

Suppression to Self Assertion: Journey of Sarita in Vijay Tendulkar's 'Kamala'



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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is a leading contemporary Indian playwright, screen and television writer. He wrote thirty full length plays. He is the most influential dramatist and theatre personality in Marathi for over five decades. His plays expose the basic hypocrisy and double standards of middle- class society. His play deals with the socio- cultural issues that are prevailed in contemporary society. Sarita is one of the leading character of the play 'Kamala'. She is treated as a slave in her own house by her husband Jaisingh. But when her husband cheats Kamala, she revolts against him. She did everything to please Jaisingh. But he makes both the women his object. She reacts against the social injustices and subservient position of women in the institution of marriage. Tendulkar made a great attack on the concept of modern journalism. This play is a real- life incident. So Kamala is an indictment of male society in which women are mere puppets in the hands of man for his quest for power and fame. All the women – Sarita, Kamalabai and Kamala suffer gender discrimination. Tendulkar portrayed them exploited and tormented. He represented the status of women in free India.

Keywords: Feminism, Marriage, Violence, Victimization, Torture, Inherent Evil, Human Complexities, Women's Oppression, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar is one of The modern Indian playwright who presents the social issues in his plays. His plays have been translated and performed in many Indian languages. He portrays the different aspects of human life. Many of his plays derived inspiration from real- life incidents or social upheavals. Kamala is a topical drama but it is not a political play in any sense. It is a realistic play. It was inspired by a real life incident. It focuses on the changed role of women in male oriented society. The Indian Express exposure by Ashwini Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference in New Delhi. By using this incident as a launch pad, Tendulkar raises certain cardinal questions regarding the value system of a modern- success oriented generation who are ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself. So it is the story of a poor and unfortunate woman who is sold away in the flesh market. So the play centres round two female characters.

At the centre of Kamala is a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav who treats the woman he has purchased as an object that can buy him promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. He never stops to think what will happen to Kamala, the woman he has bought in the flesh market in Bihar. He has no motive to reform the life of poor rustic woman Kamala. He is one of those modern- day individuals with a single-track mind. He treats both the woman characters as an object. Tendulkar explores the status of women in contemporary Indian Society. Kamala is the woman bought by Jaisingh and the other is Sarita, wife of Jaisingh. While Kamala, the woman Jaisingh has bought is a mere play thing, a puppet in the hands of the master who pulls all the strings, the maidservant, Kamalabai, from his wife Sarita's native place Phalton is a trusted household dregge who becomes jealous of Kamala's intrusion into the household managed and run by her, it is Jaisingh's wife Sarita who realizes that she is being used and exploited in the same way as Kamala. At the beginning of the play Sarita is a calm and submissive wife. Like an ideal Indian woman, she is a perfect housewife. She leads a happy life in the shadow of her husband. When Kakasaheb criticises the demoralised journalism, she takes her husband's side.

Through Jaisingh Jadhav, Tendulkar satirises the modern concept of "investigative" journalism which stresses the sensational. For this he uses Kakasaheb, a journalist from the old school. Kakasaheb stands for the true ideals of journalism which are in stark contrast to Jaisingh's

concept of newspaper reporting. He criticises the journalism of Jaisingh. But Sarita defends Jaisingh as she takes his side. She says -

"He never writes anything without first hand knowledge".

At first Jaisingh seems an enthusiastic reporter. But when he tells Sarita how women are sold in an open auction and people come from long distances to make their bid. The men who want to bid handle the women to inspect the buyer whether they are firm or flabby, young and old, healthy or diseased. After knowing this Sarita become dumdstruck.

Sarita realizes her poor position after the entry of Kamala. The problem comes closer home when the bought woman Kamala is juxtaposed with the journalist's wife Sarita, and there is hardly any difference between the two. Kamala proves to be a catalyst in Sarita's ten year old married life. Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in her husband's life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. She is highly educated but she is living a slavish domestic life. She does not know that she is also exploited by her husband. She has not been given a chance to voice her feelings in her house. She is an ideal wife. She is living a life of prison in her own house but she is not aware of it. Kamala's views on the very subject how to both of them have to adjust with Jaisingh are like a revelation to Sarita. Kamala says-

"Memsahib, if won't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you; he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us. Didn't he? It isn't easy to earn money. A man has to labour like an ox to earn money. So, memsahib, both of us must stay here together like sisters. We'll keep the master happy. We'll make him prosperous. The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children, I'll bring them up. You are an educated woman. You keep the accounts and run the house. Put on lovely clothes and make merry with the master. Go out with him on holidays and feast-days. Like today. I can't manage all that. And we must have land of our own. Don't worry about it, that's my responsibility. Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?"

The above views of Kamala shows her simple, generous and innocent nature. She has no idea why her master took her here. She does not know that her master is deceiving her for his own profit. By exposing the tribal woman Kamala in the press conference, Jaisingh only wants publicity. He has no sympathy for the poor woman. She is a weapon in his hands whom he uses as a journalist to be reputed in his professional life. In modern period people are selfish and they can do anything for their own profit. Jaisingh wants to show the degrading moral values of contemporary period but unknowingly he himself become a part of it. He talks about the freedom of woman but in his own home he made her own wife a slave. She is so dutiful that she not only attends the phone calls at home but notes down the

calls in the notebook in his absence. He exposes Kamala to prove himself a saviour of women but he stops Sarita to give a sari to Kamala as she is in dirty clothes. In this way we see that Jaisingh is living a life of dual standards. He wants to present the poor status of woman in modern period through Kamala but he dominates his wife Sarita at his own home. So there relationship is like exploiter- exploited relationship instead of a husband-wife relationship.

Kamala's entry in the house and her innocent talking awakes Sarita about her position. Kamala is ready to share all this with Sarita as she believes that Sarita has also been bought in a flesh market by her master Jaisingh. Kamala's entry into the house and her subsequent exit at Jaisingh's behest reveals to Sarita the selfishness and hypocrisy of her husband. She feels the insignificance of herself in Jaisingh's life. She wants to take revenge from him. So she intends to hold a press conference and aimed at exposing the double standards of her husband. But she postpones her resolve to rebel against her present condition to extend emotional support to her husband who has been distorted by his foolhardy adventure. He has been summarily sacked for his foolhardy adventure because it clashes with the vested commercial interests of the owner of the newspaper he works for.

Tendulkar, however, suggests that Sarita cannot unlearn what she has come to realize. At the end of the play there is a glimmer of hope that she might strive for and attain her independence in the near future. We see here, women is considered a weaker sex even in 21st century. Sarita's sole purpose in life is to please her husband but when she sees her position as a slave, everything falls into place. She does not accept her husband's proposal to go in the party which is the first sign of her revolt. She wants to hold a press conference. She tells kakasaheb about the hypocrisy of her husband. She says-

"I am going to present a man who in the 182 still keep a slave right here in Delhi. JaisinghJadav. I am going to say : 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. One you can use and throw away. He gets people to call him a sworn enemy of tyranny. But he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes, and doesn't think anything of it – nothing at all. 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. Ask him what he did with it."

Tendulkar has shown human- relationships which are strange because a husband treated his wife as a mere slave. He has no self- respect as they were bonded to each- other through the institution of marriage. Sarita is now fed up with all this and she wants to leave her husband. So when Kakasaheb asks her that everything that is going on it was since then she is married to Jaisingh but why she thinks of all this today. She replies-

"Kamala showed me everything. Because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. 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 am a slave. Slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? They must only slave away. Dance to their master's tune. 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, come to a party, they must go. When he says, lie on the bed – they (she is twisted in pain.)

Tendulkar also portrays the true nature of the rat – race that goes on the field of journalism. Jaisingh did everything for the sack of the reputation of his newspaper, but he becomes the victim because of the selfishness of his colleagues. He is dismissed from his job because the proprietor of the newspaper is pressurized to dismiss Jaisingh as many big people are involved in this flesh racket.

Sarita is now hopeful that she might strive for and attain her freedom in the near future. Like an Indian wife, she remains a source of support to her husband Jaisingh when he is dismissed from his job. She is not so much selfish as her husband is. Her inner conscience does not allow her to leave her husband in his bad days. She knows that her husband needs a moral support. She fulfills her duty as a loyal wife and tries to forget her poor slavelike situation in the house. But it does not mean that she has changed her mind. She wants her life to be changed. Her determination is seen when at the end of the play she 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 am prepared to pay whatever price I have to pay for it."

Tendulkar depicts the character of Sarita as loyal, hardworking, docile and kind-hearted. Through his female characters he shows the position of woman in contemporary period. Now-a-days people thinks themselves modern when they go in the parties with fashionable ladies as Jaisingh did. He talks of equality

and freedom of women. But he prevents his wife Sarita to give a sari to Kamala. He does not like her wife's idea of giving a sari to poor rustic lady. He even laughs when Kamala asks to do some work. So he is reflection of a male dominating society. For him, Sarita is also an object. So when Sarita turns down his proposal of sex, he abuses her as 'bitch'.

We see a picture of selfish, self-centred narrow minded and degrading modern society that does not hesitate to sacrifice their moral values. The modern success oriented society is dying to get success at any cost. Tendulkar wrote what he observes in the society. Sarita is educated and generous so when her husband is dismissed from his job. She stands with him to support him and forgets her own trouble. She is full of hope to free herself from social restrictions. The character of Sarita shows that even in modern time woman is not free from the male oriented society. The modern generation is selfish and can do anything for their name and fame. They do not think of the result. So sometimes they become victims also like Jaisingh who is deceived by his own colleagues. Tendulkar has shown the complexities of the human life through his female characters. Women is exploited, oppressed and dominated by male in different ways in India. They are physically, mentally and psychologically tortured by their own people.

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