

BIOLOGY IS DESTINY: A STUDY OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *A FRIEND'S STORY*

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ABSTRACT

We live in a pluralistic, hierarchical society dominated by patriarchy with given goals and constructed roles imposed on both genders. Males possessing traits such as strength, independence and assertiveness are considered symbolic and exemplary in possessing masculinity, while females are considered feminine only if they meet the required expectancies with traits such as sensitivity, shyness and modesty. Gender roles are determined by hegemonic social discourse, and individuals are expected to fit into them. Identities are constructed in an exceedingly essentialist way. The social rigid structure does not allow any space to those who do not fit into these roles. This paper serves as a desolate reminder of grim conventional realities leading to the cataclysmic end of people like Mitra, with fervent tears and internal struggles yearning for normalcy, they fight against the archaic gender norms and struggle to fit in with society.

Keywords: heterosexuality, homosexuality, Compulsory Heterosexuality, patriarchy, character destiny, criminal love, marginalization/victimization, societal rigidity.

Mitrachi Goshta or *A Friend's Story*, written by Vijay Tendulkar, who was an eminent bilingual playwright, literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator, is well known for his outstanding Marathi plays such as *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, and *Sakharam Binder*. He was intrigued, influenced and inspired by the Western plays. He had already written a play, *Amchyavar Kon Prem Karnar?* (Who is going to love me?) and *Grihastha* (The Householder), in his early 20s. The latter did not receive much

recognition from the audience, and he vowed never to write again. Breaking the vow, in 1956, he wrote *Shrimant*, which established him as a good writer. Most of his works were derived from real-life incidents and social cataclysms. The play *Friend's Story* presents the story of Mirta, who is homosexual.

Indian society encourages and celebrates 'individualism', the idea that a person has the liberty to act on their uniqueness and fulfil their desires along with their interests, yet ostracizes and excludes people as homosexuals for being different from us. We do not live in a homogenous society with identical twins surrounding us; rather, we live as a synergy of diverse communal people, promoting an exchange of numerous contrasting attributes and an established social cohesion among the individuals, a blend of everything together. We are conditioned to believe what we see and hear is what is normal', All that has ever been seen is guys passionately singing to a girl holding a guitar professing their love, and never it is heard others converse openly about being attracted towards the same sex. Society is a boxed - structure with high-sized panels, with people being the timid kittens afraid to compromise on the position of security. Stepping out of the box would denote non-conformity, where such people will be seen as outsiders, despise and disgust with taunting eyes would follow them. What about staying inside the box and submitting to conformity? Our social identity is determined by many factors like caste, religion, gender and class. Everybody in society attempts to fit into these labels, deviation causes problems. Labels are made and attached to the people. Outside the frames of labels the existence becomes very difficult. Such people are either oppressed or rejected. In a world of heterosexuals, homosexuals are not listened to, and their words carry no meaning against the rigid norms fabricated by society. *Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains*, (53) a very thought-provoking quote by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book *The Social Contract* unearths how society hinders us from discovering our true self, acting as invisible shackles in our path, leaving us paralyzed and hollow. Gender roles are constructed by the powerful social discourse. Nobody is allowed to transgress them. The fixed roles are repeatedly performed and sustained. Judith Butler her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, says,

If gender attributes and acts are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act might be measured; there would be no true or false. Gender and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances, means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or binding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (2)

Acceptance and idealization come from strictly and blindly following gender roles. Clothes, actions, replies, future dreams and works are predetermined in a society one is born. Transgression is punitive and unacceptable. In *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* of Jeanette Winterson a lesbian character, enunciates her disaffection. *As far as I was concerned men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless, and apart from my never wearing a skirt, saw nothing else in common between us.* (25)

SumitraDev or Mitra is a character introduced in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Mitrachi Goshta*. Although she was as courageous as a lion and as loud as thunder, her character met a painful end when society punished her for defying strict social rules and subjected her to the repercussions of nonconformity. She's lesbian. She desires to claim her sexuality as a natural one. Her consistent head butting against societal expectations and revolting rebellion embody her action of rejecting the expectations adhering to all women as heterosexuals. There are imposed cultural roles that must be followed for easy cultural assimilation. People become critical of her gender behaviours. Mitra's close friend Bapu thinks about her behaviour. He thinks *Mitra acts like a man, talks like a man ... She's not like other girls. She doesn't even try.*" (Friend's Story, 12). Her mother is shocked to learn her unmanly predilections. Her mother constantly nags her about her odd nature. Once Mitra tells Bapu what her mother thinks of her, *My mother used to say, I had hoodwinked God to be born a girl. I was always with the boys. Used to play all their games from marbles to gillidanda! . Even kabaddi.*" (Friend's Story, 18) Deeply entrenched in gender ideology, her family now and then expresses anxiety over her being the way she is, her father is ashamed of her. *We gave birth to a girl, not this shame ... She has brought disgrace upon us!*" (Friend's Story, 28) Mitra feels normal, though she is not for the world around her, she says, *I am not ashamed of who I am. I'm ashamed of this world*". (Friend's Story, 35) Homosexual people don't feel any disgust at their sexuality. In the movie Aligarh, the gay professor at the Muslim Aligarh University says,

You ask me who I am. Am I gay? Am I a sinner? I am just a man who feels deeply. Who teaches poetry? Who falls in love? My body may define how you see me, but my heart defines how I live. If that makes me different, then I accept it. But don't ask me to apologise for being a human being." (0.37.26-0.938.13)

Mitra is not ready to accept the social mores that will cause any harm to her instinctive freedom. She dares to tell to what she feels is good for her. *Why must I wear a frock and act like a puppet?*" (Friend's Story, 43) People around her are obsessively in love with her, but heterosexual love is not her interest. When she rejects Pande's proposal, he becomes furious and calls her, *Lesbian bitch! Who do u think you are?*" (Friend's Story, 39). In a Compulsory heterosexuality society, such a violent reaction is very normal; people are groomed for non-

acceptance of homosexuality. Mitra is firm. She knows what is to be done; *I knew I didn't want a man. I need a woman. I'm different, different.*”(Friend's Story, 33) Because of this, she cannot maintain good relations with anybody around her. It is not her fault. The discourse of heterosexuality throws her out of the societal periphery. Nama is very close to her, but he has the same experience from her, “*She said she loved me. She told me I was her closest friend. But when I reached out, when I held her ... she pulled away. Like I was poison. Like I was sick. Then she went and told them all. She let them laugh at me. I thought I had love. Instead, I had humiliation.*”(Friend's Story, 47)

However, her character is very complex with other factors contributing to her tragedy without implication of cultural context in the play, such as obsessive behaviour, violent tendencies, mental instability, unrequited Love, betrayal in friendship, self-destruction, social isolation, identity struggle and emotional turmoil. Her character would still be a tragic figure due to her never-ending internal suffering and her emotional suppression. Her whole life she has questioned who she really was, from Sumitra to Mitra, which suggests her two reflective identities as her conformed vs her real self as Mitra. The core theme of the play delves into the genre of Unrequited Love and other relationships resulting in the poignant portrayal of psychological decline and despair Mitra had to face. Mitra believes Nama as her one and only soul mate, while her love seemed innocent and playful at first, it later transmuted to a toxic and violent act of possession, with Nama fearing Mitra and eventually conforming to society as her character is timid and docile, leaving Mitra helpless and heartbroken she is unable to move on from Nama and her intense love towards her. Losing a person you wish to live your entire life with lands a heavy blow that resonates with everyone, transcending the concept much bigger than that of homo or hetero sexuality. The devastating aftermath portrays her struggle with alcoholism in an attempt to assuage her grief. Another tragic theme explored by the play sheds light into her losing Bapu, who is the only friend Mitra ever confided in. Despite holding the knowledge of the authentic self of Mitra, Bapu supported and helped Mitra in more ways he could, used as a vessel to vent, Mitra professed her love for Nama to Bapu symbolizing their friendship and trust. Even if Bapu didn't accept who she really was and failed to provide her help amidst struggling with his own battle between moralities, he never exposed Mitra in the social sphere but couldn't completely understand her emotions either. Losing Bapu after she left for Kolkata, breaking her promise, infuriated the meek and shy Bapu leading to a broken friendship, with Mitra having to lose both her Soulmate and her best friend. The two people she could be herself with had abandoned Mitra. The circumstances later unravel her social isolation and mental heft with a prolonged struggle for self – identity. Her battle was not only against society but herself. Even if society were to accept Mitra as masculine, bold and aggressive, her character would still be seen in a conflicting idea of unresolved emotions and mental instability due to her unrequited Love,

broken friendship and toxicity with vulnerable attributes. In the movie *Fire*, one of the characters challenges the assigned social gender roles.

Somebody just has to press my button marked 'tradition, 'and I start responding like a trained monkey. I cook, I serve, I lower my gaze. But what about me? What about how I feel? Why must I always sacrifice? Just because I was born a woman? Because biology says I should?(0.42.05-042.18)

The core element of any tragedy is the everlasting suffering of characters with a decline in their psychological wellness, casting them into darkness, as seen in the most popularly read works by the eminent playwright William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Her tragedy is caused because she comes out of the closet and expects others to respect her sexuality. She defies the constrains by as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick the *closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century*(*Epistemology of the Closet*, 12) *Friend's Story* gives us a stark reminder of not only her fragile life with insurmountable obstacles, the weight of societal rejection unaccepting of non-heteronormative identities but also the devastating internal unresolved emotions, psychological turmoil, prevailing ambiguity, failed inter personal-relationships and deteriorating health. This play not only critiques the idea of individual loss but also illustrates a broader commentary on human condition and the brunt of opposing society

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