

Vijay Tendulkar's Play *Kamala*: A representation of Slavery

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at critically studying the status of modern women's predicament, and suffering under the hegemony of men. Obviously, Vijay Tendulkar, one of the able torchbearers of feminist voices portrays two different characters sarita and Kamala in a realistic and contrasting way. The purpose of this paper is to exhibit the realities of modern Indian women at its grassroots level. In Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kamala*, a modern, educated, "high-society" woman sarita is presented in contrast to a poor uneducated slave woman Kamala. Tendulkar only raises social issues through his

female characters. He never gives solutions for social problems. Through this paper, I make an attempt to show that Feminism flourishes under Vijay Tendulkar.

KEYWORDS: Vijay Tendulkar, Indian, Feminism, Kamala, Hegemony, Predicament, Suffering.

Kamala by Vijay Tendulkar is a naturalistic play. Its focal point is on the distorted part of women in society. It was inspired by a real life incident—the Indian Express exposure by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference. But using this incident as a launching pad, Tendulkar raises certain cardinal questions regarding the value system of a modern success-oriented generation who is ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself. The playwright exposes the innate self-deception of this standpoint. It is the story of an unfortunate woman sold away in the flesh market and a so-called happy housewife married to a daring journalist, both having a revelation of verdict themselves on the general raised area of sexual slavery in this male subjugated world.

Ashwin Sarin, a journalist, investigated into flesh trade in Madhya Pradesh and purchased a woman 'Kamala' for two thousand and three hundred rupees to establish the trafficking of women, in Shivpuri village. The Journalist then wrote a series of articles exposing the prostitution trade, and involvement of political big wigs and police in it on seventeenth, twentieth, and thirtieth April 1981 and second May 1981. Tendulkar scripted a play by name 'Kamala' based totally on the Indian Express exposure and staged the play for a hundred and fifty times in thirty-two cities, and in seven languages. Journalist Ashwin Sarin and Indian Express paper grumbled that Vijay Tendulkar infringed their exclusive rights. The Bombay High Court held there could not be any copyright in an event that has actually taken place.

The play expresses Tendulkar's grasp of the harsh realities in our social fabric. In the words of Tendulkar, "Kamala for me is not just a character, she is a living person, and she just doesn't remain on my papers." The play depicts a flesh buy and sell scrape, and its consequences. It deals with the problem of trade of ancestral women. The theme of Kamala a two-act play, is flesh trade, and how well-known young journalists like Jaisingh Jadhav seek to capitalize on it to further succeed in their careers without help, in the slightest, for the fatalities of this corrupt trade in a self-governing society like India.

The play offers Tendulkar enough scope to scoff at the kind of trendy journalism practiced by Jadhav, and also to strike a contrast between the journalism in the Vernacular, and that in English. Tendulkar uses the play also to dwell on the characteristic suffering from the Indian middle class woman made to suffer by selfish, malicious, and hypocritical male chauvinists. The man-woman relationship is also deftly touched upon in the complex relationship between Jadhav and his wife, Sarita. Kamala is a female-centered play in the sense that it is built on the metamorphosis of Sarita emerging from being a docile wife to an assertive, mature, and strong woman in the end.

Kamala is a satire on the trendy journalism shown in it. Jadhav is indifferent to the humanness. He is capable of sacrificing human values, in the name of humanity itself. The husband-wife relationship between Sarita and Jaisingh is typical of the sort existing in the cities like Delhi, where executive husbands do not find adequate time for their wives who have to content themselves by being mere social beings. At the center of the play is a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, associated with English daily published by an unscrupulous press baron, Sheth Singhanian. He is an agile, adventurous journalist. He takes risks, exposes scandals and feeds the sophisticated paper with sensational news. His work boosts the circulation of the

paper, and the owner increases his salary, Jadhav happily moves to a small bungalow in a fashionable locality around New Delhi.

Sarita, his wife is well-educated and hails from a village called Phaltan. Kakasaheb, Sarita's uncle is currently in Delhi to procure his quota of newsprint with Jadhav's help. Kakasaheb runs a newspaper in vernacular. He lives a simple life on Gandhian principles. Jaisingh treats the woman he has purchased from flesh market as an object that a can buy him a reputation in his professional life and promotion in his job. He is one of those modern individuals, who pursue their goal unquestioningly, with a single-track mind. Jadhav is never bothered of what will happen to Kamala after exhibiting her at the 'Press Conference'.

Kamala's entry in the household reveals to Sarita the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the insignificance of her own existence in Jaisingh's life. On realizing that she holds no value in her husband's busy and materialistic lifestyle, she takes a re-birth. And finally a new Sarita emerges. She discards her submissive attitude and decides to convene a Press Conference where she would expose to the whole world the real Jaisingh Jadhav. She is resolute to put onward her partner as a great supporter of freedom. She would tell how he bought the slave Kamala and used her for his selfish ends. Sarita, who was asleep to her reality, was awakened by Kamala. She has come face to face with her domestic slavery.

In the play Tendulkar has made a rude remark at the modern concept of journalism, which stresses on sensationalism. For this, he uses Kakasaheb, a journalist of the old school, who runs a small paper with his own resources. Kakasaheb provides the true ideals of journalism. And in contrast to these, Jadhav's concept of newspaper reporting is shown in a critical light. To quote Kakasaheb's words:

“I'm a back number- a remnant of times past. A dead journalist-who's just about staying alive! Now it is day of your husband's type of journalism.

The High-Speed type! Something catches fire- and there he runs!

There is a unrest anywhere else-and off he flies.” (Tendulkar 97)

That Kakasaheb corrects a paper published in language, while Jadhav's standard is English, also helps to emphasize the restricted nature of journalism experienced by him. Tendulkar has tried to drive home the fact that it is the dailies in vernacular alone that reach the masses. And that none can affect any meaningful social or political change in India through English dailies, as they reach only a very small section of Indian population.

Intended for Tendulkar, the stimulation comes from the adjacent society. In his plays one acquires a feeling there is an essential contemporary of consideration towards the female characters shaped by him. In Kamala, Tendulkar has explored the position of women in the society today. Through Sarita, who is in her own way as exploited, as Kamala, Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who believes that he is liberal minded.

Kamala is such an evaluation of the role of an Indian woman within the institution called marriage, considered as the holiest of the holy in our society which definitely provides a novel point of view showing that women are still mere slaves at their male owners in Indian society in the latter half of the twenty-first century, in spite of democracy. Women's bear and bring up children; do all the housework and some of them do jobs additionally. Yet, they are considered a debit to the family. They are ill-treated and tortured by their husbands. Indian society which has

accepted the laws of Manu (Manu is an ancient Hindu Lawgiver and his laws are widely accepted and observed), denies women's education and thus mental growth.

In modern India women are allowed to study so that they become sophisticated slaves. The plight of Hindu women is peculiar. A Hindu woman is honored to bear progeny for her husband and as a partner to him in performing religious rites. But, she is feared and loathed as a whore. She cannot thus even think of sex, as she feels completely exhausted by the end of the day. Moreover, as Jandhyala points out: "With woman's sexuality so closely bound with marriage, and her role as wife and mother, there was no possibility of considering her sexual needs, and desires." Thus, women are sexually oppressed. It is reflected in the concept of chastity, a patriarchal value. It is one of the most powerful yet invisible cultural fetters that have enslaved women for ages.

The principal action in *Kamala* revolves around a woman protagonist. Sarita in the play stands for the central consciousness in the respective work of art, and so the play can be called women-centered. In such a play, the feminine ideology which pities women in direct encounter with chauvinistic male opposes, finds its complete expression. The character of Sarita consists of a great variety and depth in comparison to her male counterparts. She reacts against social injustices, and the subservient position of women in the institution of marriage. In the end, the rebirth of Sarita, who is now independent, and stronger with confidence, and who looks forward to the day, when she would break away the shackles of her repression, illustrates that Tendulkar, however not a self-acknowledged feminist, take care of his women typescript with sympathetic and consideration. So, we see that Sarita is emerging as a capable woman who challenges man. Here Tendulkar commands our admiration as he has attempted at delineating women, who in spite of their supposed inferior status in Indian society, rebel against all odds.

There is a considerable satire and sarcasm aimed at the very core of dualism and inhumanity of the male chauvinists in the Indian middle class society. When the highly domineering and egotistical Jaisingh is out cast by the society, and loses his job in his bid to expose the racket of women trade, it is no one else but his ill-treated wife Sarita, who provides him the required physical mental support for coping up from the situation. The play also offers Tendulkar enough scope to launch his diatribe against the presumptuous and reckless news reporters working for English dailies. It lays a strong stress on ethics.

Gender and power are inevitably linked together in a society that witnesses a constant battle for aggrandizement. The gender division in a game is marked by the response to power. The male pursues it, the female submits to it. Because, in a patriarchal society power lies in the hands of men, the female are marginalized and trivialized. The role of gender in power game is obvious in Kamala, which focuses directly on the position of women in a patriarchal society.

Here, Tendulkar has underlined both the dark ambiguity of the cardboard figures of power, the patriarchal society holds in high esteem and the continuing of the very real dangers of this never-ending struggle for supremacy in the society in which gender has always played a pivotal role, be it Kamala, the tribal woman, or Sarita, Jaisingh's well-educated and cultured house wife, a useful object in his life. The story of the play very well narrates how the well-known young journalists like Jaisingh seek to use Kamala, the victim of the immoral flesh trade in a democratic notion to achieve instant success and reputation in his professional life. Through Sarita's realization, Tendulkar has unfolded the bleak truth that a woman in a male dominated society functions just as a mere pawn. The playwright has made obvious the unacceptable fact that from ages a woman has always been destined to be an object to be used and thrown away by man.

But we should note here that Tendulkar does not launch any frontal attack on the subject ridiculed. He resorts to employment of the device of “indirect satire” in which the characters make their opinions ridiculous by what they think, say and do as Jadhav exposes himself to ridicule all around because of his insensible pursuit after worldly fame. Such a woman oriented play by Tendulkar is a testimony to his wonderful insight into the inter relationship between A human mind, psyche and body which are the tripods making up a personality. As Tendulkar puts it himself: the basic urge has always been to let out my concerns vis-à-vis my reality: the human condition as I perceive it.

So, the overall scanning of the play deduces that the play looks at issues that disturb a sensitive mind, issues that need to be answered by each of us. And today, after twenty- two years also Kamala forcefully raises a voice against violence -violence against women. And to bring our awareness on such a burning issue, in India, the theatrical, societies like 'Sparsh' 'Abhinav' and institutions like 'St. Francis College' for women are staging a dramatic reading of Tendulkar's Kamala bearing solidarity with the rest of the world in observing the international fortnight for violence against women.

Finally, whether women like Kamala who was bought by Jaisingh, a journalist, from a bazaar in Bihar at merely two hundred and fifty rupees still exists or not is debatable but what exists, as a poignant reality is that till Today, women in India are exploited, oppressed and dominated by men in varied forms. Be it physical, mental or psychological violence, the psyche of Indian male largely, yet considers women as slaves whose chief duty is to serve him and lead a life as per his whims and fancies.

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