

# Portrayal of Gender in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* and Tennessee Williams's *A Street Car named Desire*: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract-** The research titled "Portrayal of Gender in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* and Tennessee Williams's *A Street Car Named Desire*: A Comparative study" compares the works of writers belonging to diverse cultures of India and America respectively.

The study highlights gender issues which are a recurring theme in their plays. The works of both playwrights depict the psychological impact of physical and sexual abuse on the minds of female characters in these plays. It examines the way in which Tennessee Williams used the character of Stanley to portray the Masculinity of a Working Class American, Tendulkar has done the same through *Sakharam*, to showcase Gender roles and their effects in an Indian working-class Environment.

Blanche vs Laxmi/ Champa and how men treat them, the comparison gives us an insight on how a dominating male figure not only robs them of their sanity, but also their lives.

Thus, This paper intends to compare both these plays by analyzing them through a cross-cultural lens to depict the portrayal of gender roles in these works and their impact on society. The study shows that gender stereotypes and male dominance leading to the subjugation of women are prevalent issues in both Indian and American culture

**Keywords-** Gender roles, Cross-cultural, Stereotypes, Gender issues

Paper

It is a widely regarded knowledge that Vijay Tendulkar was Inspired by the works of Tennessee Williams, and thus it can be seen in his plays. What meets the eye is how "A street Car named Desire" and "Sakharam Binder" both have an overbearing Patriarch who subjugates women seeking haven in their house.

Sakharam the "Social Messiah" as some have called him, Is a character with multiple shades and a complex personality, Very Similar to the Patriarch in Williams's Play.

Where at the beginning of the play *Sakharam* announces that he is "the King of the House , even if people may treat him like dirt outside" Similar lines are said by the American Patriarch who says "Every man is a king and I am the king around here"

The two lines quoted above show us how Authoritarian men think of their house as an imaginary Castle, A castle of foam one could say where they believe they should be hailed as the absolute kings by the women in the house. Where their word is the law even if it goes against the opposite gender.

The two characters strongly believe they deserve this privilege due to being from a "Superior Sex"

a phenomenon that still exists in both cultures to this day, where the so-called Stronger gender thinks it's their right to subjugate and oppress the weaker sex in a domestic household.

The two representations of Masculinity follow a similar pattern of drinking and abusing their wives, *Sakharam's* lashes, however, are met by a "temporary wife-like figure"

Their Brutish and savage selves are let out when they're under the influence of Alcohol, Followed by them showing their gentle side once sobriety pulls them back and hits them with realization.

While Stanley's preferred move to make amends is offering "Wild Sex" to his wife, knowing it always works for him, We see how Women are psychologically manipulated by reminding them of the bond of "marriage" and how it should be normalized to overlook their abuse because the bond of marriage ties them to one another.

After Physically abusing their Partners, Both the Patriarchs offer love as a balm to the wounds they themselves have inflicted on them, The American brute would remind his wife of his love by sexually pleasing her where on the other hand the Indian patriarch would wake his "wife" up to apologies and to make her laugh. Since it is expected of women to laugh and forgive in the brown culture.

The two plays also portray how patriarchy views promiscuous women and how the attitude of the dominating male figures changes in an instant once they learn about their past sexual affairs and experiences.

Not only do the men who see themselves as stallions, but a character insecure about his own masculinity gets the privilege to judge and chastise a licentious woman, simply because he has the privilege to sit on a high horse where the patriarchal society is his saddle.

The Promiscuousness of a woman is seen as a ticket for these men to sexually abuse them and get away with it. Champa who uses her sexuality to get things done is expected to pay the rent of the roof through sex, meanwhile, Sakharam thinks it's his right to lie with Champa even if it's at the cost of her consent which is often taken from her when she is made to drink herself unconscious.

The paper argues their sexual intercourse to be nonconsensual even if the woman willingly drinks herself to the point of unconsciousness just to provide for her "husband's" sexual needs. Even though Normalized, Sakharam putting Champa through Substance abuse just to gratify his own sexual hunger resembles the Marital rape we see in our Indian society to a large extent.

Both the Literary works bring to light how patriarchy uses the sexuality of these female characters against them to further abuse them both: physically and mentally. Stanley Rapes Blanche once he learns about her affairs in the motels and with Mitch, He thinks it's okay to force a woman for sex because she has a history of being with men, a mentality flawed to the core yet very much Normalized in a patriarchal society.

The incident pushes Blanche's deranged mental health off the cliff, the Rape serves as a final nail in the coffin to her sanity and brings a tragic end to her character.

Women's sexuality is used against them as a weapon to shame and berate any libertine woman the patriarchy comes across, this is done to use their demise or tragedy as an example or a monument to preach patriarchal ideas so as to maintain and preserve the ideal feminine image in the society, for patriarchy wishes its sexuality to be liberated but it deems its women to remain "Angels of the House".

A glimpse of how this subtle brainwashing affects women is portrayed by Laxmi's character who even after receiving a fair share of struggles due to the patriarchal structure of the society, shows an unwillingness to let go of the ideas that were deeply embedded in her psyche, as she constantly shames and criticizes Champa for not being faithful to Sakharam or her Ex-Husband, overlooking how her Promiscuous counterpart was not obligated to commit to either of them.

Blinded by the ideal image of how a woman ought to be, a farce sculpted by a false patriarchal standard makes Laxmi believe that she deserves to be the woman of the house for being closer to this "so-called standard" where Champa deserved to die for being far from it.

In a Society where women ought to live like "Dependent Organisms" for the sake of security, safety, and stability, The two men cut from the same cloth use this "dependency" for their own gain.

Sakharam uses the body of both of his "wives" he reminds Laxmi "Once a woman is thrown over, nobody calls her respectable. Remember that. I at least took you in" (*Sakharam binder 147*) once she complains about working round the clock.

The Indian patriarch uses their dependency to make His 7<sup>th</sup> wife feed the hunger of his belly, while the woman who comes after her is made to feed the hunger of his loins.

Stanley also uses the expected dependent behavior of a new mother to get away with a crime, knowing his wife cannot leave him now after delivering their baby, he also exploits a deranged Blanche's dependency on him to send her to an asylum, Where Blanche, who "always Depended on the kindness of strangers" (*A Streetcar named Desire 142*) is now to be depended on another Man to mend her broken mental state.

The similarities between the female characters of both works are evident if inspected closely, as it wouldn't be far-fetched to say a hint of Blanche exists in both Champa and Laxmi.

Both Champa and Blanche meet their end due to their sexual persona and history, Even though the similarities between the docile and submissive characters who overlook a crime done to their female counterpart, in order to save the roof under their head by the end of their respective plays appears as a parallel between both the works, one cannot help but notice how patriarchy pushes the likes of both Laxmi and Blanche to Mental Derangement.

Both the Mentally traumatized Women from two poles apart cultures try to deal with their psychological traumas and anxiety, Although, this is where the privilege white women held in the American society compared to that of a Third world country is starkly visible. Where Blanche had the privilege to stay in the gloom and have "Hot scalding Baths" to calm her nerves, even though she could never be "clean enough" according to Stanley and his friend, Laxmi, a brown woman who was traumatized since an early pubescent age to adulthood had to indulge in a rather odd activity of talking to insects and animals to ease her psychological stress.

The fragility of both the Patriarch's Masculinity is conspicuous at the end of both the plays, as When Sakharam's Masculinity is questioned, he rapes Champa in a fit. Learning about the news of her affair with his own friend scrapes his "Wounded" Masculinity even more which provokes him to murder her. The American Patriarch on the other hand could not bear with a Woman's constant sly remarks on him, Blanche's rape is a result of how a Man could not deal with someone mocking his Masculinity over and over. As Wade Bradford in his Article says "For Stanley, this scene is the point where he fully crosses the line as a villain. He rapes her out of anger, out of pent-up sexual frustration, and as a way to assert his power." (*A Streetcar named Desire: The Rape Scene*)

We see two men commit heinous crimes only because their Masculinity is questioned or "Wounded" in a sense.

This makes one wonder, is True Masculinity so fragile? Or was their Masculinity truly hollow?

Toxic Masculinity, a relatively new term which is often used in research works when the two male characters are analyzed, "A *Streetcar named Desire* review—"a play that unpicks Toxic Masculinity by Izzy troth" and "*Masculinities in Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder*" are a few examples.

The term, however, was instantly adopted by people without putting in a school of thought when most gendered terms are given sufficient time and space.

"I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none." (*Macbeth Act 1 Scene 7*)

Where Macbeth says he'd do whatever is appropriate to be a true man, the character speaks of Masculinity as being Noble and Just.

"you have no trace of Manhood. You come to me now, when you've turned into the worst enemy of the gods and me and the whole Human race?" (*Medea by Euripides 550*)

A play written in the Ancient Greek age addresses "Lack of Masculinity" as the enemy of all human race, which in a way has predicted the future of our society.

The characters of Sakharam and Stanley may stand as the epitome of "Toxic Masculinity" for many, where it is a popular belief that Toxic Masculinity is the true evil of our modern patriarchal Society, but one could ponder if its Toxic Masculinity or lack of Masculinity.

Whether it is right to paint Masculinity with the word "Toxic" when the society also aspires to celebrate femininity. Why are the insecure, lewd, oppressive, manipulative, bullying traits of men associated or described as "Masculinity so heightened to a point that it's toxic to the society"

A question after contemplating the idea arises, why are the negative traits of men associated to a scale that measures a person's Masculinity or is seen to serve as an example of heightened or over-the-top masculinity, the society in a way has failed to look through Men who claim to be the epitome of Masculine with an inflated chest, but are too insecure about their Masculinity on the inside.

Jacob Flood in his article says "The term "toxic masculinity" points to a particular version of masculinity that is unhealthy for the men and boys who conform to it, and harmful for those around them."(*Toxic Masculinity: what does it mean, where did it come from - and is the term useful or harmful?*)

The paper Argues for the harmful traits of Masculinity to be seen as Lack of Masculinity rather than viewing it as a version of Masculinity.

Since true Masculinity which is ideal to be used as an example is overshadowed, even if it's everywhere around us.

"I can't believe that the noblest impulse of man-his compassion for another can be completely dead around here" (*Paths of Glory, Stanley Kubrick*)

The quote above taken from Stanley Kubrick's work implies how true Masculinity lies in the virtue of man.

True heightened Masculinity in its sense could be witnessed when a Fireman rescues someone from a burning building When a Man takes innumerable risks to reach a "Eureka!" moment which would benefit all of humankind, or even a man who uplifts the weak.

The virtues we call chivalry, Compassion, empathy are all traits which were applauded and expected of Knights as they were seen as the absolute Masculine, The opposite of these traits should be termed as "Lack of Masculinity" rather than "Toxic Masculinity"

Stanley even with his reeking Manliness, lacked Masculinity, which thus made him abuse Stella and Blanche.

Sakharam who chastised other men for beating their wives, his hypocritical actions makes him void of any kind of actual Masculinity.

Asserting Dominance while being insecure about their Manhood, is an accurate description of both the Patriarchs.

The balance of any society depends on the balance of its sexes, The potential risk of the term Toxic Masculinity is how readily it is used to shame masculinity by movements which declare "All men are Toxic" and "#Yesallmen" Making men critical of their own identity and Masculinity, which stirs the problem even more rather than looking for solutions for gendered issues.

The paper intends to showcase the oppression of women by the hands of patriarchs who lack all the decent qualities of Manhood. While femininity is undoubtedly to be celebrated, Masculinity in its truest sense should be promoted as well, which would help us to aspire for a progressive utopian society.

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