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Non-traditional Sexuality In Vijay Tendulkar's A Friend's Story

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Abstract:

*“When life descends into the pit
I must become my own candle
willingly burning myself
To light up the darkness around me.”
— Alice Walker*

The present paper titled “Non-Traditional Sexuality in Vijay Tendulkar's

A Friend's Story” is a discussion on homosexuality in heterosexual society. Tendulkar through the protagonist Mitra mirrors how heterosexual society is ruthless towards homosexuals how they are not accepted in the society and they suffer psychological insecurity and guilt. Tendulkar has raised an untouched issue in this play. In our Indian society its not only taboo to be that but even writing about that comes in the realm of taboo. Tendulkar has knitted a love story which is an unusual story of females. Sumitra Dev was different from other girls but there was a masculine vigour in her stride and speak. She was unable to understand herself, cracked her head, brooded so much that it ate into her brain, she could not think any more. She concluded that she was deficient in some way. Something had to be corrected .. (432). Mitra experimented herself with her servant then she understood that she is different. “It was impossible for her to go through... She was different.... She could never become a man's partner in this... never ... (433). The truth was not digestible by her and decided to kill herself. She committed suicide but was rescued by her family. When she was still recovering she got a chance to act in a play that too a male role. She readily accepted. Sumitra was commendable in her male role. Nama played heroine role and Mitra madly falls in love with her. When she is desolated by Nama and Bapu she commits suicide. It was very clear from Mitra's words that what was Bapu's place in her heart she had given him a position of mother, one who gives life. It's not easy to confess, everything to everyone that ease had developed between them because of Bapu's good nature. Bapu had treated Mitra as a human being rather than a friend and that was more essential for her. After hearing to Mitra Bapu drinks for the first time he is unable to decide whether he did a right thing by leaving her friendship. Mitra says “Mother Bapu gone friendship is over. Nama is over, no dependence... no dependence... Bapu gone”(492). Its very clear that Mitra was more dependent on Bapu than Nama. She has sensed Nama would leave her one or the other day but never had thought that Bapu would leave her. Mitra pricked by the thorns of loneliness commits suicide. The likelihood of suicide attempts is higher in the homosexuals as they suffer loneliness and cloister away from others. The trend of having a higher incident rate among females encompasses lesbians or bisexual females; when compared with homosexual or bisexual males, lesbians are more likely to attempt suicide. Bapu had thrown Mitra out of his life and concentrated on studies but Mitra was unable to go on without Bapu's friendship and Nama. She had no reason for living. May be if Bapu had given his helping hand she would have not killed herself. Bapu is in a state of turmoil after hearing the news. It pains his heart. He had lost a friend and rather holds a guilt that he failed as a human being to help her.

Tendulkar had written 'A Friend's Story' at a time when the play was not accepted but now the situation has changed the play would be accepted and even 'Mitra' would be accepted. But still may not by the conservative minds. . . As Mina Kumar opines “Now in modern India Lesbianism is well received.”

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India's first married lesbian couple Savita and Veena were given police protection and moved to a safe house amid fears the two women would be targeted in an honour killing. Savita, a 25 year old student at Choudhary Charan Singh University and her 20 year old wife Veena, 20, were married by a court in Haryana, close to New Delhi. (Dean Nelson). In a path-breaking judgment, the Delhi High Court on 2 July 2009 legalised gay sex among consenting adults, holding that the law making it a criminal offence violates fundamental rights. However, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises homosexuality, will continue for non-consensual and non-vaginal sex.

Tendulkar's Sumitra is a reflection of Indian society who is victimized for being different, being non-traditional in her sexuality. It is not easy to live in the society being 'different' from others. The protagonist is in turmoil of conflicts in her mind. She wants to follow the pattern of behaviours the society as set forth and falls as a victim to the expectations society creates. Mitra tried to be a woman dressed like a woman and tried to concentrate on men. She was able to attract men but failed to get attracted. Tendulkar through Mitra mirrors how heterosexual society is ruthless towards homosexuals how they are not accepted in the society and they suffer psychological insecurity and guilt. Wadikar rightly points out that the analytical studies of Vijay Tendulkar's plays reveals that the dramatist has a desire to strive for perfection of life Chekhov, he aims at creating a kind of emotionally refined, integrated and conscious world (Wadikar). Mitra's serious thoughts: "who makes us the way we are and sends us here? Why are we what we are? Why do we become own slaves? We have to search for our own answers. No one can help (424). The helplessness of Mitra, the inability to change her fate and futility of her existence is expressed. She is suffering from identical crisis so is every human being. The Dammapada quotes: "You are your own refuge, there is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve."

Vijay Tendulkar is a versatile writer whose explorations with theme are so vivid and enigmatic that there is not a single repetition of similar form. Drama was in his blood, his father was an enthusiastic writer, director and actor of amateur plays in Marathi. Tendulkar was exposed to the stage at the young age of four and started writing at the age of six. When he wrote, directed and acted in his first play he was eleven. He was so spontaneous in his writing that as he says given a piece of paper, any paper, and a pen, he shall write as naturally as a bird flies or a fish swims. As he was brought up in a literary atmosphere and his voracious reading helped him to rise to this stature. Writing was his passion which soothed him a lot till his last breath. His fruitful fifty years of writing career as a writer, playwright and film writer encompasses twenty eight full length plays, seven collections of one-acts, children plays, four short stories, three essays, a novel and even seventeen film scripts to his credit. Tendulkar has translated nine novels. He has been felicitated with many awards and honours including the Maharashtra state Govt. Award (1956,1969,1973), the Sangeet Natak akademi Award (1971), the film fare Award (1980&1983), the PadmaBhushan(1984), the saraswathi samman(1993), the Kalidas samman(1999), the Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar(1999), the Janasthan Award (1999) and recipient of Katha Chudamani Award for life time literary achievement in 2001.

Dialogues are the most striking point of his writing as Tendulkar opines that his characters are not cardboard characters, they do not speak his language rather as he puts it differently are actors on the stage of his creative mind. For Tendulkar the primary compulsion is and always been humanistic. Man's fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert or overt violence in human beings, there are his abiding concerns. He says "I was never able to begin writing my play only with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to have my characters first with me... living persons leading me into the thick of their lives where they would give me the theme". (SRM lecture)

Tendulkar has raised an untouched issue in the play A Friend's Story (1982). He has dared to bring forth a deviant relationship that is homosexuality. In our Indian society its not only taboo to be that but even writing about that comes in the realm of taboo. When women writers write about sexual love that too between women it is considered total obscene. This is evident by Kamala Das's candid autobiography My Story (1976) which was controversial and even more when Shobha De wrote Strange Obsession (1993). Homosexuality was not new to India it can be said by some of the historical evidence like temple sculptures at Khajuraho and Konark. Ancient and medieval texts constitute irrefutable evidence that the whole range of sexual behaviour was known in pre-colonial India. Vatsyana, a Hindu sage has written on homosexual acts in his Kamasutra. Emperor Babur's autobiography Tuzuki-Babri gives details of his attraction towards a teenage boy. Under British rule homosexuality was an offence. ChapterXVI, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is a piece of legislation in India introduced during British rule of India that criminalises sexual activity "against the order of nature." (Fom Wikipedia) In her short essay Mina Kumar says: "Lesbians in Indian texts and contexts" explains how non Brahminical traditions generated positive images of lesbianism" and [t] antrism's valorization of women and sexuality [further] provided a religiously sanctioned role for lesbianism. Homosexuality was illegal in India but in foreign countries it was common in the times of World War II. "In 1969, Lesbian and Gay street people, Puerto can drag queens, and bar gays fought back against a routine police raid at the stone wall Tavern in New York City [...](Dellamora). Same

sex couples have been fighting for the freedom to marry since the dawn of the modern lesbian and gay civil rights movement. This struggle is important to the movement because of the myriad rights and responsibilities married couples enjoy and because of the special status marriage has in America. (Johnson) Obama stands first U.S. president who had publicly expressed support for gay marriage. Recently Obama said in an interview with ABC's Robin Roberts: "It is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

A Friend's story is a stark commentary on the nature of both heterosexual and homosexual love. Sumitra Dev was different from other girls but there was a masculine vigour in her stride and speak. "Her entire personality had a natural, aggressive masculinity, but with a figure irresistibly attractive to men" (419) As a child Mitra loved the company of boys and played all the games of boys like marbles, gillidanda and even Kabaddi. Dare devil lady, rode a cycle like a man. Her mother used to say that she had hood winked god to be born a girl. when Sumitra was behaving strangely and liked to mingle with boys than with girls of her age obviously her parents got worried. "The elders in the family got angry with her but the girl did not care. When she came of age, rather early, they got worried. They became very strict, 'What will people say?' was the bug bear they set up to control her. They sought to stamp her mind with fear of men, at a time she did not know why men were dangerous. Those who made the rules were men themselves – father, grandfather – were not they men? Why were they at her constantly? She followed their rules without protest. Then they fence her in. She found it very difficult to live in that world of enclosed pens, but she did (431). Mitra was in utter confusion why she felt no physical thrill or excitement when she met guys. "She found the whole thing rather bizarre. She asked herself why she did not feel the way other girls did. Why did I feel so completely at home in the company of men? Why did I never feel shy? Why did I feel so much at ease in putting my hand round their shoulders? Why did I find it strange when I sensed a man's excitement? Men were good company, but their ways with women seemed weird and unpleasant. (432)

Mitra was unable to understand herself, cracked her head, brooded so much that it ate into her brain, she could not think any more. She concluded that she was deficient in some way. Something had to be corrected.. (432). Mitra experimented herself with her servant then she understood that she is different. "It was impossible for her to go through... She was different.... She could never become a man's partner in this... never ... (433). The truth was not digestible by her and decided to kill herself. She committed suicide but was rescued by her family. When she was still recovering she got a chance to act in a play that too a male role. She readily accepted. Sumitra was commendable in her male role. Nama played heroine role and Mitra falls in love with her. Bapu though attracted to Mitra by her looks in the beginning later becomes a good friend of her. Bapu's friend Pande falls in love with Mitra watching her stunning performance. Pande requests Bapu to help him to get Mitra. Even Mitra confesses her love for a girl to Bapu. Mitra wants Bapu's room to have Nama. Bapu favours Mitra by giving his room. Nama is having affair with Manya Dalvi. Mitra is aware of the facts, "They meet every day. In the lane behind the college grounds, after dark. She is under his thumb. I heard they even go to a hotel downtown" (447).

Tendulkar has successfully pictured clear contrast between the homosexual and heterosexual love. Sumitra is in madly love with Nama. She says "I love her with my whole being, Bapu! I have lost my heart to her. I just can't forget her" (448). Mitra and Pande both ask Bapu's help. "Bapu Saala, I fall at your feet like you are my own father, I will rub my nose on the ground before you, I will do anything your say, but – please get Mitra to see Me" (449). Mitra wants Bapu to find personal details of Nama's boy friend Dalvi. She says, "Find out about Dalvi, find out if he's got anything else going... just anything... it's enough even if it has to do with someone in his house... not necessary that is should be true. Mitra writes love letters to Nama in a hand writing which matches with Bapu so he is thoroughly beaten by Dalvi. Bapu finds the writing filthy and warns Mitras not to write again. Pande had gone alcoholic in the memories of Mitra. Even he had brought a woman to his room fully drunk and had thrown out of the room saying "She's not Mitra!"(455). Bapu collected courage and told the truth to Pande that Mitra is interested only in women. Pande left to battle front as there was a war in Europe or Africa. When Dalvi catches Nama with Mitra he humiliates Mitra with his bad slang. "You bloody lesbian bitch, you! I will kill you! Aren't you ashamed? You do such things here? You bring her here again, and I will show you! I'll crush you, you devil, I tell you, I'll – I'll tear your to pieces on the streets. I'll strip you on the road" (456).

After Nama is taken by Dalvi Sumitra rips a bed sheet to pieces and bangs her head against the wall. Nama was crushed between Dalvi and Mitra. She met Mitra without Dalvi's knowledge. Dalvi asks Babu to give his room as his usual arrangement had broken down. Bapu vacates the room to escape from the speculation. Mitra gets worried hearing this and wants to pay double and have room for herself in the name of Bapu. Mitra tries to persuade him by saying that she had no one to call her own except him. Mitra is desperate to have Nama and kill Dalvi who is coming in her way. Bapu was firm in his decision and got joined to another place with two roommates. Mitra asks for loan from Bapu as she has to make other arrangement. Nama gets irritated by Mitra's love. She says "She loves me... very much. I too like the way

she treats me... But sometimes I get fed up even with her love... Too much of it..." (462). Nama gets suffocated in her relationship with Mitra who is too bossy and dominating. Nama gets afraid of Mitra when she questions of her relationship with Dalvi moreover she is keen to know how they enjoy. Bapu was able to understand Nama's plight. Bapu is a soft hearted man and a good friend of Mitra. As a well wisher he warns Mitra to be careful and writes "What you depend on is not so dependable." Mitra says Bapu that "Nama can't get away. I hold her in the palm of my hand. She knows that if I want, I can make her eat dirt. Mitra would like to have Nama under her control and she would go to any extend to have her. She says "I can make our relationship public. I can break her marriage proposal. If she leaves me, she has nowhere to go" (471). When Bapu asks Mitra if she allows Nama to marry she says she would consider when the time comes that too she would consider if she continues to come to her. Bapu gets angry the way Mitra is treating Nama he feels its wrong to treat a human beings as things.

From Dalvi Bapu comes to know that Mitra's name has been taken off from the register. Nama reveals to Bapu considering him confident regarding her marriage in Calcutta. But Bapu could not keep his words and gives the news to Mitra. Bapu wants Mitra to change herself and lead a new life. He says. "Look Mitra, nothing is difficult if you make up your mind. You have the guts, you have the strength. If you resolve to change, then everything can change. I have that faith in you" (484). Bapu really wanted to help Mitra. "I will help you. I will do whatever you want you have my word. I will keep it let people see you as a new Mitra. Is that on?" (485). Bapu had thought Mitra as innocent and good girl and was planning her future. But when he comes to know that Mitra had gone to Calcutta Bapu was very much hurt and felt he was fooled by her. Mitra and Bapu have a long bust up over this and finally they breakup. But Mitra had brought a tin of Rosogallas for Bapu and he was not able to understand this gesture of hers. Bapu was angry that he had sworn to Nama that he would not tell anyone and now worried about his reputation. I did not mean a thing to you. I was only a doormat to be used at need and kicked aside when not needed (486). Thus their friendship ends and it is only in the club where Bapu hides and watches Mitra. Dalvi tells Bapu that Mitra was thrown out of her house and stays in the women's hostel. Pande tells that Mitra is regular to the club. "To drink . . . costly foreign maal . . . you are sure to get it here... and at that. Today this officer tomorrow that officer. They get her drink and . . . They get their money's worth. The Lesbian bitch"(490).

When Bapu was told about this he just prays that Mitra should not come to club that day but she comes and he is unable to witness that Mitra enters dressed in outrageous costume and lipstick. When the officers greet her she joins them and drinks. Sumitra being heavily drunk is not able to control herself. She begins to play the drunken games with officers and is not conscious of her saree having slipped down from her shoulder. The men are having usual fun. Its in the drunken state she tells about Bapu. She scolds him are pig, hates him for bossing". I am not a handbag. I'm a human being, I have a will... I will do what I like" (492).

Mitra had gone Calcutta to search Nama but in Vain she was not successful to find her. Mitra is too hurt the way Bapu had left her. More than left her the way he said that she lied him. "Who lied? I lied? I did not lie to him. I lied to my mother, but not to him. Told him what I did not tell anyone. He – he was my mother. Mother Bapu, Mother – Bapu. It was very clear from Mitra's words that what was Bapu's place in her heart she had given him a position of mother, one who gives life. It's not easy to confess, everything to everyone that ease had developed between them because of Bapu's good nature. Bapu had treated Mitra as a human being rather than a friend and that was more essential for her.

After hearing to Mitra Bapu drinks for the first time he is unable to decide whether he did a right thing by leaving her friendship. Mitra says "Mother Bapu gone friendship is over. Nama is over, no dependence... no dependence... Bapu gone"(492). Its very clear that Mitra was more dependent on Bapu than Nama. She has sensed Nama would leave her one or the other day but never had thought that Bapu would leave her. Mitra pricked by the thorns of loneliness commits suicide. The likelihood of suicide attempts is higher in the homosexuals as they suffer loneliness and cloister away from others. The trend of having a higher incident rate among females encompasses lesbians or bisexual females; when compared with homosexual or bisexual males, lesbians are more likely to attempt suicide. Bapu had thrown Mitra out of his life and concentrated on studies but Mitra was unable to go on without Bapu's friendship and Nama. She had no reason for living. May be if Bapu had given his helping hand she would have not killed herself. Bapu is in a state of turmoil after hearing the news. It pains his heart. He had lost a friend and rather holds a guilt that he failed as a human being to help her.

Being human is all matters. Bapu being a gentleman helps Mitra and tries to be with her whenever she needs him. Bapu was trust worthy and without any expectations he was always beside her, a genuine relationship, a bond, a friendship had developed between the two. Other male characters Manya Dalvi and Pande loose our attention. Dalvi is a flirt and moves from one girl to another. He easily forgets Nama and finds another girl. Pande loved Mitra in the beginning but later when he learns the truth scolds her as a lesbian bitch. Nama is a confusing character. She was comfortable with Mitra as well as Dalvi. She is happy

with Mitra till it reaches a stage of suffocation. She was making love with Mitra and Dalvi at sometime balancing the both. She was not serious in her relationship with either of them and got married to someone in Calcutta.

Tendulkar had written 'A Friend's Story' at a time when the play was not accepted but now the situation has changed the play would be accepted and even 'Mitra' would be accepted. But still may not by the conservative minds. . . As Mina Kumar opines “Now in modern India Lesbianism is well received.” India's first married lesbian couple Savita and Veena were given police protection and moved to a safe house amid fears the two women would be targeted in an honour killing. Savita, a 25 year old student at Choudhary Charan Singh University and her 20 year old wife Veena, 20, were married by a court in Haryana, close to New Delhi.(Dean Nelson). In a path-breaking judgment, the Delhi High Court on 2 July 2009 legalised gay sex among consenting adults, holding that the law making it a criminal offence violates fundamental rights. However, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises homosexuality, will continue for non-consensual and non-vaginal sex."We declare that Section 377 of IPC in so far as it criminalises consensual sexual acts of adults in private is violative of Articles 14, 21 and 15 of the Constitution"(a bench comprising Chief Justice AP Shah and Justice S Murlidhar).

Tendulkar's Sumitra is a reflection of Indian society who is victimized for being different, being non traditional in her sexuality. Its not easy to live in the society being 'different' from others. The protagonist is in turmoil of conflicts in her mind. She wants to follow the pattern of behaviours the society as set forth and falls as a victim to the expectations society creates. Mitra tried to be a woman dressed like a woman and tried to concentrate on men. She was able to attract men but failed to get attracted. Goldman in a letter to Hirschfield wrote “It's a tragedy, I feel, that people of a different sexual type are caught in a world which shows so little understanding for homosexuals and is so crassly in different to the various gradations and variation of gender and their great significance in life”(174). Tendulkar through Mitra mirrors how heterosexual society is ruthless towards homosexuals how they are not accepted in the society and they suffer psychological insecurity and guilt. Wadikar rightly points out that the analytical studies of Vijay Tendulkar's plays reveals that the dramatist has a desire to strive for perfection of life Chekhov, he aims at creating a kind of emotionally refined, integrated and conscious world (Wadikar). Mitra's serious thoughts: “who makes us the way we are and sends us here? Why are we what we are? Why do we become own slaves? We have to search for our own answers. No one can help (424). The helplessness of Mitra, the inability to change her fate and futility of her existence is expressed. She is suffering from identical crisis so is every human being. The Dammapada quotes: “You are your own refuge, there is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve.”

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