

A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *KAMALA*

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Abstract:

God creates man and woman with equal power and with the gift to foster, organize and rationalize the beliefs specific to his own gender. But the society gives the power of making policies to the men where he proves him advanced and tries to vanquish women's identity and power by repressing her position not better than a dog in the master's house. The women characters in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar suffer a lot as the victims of hegemonic power structures. The female body is the desire of the male sexual fantasy and desire. Tendulkar successfully brings this status to limelight. His play Kamala brings out the realistic picture of Indian women and the chauvinistic spirit of men who believe in liberty of themselves and hence try to elude and suppress the voice of women in the society either physically or emotionally.

Keywords: Marriage, hypocrisy, Chauvinism, Exploitation.

This article offers an account of the plight and predicament of women in traditional Indian households. The dramatist pictures how women in spite of all their ability and skill, are unable to battle against all the oppressive measure unleashed on them. One important cultural institution that cripples the independent thinking and functioning of women, according to Tendulkar is Marriage. Marriage- a sacrificial aspect where the daughter is given away forever leads to the annihilation of femininity emotionally and sometimes physically. Like a corpse which can never hold on to its life, a daughter given in marriage too cannot make a return from the wedded life. On marriage, Bhattacharya utters,

The sacrificial aspect, which explicates the significance of the giving of the daughter forever, indicates the pain involved in this shift of the female body from one position of familiarity to an opposite one ... This religious and cultural procedure of entry into the institution of marriage is deterministic for the object here, i.e. the woman because she cannot claim for the right to expression; nor can she show her choice and preferences in this (more or less) forced transfer from one disciplinary domain to another. Her womanhood is highly conditioned by the requirements of this phase of entry into womanhood, which is actually a part of the larger discursive construct of her feminine subjectivity (91).

The Hindu Marriage System devised by the ancient sages like Manu and Kautilya refers to the sacrifice of girl/daughter to the groom's place. The role of women conformed to the maxim by Manu; the great law giver was that *a woman does not deserve freedom* and that her life should throughout be one of the dependence on man. Another similar command laid down by Manu was that a woman should be subservient in all stages of her life- "in childhood to the father, in youth to the husband, and his elder kins and to the son when widowed. Hence "the Vedic age ... established the doctrines related to human code of conduct. They made men- 'The Mentor' of the entire human race, and women 'The Nurturer' ... Though in contemporary India women have been given many legal rights by the constitution the realization of these rights at social level is still a remote dream. Men in general are unable to overcome the attitudes of male superiority the centuries of indoctrination have generated in their psyche" (Thakur 36).

Wedded life represents how women are repressed under the onslaught of reactionary idea of the

fundamentally orthodox society. And this statement can be seen alive in the works of the great dramatist Vijay Tendulkar, who by critics was named as the *Arthur Miller* of India's theatre. Born in 1928, Tendulkar wrote his first story when he was six years old and wrote, directed and acted in his play when he was eleven. Celebrated as the Playwright of the Millennium, Tendulkar's plays have been perceived by critics as timeless and being ahead of their times because of his accurate and sensitive portrayal of the social issues of the time.

Shakti, a Hindu concept that represents divine feminine power, is a widespread and commonly accepted image in Indian society. And Shakti is believed to have equal power as that of Shiva, the divine masculine power. The incredible traditionally cultured society which believes in the existence of Shakti and Shiva treats women as an inferior sex. Tendulkar's play *Kamala* clearly demonstrates how matrimony adds to the depreciation of women as human being and deprives them of most of human rights, relative to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual. His play *Kamala* is an emulation that exhibits selfishness and hypocrisy of the modern young generation, and brings out the oppressive nature of contemporary society. Speaking on his plays, Tendulkar has stated,

I have written about my own experiences and about what I have seen in others around me. I have been true to all this and have not cheated my generation. I did not attempt to simplify matters and issues for the audience when presenting my plays, though that would have been the easier option... My plays... contain my perception of society and its values and I cannot write what I do not perceive (Tendulkar 66).

Tendulkar's *Kamala* (1982) is an inspiration by a real life incident reported in *The Indian Express* by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at the press conference. Through this play, Tendulkar represents the acceptance of social values, customs, tradition and conventions and its impact on the Indian women. Though the title of the play is named after the girl brought from the flesh market, the protagonist of the play is Sarita, the wife of a journalist Jaisingh Jadhav. Sarita is well educated and hails from a village called Phalten. They live in a small bungalow in a fashionable locality around New Delhi in the neighbourhood of Neeti Bagh. Sarita is seen extremely sensitive to the needs of her husband. Taking out the notes of the phone calls and carrying out the instructions laid, she portrays the embodiment of women who are used as menial servants or stepping stones to their male counterparts. On seeing Sarita's dedication, kakasaheb (Sarita's uncle) comments, "You may be educated Sarita, but you are still a girl from the old Mohite *wada*!" (5) Though educated, Sarita's behaviours indicate her ignorance and lack of knowledge. Although Sarita is shocked when she is told about the way he bought Kamala, Jaisingh is delighted about his accomplishment to have bought kamala to expose the crime committed against women.

Jaisingh: I bought her in the Luhardaga bazaar, in Bihar.

Sarita: Huh? Bought her?

Jaisingh: Yes. For two hundred and fifty rupees. Even a bullock costs more than that. They sell human beings at this bazaar.... Human beings. They have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages. People come from long distances to make their bids.

Sarita: They auction- women? (14)

Jaisingh goes on speaking of the ways in which auctioneers handle the women, checking them physically to find if they are sexually appealing. Sarita recoils with shock and expresses her disgust. She feels uncomfortable about the case at hand and insists on Jaisingh to give up his plans. But he shows his determination to make the media sensation with the evidence. He tells Sarita not to be sentimental about Kamala. For Jaisingh, Kamala is just a tool in his hands for his media success. But for Sarita, Kamala is a woman like her with flesh and blood and with feelings and emotions. Jaisingh plans to expose the revulsion of selling and buying of women in the flesh market and the condition of tribal women as gendered subaltern. He keeps Kamala at his residence without allowing her to take bath or change clothes in order to

present her before the press conference for the highest drama of his investigative journalism.

Sarita: She is asking me to lend her one of my saris.

Jaisingh: [Angrily], Who? Kamala? Don't do anything of the sort. Don't give her anything. I tell you, Don't give her a thing without asking me.

Sarita: But I am asking you.

Jaisingh: That's exactly what I am telling you. She will come to the Press Conference in the same clothes she's wearing now.

Sarita: She's a woman, after all. And her sari is torn.

Jaisingh: [His voice raising]. I know, I know! You don't have to tell me, understand? I have a very good idea of all that. I want her to look just as she is at the Press Conference. It's very important (21-22).

Whereas Sarita feels that her husband has taken a step to relegate women's honour, Jaisingh proves to be a selfish and irrational fascist who makes Kamala instrumental to unwrap the authentic picture of the police and politicians. Tendulkar projects Jaisingh's determination to liberate women slaves and become a champion of the cause and his aspiration for an ambitious news item at the cost of an innocent woman's reputation.

While Sarita has a great concern for Jaisingh, he treats her as a personal property and a lovely bonded labourer. He feels, as a husband, it is his right to exploit her both physically and emotionally. At one such instance, when Jaisingh calls Sarita upstairs to the bedroom, she shrugs away making excuses. He keeps insisting, exercising his power over her as her husband. When she is not interested in yielding to him, he shouts in rage, "Don't I have the right to have my wife when I feel like it? Don't I? I am hungry for that too- I've been hungry for six days. Is it a crime to ask for it? Answer me?" (32) Sarita realizes that she was used merely as an object of sexual satisfaction, of social companionship and of domestic comfort. Kamala's entry in the household reveals Sarita the Selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the significance of her own existence in Jaisingh's life. She says,

I was asleep.... Kamala woke me up with a shock. Kamala showed me everything. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights in this house. Slaves don't have rights. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says, laugh. Cry, when he says, cry. When he says pick up the phone, they must pick it up. When he says, lie on the bed- she (she is twisted in pain) (46).

The question asked by an uneducated innocent woman, Kamala, "How much did he buy you for", triggers her ignorance lit flame of light. Sarita understands her ignorance that she means nothing to Jaisingh and that he treats her as an inferior being and that she is more or less in the same position of Kamala. Kamala is a woman purchased from the flesh market as an object that can procure for him a promotion in his job and reputation in his professional life and Sarita is a woman brought from the market of marriage who provides him with domestic comfort and sexual pleasure in conjugal life. She discusses it with Kakasaheb trying to get solace to her wounded heart. But to her surprise, Kakasaheb adds insult to her injury by shooting the following statement:

That's why he is a man. And that's why there's womanhood in the world. I too was just like this. Don't go by what I seem to be today. I gave your aunt a lot of trouble. As it was my right. I didn't care what she felt all. I just marched straight ahead looking in front of me. I was confident she would follow, even if she was limping, and she did follow (47).

Through the statement of Kakashaheb, Tendulkar has tried to expose the essential artificiality of the society. He has also unveiled the patriarchal set up of marriage which means not only regulating sexual and reproductive behaviour but also it denotes the upholding of male dominance. Ever since the practice of

marriage was introduced in Hinduism, men have been manifested with infallible patriarchal authority making themselves superior and it is clearly stated that manhood remains stronger due to the weakness of womanhood as in patriarchal culture power is equated with masculinity and weakness with femininity. Women are supposed to bear male oppression silently and meekly as the institution of marriage does not permit unhindered growth at any stage of their lives.

On realizing that she holds no value in her husband's busy and materialistic lifestyle, she takes a rebirth. And finally a new Sarita emerges. She junks her acquiescent attitudes. In fury and humiliation she cries out, "*Why can't men limp behind? Why aren't women ever the masters? Why can't a woman at least live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have the right to be a man? Does he have one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can*" (47).

Women are exploited, oppressed and humiliated. They try to revolt against the outdated conventional moral values. For centuries they have been silent- the symbol of oppression, a characteristic of subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation. Women in India are expected to be the mythic models particularly from *the Ramayana* as Sita- the silent sufferer.

As a wife, Sarita understands that she has been cornered by her husband as an inferior sex and she never had any identity in that house which she was thinking hers. She says, "I saw that man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I'm a slave. Slaves don't have rights....they must only slave away. Dance to the master's whim. Laugh when he says laugh, cry when he says cry." (46). Sarita has been humiliated, subjugated and cornered just because she was offered in marriage to the hands of Jaisingh and being a wife she has to perform all that which is ordered to her.

Jaisingh is an epitome of chauvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes him to be a liberal minded. He wants Sarita to be an angel at home who can quench his thirsts and to be a doll who can dance to the music of his keys. Recalling all the injustice done to her, Sarita with a determined tone says,

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 it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave, I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. 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 (52).

With the statement of Sarita, Tendulkar goes with the feminists in voicing women's concern, their sensibility and their subjugation as well as their protest. Sarita becomes aware of the fact that her dignity or position in the house is not far away from Kamala's who is not even treated as a human being. It is not necessary to be a meticulous reader to observe the behaviour diversity in the character of Sarita at the end of the play. The opening up of the play depicts a docile housewife, progressively transforming into the central consciousness of feminine ideology. At the end, she is seen reacting to the injustices furnished to the female counterparts in the institution of marriage.

The cry of Sarita is the cry of every Indian woman who has been offered in the institution of nuptials. They in some point of life are made to realize their position and identity. But their culture and tradition makes them stand behind the screen waiting for *the day to come*. They are sacrificed as a living gift by their parents and they sacrifice their own *self* by following the conventional rules. It's the providence of every Indian woman because she is supposed to follow the norms of wedded life in a traditional male dominated middle class society which is reluctant to any social change. It's an implausible fact that as far the conventional customs of marriages are active in this society, the selfish, hypocritical, and brutally ambitious male dominated society shall survive and shall be in progress as Tendulkar affirms to the society through the character Kakasaheb,

"It may be unpleasant, but it's true. If the world is to go on, marriage must go on. And it will only go on like this."

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