

Women Identity as Portrayed by Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is a well-known playwright in contemporary Indian theatre. He reminds us other playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh. His *Kamala* is a gyno-centric play focusing on a stereotypical confined life of an Indian woman. The play shows the radical changes in the life of a modern woman who always dreams to retain her status in Indian society. She seeks to rebel against all the oddities that she faces in her life. Undoubtedly *Kamala* is a gyno-centric play. He has a tremendous exposure to Marathi theatre from his childhood. He points out the contemporary socio-political issues through his plays. He seeks to portray the intricacies of human character, individual stress and tensions, and a web of the natural relationship between a husband and a wife. The focus of his writing is on the plight and predicament of women in the urban middle-class society.

Keywords: *Kamala*, Gyno-centric, Indian society Feminism, exploitation, subjugation.

Vijay Tendulkar is a versatile dramatist. In each of his plays he has touched different storm raising issues and has portrayed realistically the multifaceted problems of our Indian society. Though he has never acknowledged himself as a feminist writer his works are feministic in approach and all his female characters are treated with good understanding and compassion. Tendulkar's *Kamala* clearly pictures the status of Indian women revealing how marriage as a sacred institution enslaves women. The play is based on a real-life incident. Jaisingh Jadav is a representative of a staunch male chauvinistic society. He is a well-known journalist working as an Associate Editor.

Jaisingh Jadav buys *Kamala* in this auction not to help her or stop the flesh trading but rather he is keen in creating sizzling news to gain all fame and success in his career. He uses *Kamala* as an object for his publicity. He takes *Kamala* to the press conference where she is humiliated very badly. She is unable to answer any questions. It was a direct hit to her womanhood and chastity. His wife

Sarita is just a puppet in his hands. She does politely whatever her husband asks her to do without questioning. It is Kamala who opens her eyes to understand her real self. Virginia Woolf correctly mirrors the position of women in society. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger and in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

Sarita is a representative of educated Indian women who are caught in the shackles of marriage and suppressed and oppressed in this holy institution. She is responsible for her own pathetic condition as she was very much keen in satisfying the matrimonial responsibility assigned to her. “How much did he buy you for?” This innocent question of Kamala compelled her to think of her own self. She says:

“I was asleep, I was unconscious even when I was awake.
Kamala woke me up..... Kamala showed me everything.
I saw the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave.
I have no rights at all in this house.....slaves don't have rights,
do Kakasaheb?... Dance to their master's whim.
Laugh, when he says laugh. Cry, when he says, cry....
when he says lie on the bed –they...” (46).

Sarita finds herself as a slave who was used as an object for his domestic, sexual and social comforts. What a bourgeois woman gain from marriage in the words of Simone De Beauvoir is “a gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips – away gently towards death without questioning its purpose.” Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom and Simone de Beauvoir emphasized that such a sacrifice on their part of a woman is too high for any one because the kind of self-contentment, serenity and security that marriage offers woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness: She shuts behind her the doors of her new home.

When she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the forest was hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space. Generally, a woman's identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men that is as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother etc. The question “what a woman does” is never asked, but “who she belongs to” is always considered important as though she is a commodity which is for a sale. She does not have an identity of her own and she is always expected to dance to the tune of a man, whether her father, brother or husband. There are a set of rules and regulations for woman, how she has to behave as a wife but not for man as a husband.

Even Yajur Veda says that a wife, obedient to her husband, renowned, light-footed, eloquent in speech, sympathetic to the patients, attains to happiness when she lives peacefully with her husband, and nicely cooks the food highly efficacious, and grown through rain, conducive to our

physical growth, brought daily in use, and relished by our ancestors. Woman is always bound by restrictions imposed by the society. Jaisingh for instance doesn't care for his wife's existence.

Jaisingh is a rude heartless man who never cared women's feelings. It is very clear from the way he treated Sarita and used kamala for his need. He didn't feel bad the way Kamala was prosecuted in the press conference how she was made a laughing stock.

Everything was funny and part of the game for him and Kamala was a pawn which could be used and thrown out after the game is over. But Sarita was not prepared to send Kamala away she had taken her and her words seriously:

“Memsahab. If you won't misunderstand, I'll tell you.
The master bought you: he bought me, too...
so, memsahab; both of us must stay here like sisters.
We'll keep the master happy.....
the master will have children.
I'll bring them up. You keep the accounts and run the house...
Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master;
the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him”. (35)

Though it's very shocking that Sarita had given her consent to Kamala. It's very clear that Jaisingh's inhuman actions have made Sarita to equate her with Kamala and he is the master. When Sarita opposes him for sending Kamala to an orphanage he shouts that, it is I who take decisions in this house and no one else. Sarita after an introspection of her life wants to assert her will for the very first time. She denies accompanying her husband to a party. She tells her uncle that she would like to hold a press conference and reveal the true nature of the great journalist Jaisingh says that this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her.

He doesn't consider a slave a human being just a useful object. Listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got free -not just free - the slave's father shelled out the money - a big sum. Sarita's uncle Kakasaheb tries to comfort her by telling that all men are like Jaisingh and even he had treated his wife badly so its wrong to think that her husband is a bad man. Aman is always too proud of his achievements. Sudhir Kakar views that superego, the moral agency is weakly differentiated and insufficiently idealized in Indians. Whereas in the West, an individual's behavior is constantly regulated by the proscriptions of the Super ego, in a Hindu it is regulated by what he calls Communal conscience. He explains that Communal conscience which comprises family and jati norms is a social rather than an individual formation, it is not 'inside' the psyche.

In other words, instead of having one internal sentinel an Indian relies on many external 'Watchmen' to patrol his activities and especially his relationships in all social hierarchies. As Clare says if I fail, no one will say, “She doesn't have what it takes.” They will say, “Women don't have what it takes.” Her uncle suggests her to follow her husband if she has to save her marriage. Writing in the 1950's Simone de Beauvoir writes that, “Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism”.

Man wants to dominate woman its universal and our traditional marriage provides ample opportunities for this. Husband wants his wife to be patient, all suffering, ever faithful, and ever-pure wife. If she fails in any of these, then as a husband he forces violence on her to tame like an animal. In the mouth of Sarita, Tendulkar wishes a change:

“Those who do manly things should be equal to men.
Those who don’t are women. And there will be some
among them who have beards and moustaches too...” (47)

Mira Kumary states that the source of inconsistency lay with society itself and not with the individual woman analyzed in her study. According to her, the remedy for the solution is not in individual therapy but rather in social reconstruction. “The fault is with the actively cruel social environment, not with her. Sarita takes a journey what Elaine Showalter calls the “Female phase” which is of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity. Now she declares in a masterly determination that a day will come, when I will stop being a slave. I’ll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I will do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. Sarita is ready to face the reality with her changed attitude. She is optimistic in her perspective.

It can be noted by the words of Virginia Woolf: There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of mind. Kamala is not only a tale of slavery but also about the quest of selfhood and gender equality. It even tries to redefine the concept of manhood. Real story of a journalist who purchased the woman from the rural sex industry which shows the involvement of police and politics in this trade. Sarita’s sacrifice in a domestic world finally leads her to become an able modern woman, strong willed, optimistic and free. The play is a dramatic exposition of the latent violence, treachery, sexuality, and immorality that characterize contemporary gender politics of Indian society.

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