusion. Every woman in Shaw's work falls in love. They progress in knowledge from ignorance. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Ibsenism influenced both literature and society as a whole, *The Philanderer* was composed. Grace Tranfield, a "New woman" who challenges the Victorian 'Womanly woman,' is introduced in the drama. Evident from her words is the fact that she embodies nearly every characteristic of a 'New woman': "No woman is the property of a man. A woman belongs to herself and to nobody else" (Carlson, 103). Again she asserts as "..."I will never marry a man I love too much. It would give him a terrible advantage over me: I should be utterly in his power. That's what the new woman is like" (Carlson, 107).

Grace employs her sagacity and prudence to safeguard not only her personal autonomy and liberty, but also those of all women. Grace's confidence in her own abilities and regard for herself as a woman serve to underscore the Iberian cult of the independent, emotionless, and unwomanly woman. "I will not give myself to a man who has learned how to treat women from you and your kind," she declares. His regard is indispensable; I can survive without his affection. *Pygmalion* serves as a personal journey through themes of freedom and identity for its title character, the 'flower girl' Eliza Doolittle. She effectively traverses the globe and matures from an infantile woman. Her ascent from 'flower girl' to 'duchess' to 'princess' exemplifies a characteristic of the New Woman. Mrs. Warren's *Profession's* Vivie is Mitra, a character from Tendulkar's *A Friend's Story*. Mitra, an assertive male-stuff exerciser, removes a cigarette and ignites it. She exudes a robust, masculine chuckle and leads a



casual existence. She prefers the company of men to that of women. In a similar vein, Vivie exemplifies the epitome of a self-assured, sophisticated, and credibly educated woman. She is the initial unfeminine character to appear in a Shavian drama. Vivie is an athletic, physically capable, and enthusiastic young lady. Given that she possesses every unfeminine quality, she is indeed an unfeminine woman. At the tender age of twenty-two, she consistently demonstrates remarkable bravery in all of her enterprise. In even the most sentimental circumstances, she maintains an effervescent, candid, and forthright demeanor.

Silence! The Court is Session by Benare represents Tendulkar's conceptualization of a 'New Woman' within the Indian milieu. Despite her modernity, education, and economic independence, which enable her to fulfil her responsibilities, her co-actors do not acknowledge or appreciate any of her positive qualities. She falls prey to the false morality of the middle class and the dual standards of society. Benare's inquiries are prevalent across all time periods and societies. She is portrayed as a dissenter to the constituted norms of a predominantly traditional society. Benare's ultimate choice to give birth to her child in the midst of this ruthless society is strikingly similar to Major Barbara's decision in the play *Major Barbara*, in which she returns to life resolute in her pursuit to save the souls of all people, regardless of wealth or poverty, nourishment or lack thereof. This demonstrates that this New Woman possesses not only revolutionary rebelliousness but also spiritual fortitude. Additionally, it implies the dramatist's conviction in the fundamental virtue of women, which enables them to avert global catastrophe. Barbara, similar to Benare, condones the malevolent aspects of society while upholding her moral rectitude. A characteristic of a New Woman is her "caring, maternal attitude." Candida gives each individual the care of a resourceful mother in *Candida*. As her infant, she handles Morell and Marchbanks similarly. Candida demonstrates her practical nature when, when the time comes to choose between Morell and Marchbanks, she opts for the more pragmatic Morell rather than the more poetic Marchbanks. Candida describes Morell as "strong in society but weak before her." Since Candida is aware of Morell's frailty, he is more dependent on her. An analogous circumstance transpires concerning Sarita in Tendulkar's play *Kamala*. Although Sarita and Kamala both represent the exploitation of women, Sarita is comparable to Candida in that she serves as an influence for her husband's professional trajectory. Sarita extends emotional support to Jaisingh in the aftermath of his employment loss, driven by her compassion for him. She embodies Tendulkar's New Woman ideals; she shares her husband's concern for the tribal woman without hesitation or hesitation as a sign of support for her rehabilitation, which entails the restoration of social justice. Sarita, similar to Candida, offers Jaisingh emotional support and prevents him from experiencing a complete mental breakdown. She is not, however, subservient. By asserting herself as a 'New Woman,' she states:

I'll go on feeling it. But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about itBut a day will come.... I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it. (Tendulkar, 52).

However, it is possible that Tendulkar has authentically embodied the notion of a "new woman" through the portrayal of Princess Vijaya in *Encounter in Ubugland*. The theatrical production is replete with political machinations that aim to acquire a position of power. However, what is more noteworthy is the transformation of Princess Vijaya's persona—from that of an independent, capricious, impish, and amusing young lady—into that of a shrewd and ambitious autocrat.

Princess Vijaya embodies the archetype of the modern woman. She embodies the qualities of a defiant and self-assured woman who possesses the ability to influence not only her own destiny but also that of the nation. The author meticulously portrays the transformation of the princess's persona from that of an intrepid and politically naive princess to that of a shrewd and triumphant monarch.



The transformation of Jyoti even in the play *Kanyadan* exemplified the cult of the New Woman. As a result of her transformation from a well-educated and soft-spoken Brahmin girl into the resolute spouse of her dalit husband, Jyoti demonstrates the fortitude with which she confronts society. The most apt manifestation of her bravery occurs when her father Nath prepares to deliver a speech on Arun's autobiography. Fearing that his refusal to do so would only cause Jyoti further trouble, she audaciously interrupts him before he can finish his insincere and dishonest speech. The girl's ultimate choice to vacate her father's residence with an unwavering resolve to never return demonstrates her preparedness to confront the arduous realities of life. Although playwrights G.B. Shaw and Vijay Tendulkar have written in distinct settings and on various issues, they both have similarities in their portrayal of a New woman. Shaw always aimed to provoke society into reconsidering the notion that women were intellectually inferior to men. Shaw's female characters have consistently incited reviewers to either support or criticise them throughout time. Shaw's female characters provide us with a peek of women who were similar to males and would continue to be so in the next century. Therefore, while Shaw's peers were developing female characters that had more feminine qualities, Shaw himself was focused on producing female characters who closely resembled males, but being referred to as "unsexed women". Shaw was concerned in achieving political equality because he believed that a person's gender should not determine their rights or opportunities. Vijay Tendulkar, like Shaw, represents a pioneering movement in theatre that explores fresh ideas, issues, and approaches. He used the stage not for the purpose of amusing the audience, but rather to unsettle them by deliberately provoking their sensitivity and prompting them to contemplate issues related to human connections and the fundamental nature of human life. Tendulkar's plays address the issues faced by women and criticise the feudal ideals that continue to uphold male dominance in society, even in the 21st century. Women consistently endure humiliation and oppression inside the purportedly civilized society. However, Tendulkar has empowered women to become rebellious and embrace a new, independent identity, similar to the character of Shaw's "New Woman". Both playwrights, G.B. Shaw and Tendulkar, advocated for sexual equality and made efforts to support women via their dramatic works, particularly in relation to the notion of the New Woman. Jyoti's concluding statement reflects the playwright's hopeful portrayal of women, which aligns with G.B.

Shaw's concept of the "New woman" who embodies qualities traditionally associated with men's.

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