

SYNONYMS OF SUBJUGATION: A STUDY OF THE MALE CHARACTERS IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *KAMALA*

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Abstract: Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is often credited with his contribution for bringing Marathi theatre at the national as well as international arena. Often a rebel in his themes, he brought to the stage those themes which Marathi dramatists before him did not dare to discuss or discussed in a veiled manner. Violence on women is a major subject in many of his plays and he brings to light the oppressed condition of the lower class or middle class women at the hands of patriarchy. *Kamala* is one such play of Tendulkar where we find three male and female characters. The titular character Kamala is bought by a journalist, JaisinghJadhav, from a flesh market in Bihar, in order to demonstrate her at a press conference to prove that flesh trade is still the order of the day in villages. Though Jadhav seems initially a champion of women liberty but in reality he exploits Kamala and has also reduced his wife, Sarita, and their maid to nothing better than slaves. The other two male characters, Sarita's uncle and Jadhav's friend are also more or less associated with male chauvinism as seen in the play. This paper attempts a thematic study of sexual violence on women as evident in this play and makes an analysis of the male characters as perpetrators of gender abuse.

Keywords: slave, male chauvinism, patriarchy, liberty, will.

A multi-faceted playwright in the domain of Marathi theatre and Indian performance centre also, Padmabhushan Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) has amazingly twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one act plays and eleven children dramas. A decent number of his plays are interpreted in English and numerous other provincial dialects in India. A humanistic author he is, Tendulkar has constantly expounded on man's battle for existence, the distinction in the morals of individuals, the brutality in people or the viciousness they need to face in their everyday lives, the minimized position of women in our society and their exploitation by the systematized group of forces. Prof. Mrs.DhimateSangita Sunil quotes Tendulkar's words in her article, "Feminist Analysis of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*", "As a social being I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end. As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited-exploiter relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end." (2) An investigation of his characters uncover that he had a profound comprehension of how concealment and abuse of the female by male resulted in violence. A significant number of his plays, including *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Kanyadaan*, *The Vultures*, *Kamala*, and so forth demonstrate the predicament of women squashed under the cruel monstrosities of male controlled society. They, once in a while, attempt to battle this losing fight but are crushed at the end. The male-dominated society which is around them, do not enable them to lead their life autonomously. It tries to command them and trap them in its grasp of the ethical approvals.

The play under survey is *Kamala* by Vijay Tendulkar. The story is based on a real life incident—the Indian Express expose by AswinSarin, a Delhi based correspondent. He did some comprehensive research and investigation concerning the flesh trade that prospered in Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) and bought a lady by name

Kamla from town Shivpuri in M.P. for Rs. 2,300/- . He at that point composed a series of articles which were published in the issue of Indian Express on 27th, 29th and 30th April, 1981 and second May 1981. The article dated 25th was published in the issue of 27th April, 1981 under the heading 'Purchasing young ladies from circuit house' and was depicted as express exceptional. This article opened with these words:

Yesterday, I bought a short-statured skinny woman belonging to a village near Shivapuri in Madhya Pradesh for Rs. 2,300/-. Even I find it hard to believe that I have returned to the Capital this morning buying this middle aged woman for half the price one pays for a buffalo in Punjab. (Indian Express)

By employing this incident, Tendulkar frames the structure of Kamala and investigates the intolerable offense by the high and mighty male-centric society which can go to any extent and can impose any type of brutality on women to accomplish their ends.

At the centre of the play is a journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, associated with a Delhi-based English daily. He is a deft, audacious columnist. He collects sensational news for his newspaper. His work helps the course of the paper and the proprietor also expands his compensation. Sarita, his better half, is well-educated and hails from a town called Phaltan. Kakasaheb, Sarita's uncle is at present in Delhi to get his amount of newsprint with Jadhav's assistance. Kakasaheb runs a daily paper in vernacular. He carries on with a basic life on Gandhian principles. Kamalabai is their house-keeper who consistently complies with all the orders of her master and mistress. The two other characters who need introduction are Kamala, the slave-girl, whom Jaisingh buys from the flesh market in Bihar and his journalist friend, Jain.

This two-act play opens with uninterrupted phone calls which Sarita attends and takes a note of each one of them. When Kakasaheb enquires about it, Sarita says that she has to take down details of all the calls failing which she has to face her husband's rage. After sometimes Sarita receives the news that Jadhav is returning home this day itself. She hastily makes all the preparations for his reception. N.S. Dharan observes in his essay "Gyno-Centrism in Silence! The Court is in Session and Kamala": "Sarita, thus, attends to her husband's needs with an alacrity that makes us wonder how she, an educated girl, rich enough not to depend on anyone, could be so slave-like to her husband." (Dharan 42)

Jaisingh returns and with him enters a rustic lady swathed in a grimy white sari. When enquired by Kakasaheb, Jaisingh presents her as Kamala, a young lady, whom he has purchased from a flesh market in Lohardaga (Bihar) for two hundred and fifty rupees. He additionally says that he has officially made arrangements to display her at the press conference to demonstrate that flesh trade is rampant in remote places in India. Indeed, Kamala was not permitted to take bath and change her clothes in Jadhav's house so that Kamala's meagre appearance does not get reduced. After the press conference, he intends to send Kamala to 'Nari Niketan', an orphanage, so that she doesn't need to be a casualty of subjection to flesh trade for the rest of her life. Both Sarita and Kakasaheb spoke against his plans but Jaisingh does not pay any regard to what they say. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* can be referred to in this respect. She says: "She (a woman) is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute— she is the Other." (Introduction 16) Jadhav considers Sarita as the 'Other' and thus he does not value her opinion as he thinks that she lacks the intellectualism which is inherent in him.

Act II opens with Jaisingh and Jain returning home in the wake of praising the previous' triumph at the press conference. Jain was describing the queries put forward to Kamala, like: "— if there is free sex among you, what do you do with the illegitimate children?" (Five 29) When Kakasaheb and Sarita objected to their inhuman exhibition of Kamala at the perverted press conference, Jadhav justifies himself by saying: "I didn't

hold the Press Conference for my own benefit. It was to drag this criminal sale of human beings into the light of day.” (Five 31)

Then the most important scene follows—the long conversation between Kamala and Sarita. The oblivious inquiry that Kamala raises about the cost of Sarita opens her eyes to her genuine position in Jadhav's life and influences her to understand that there is essentially less distinction between her life and that of Kamala's. She replies that she is worth seven hundred rupees. Kamala, uneducated and oblivious about the reality, sympathises with Sarita when she discovers that she is childless. Kamala, thinking Sarita to be a barren slave, tries to help her companion in this way:

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 a land of our own. Don't worry about it, that's all my responsibility. Fifteen days a month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?” (Five 35)

Later we find that when Sarita prevents Jadhav from shifting Kamala to the orphanage, he asserts his masculinity by saying: “It's I who take decisions in this house, and no one else. Do you understand?” (Five 42) So it is clear that male chauvinism is the guiding spirit of men like Jaisingh. Later, we also find that Jadhav was shocked to learn from his wife that she doesn't want to go to the party tonight:

Jaisingh: You don't want to come? Why?

Sarita: That's my will.

Jaisingh: [Rather surprised] Your will?

Sarita: Aren't I allowed to have a will of my own?

Jaisingh: [sarcastically] Never noticed any signs of it before.... (Five 44-45)

A supporter for women liberty, Jadhav, finds it difficult to acknowledge that his wife can have her very own will.

This change in Sarita is the aftereffect of her experience with Kamala and her transformation from a subject to a self-proclaiming woman is found in her exchange with Kakasaheb where she flares out her anger and attests her assurance to hold a press conference to disclose Jadhav's real character:

I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. JaisinghJadhav. I'm going to say: this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her... The other slave he got free— not just free— the slave's father shelled out the money— a big sum. (Five 46)

JaisinghJadhav has taken a big sum from Sarita's father as dowry in their marriage. Elizabeth Jackson, in her chapter “Marriage and Sexuality” emphasises MadhuKishwar's view on dowry as a politics of power relation: “She argues that dowry is a transfer of wealth from the men of one family to those of another with the bride acting as a vehicle of transfer. Its significance is not primarily economic but political in that it defines a power relation between the man and the woman.” (58) Further, Sarita asserts her grievances against the patriarchal society of which she is a victim and cries out:

Why? Why can't men limp behind? Why aren't women ever the masters? Why can't a woman at least ask to 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. (Five 47)

However, at the end, when the news of Jadhav's dismissal from job reach her and the drunk Jadhav breaks down on the sofa, she handles the situation with efficiency, showing that women can also take care of critical situations efficiently. But she also tells Kakasaheb that a day will surely come when she will break the barriers of Jadhav's imprisonment and release herself from his slavery.

Kamalabai, the woman-servant of the house, is the also a victim of violence, though not up to the level of the other two women in the play. We do not find at least once in the play Jadhav talking to her with affection or respect. Her continuous plea for release from the job was also not accepted and her servitude continues till the end of the play. Her character suggests the hopeless state of women because of poverty.

So we find that the three women in this play are victims of patriarchal domination in one way or the other. Patriarchy, in a general sense, is the accumulation of mental, social, economic and political associations in the male-oriented society which emphasizes on the lesser valuation of women and their role in the private and public lives. These establishments interconnect not just with each other to fortify the structures of control of men over women, but they also build up frameworks of rejection, abuse or potential control over women. "The result," as Kate Millet observes, "is that the male tends to have aggression reinforced in his behaviour, often with significant anti-social possibilities." (Sexual Politics 31) There are three male characters in the play. Now, let us analyse the patriarchal characteristics that each of them possess. JaisinghJadhav, who considers himself a proficient journalist, purchases a woman from a flesh market in Bihar and uses her as a commodity which can secure him promotion in his job and earn him repute. Arundhati Banerjee, in her Introduction to Five Plays writes: He is one of those modern day individuals with a single-track mind, who pursue their goal unquestionably. Jadhav never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after this expose." (xvi-xvii) Apart from revealing to Sarita and Kakasaheb that he is going to present Kamala, the slave-girl he has bought, at a press conference, he gives a atrocious description of the flesh market in Luhardaga (Bihar): "Yes, women. Can't believe it, can you? The men who want to bid— handle the women to inspect them. Whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and..." (Five 14) Sarita unable to take it anymore asks him to discontinue. Jadhav enjoys Sarita's stunned look and further uses hyperbolic expressions to heighten the intensity of the situation. As the time of the meeting draws close, Jadhav draws Kamala in a beguiling discussion and sternly charges her to go with him to the conference in her tattered clothes. Patriarchy is presented here in an ugly garb by Tendulkar in the character of Jaisingh.

In the next Act, Jaisingh returns home with Jain, dead drunk and were referring to the 'tamasha' at the press conference. Here 'tamasha' refers to the insult meted out on Kamala in the form of questions at the press conference. In fact, she was stripped verbally by the reporters to which Jadhav was delighted. Male chauvinism in Jadhav is again seen in his act of getting angry at Sarita for not responding positively to his sexual advances: "Don't I have the right to have my wife when I feel like it? Don't I? I'm hungry for that too— I've been hungry for six days. Is it a crime to ask for it? Answer me!" (Five 32) This mentality demonstrates that like Kamala, who is a slave purchased by Jadhav, Sarita, as well, is his bonded worker, a simple puppet, who needs to fulfil all his needs when he wanted and she ought not to have any say of her own in any issues. Equally, his treatment of the third female character in the play, Kamalabai, is rude and his behaviour with her also proves that he treats her in no better way than as a slave, which again highlights his male chauvinism.

Kakasaheb is the next male character in the play to be discussed after JaisinghJadhav. In her Introduction to Five Plays, Arundhati Banerjee, comments:

Tendulkar makes a jibe at the modern concept of journalism which stresses the sensational. 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 of these, Jadhav's concept of newspaper reporting is shown in a critical light. That Kakasaheb edits a paper published in the vernacular, while Jadhav's medium is English, also helps to elitist nature of the journalism practised by Jadhav. (xvii)

An ideal journalist he is, Shivajirao Mohite, argues with Jadhav on the ethics of journalism and also speaks against him on his conduct with Kamala. But he also keeps mum when Jadhav exploits Sarita. When Sarita was hurling her painful complaints on the dominance and mistreatment of the male society on women, Kakasaheb answers, "You're wrong. Sarita, my girl, doesn't a man makes mistakes? When he does he has to endure it. If you put your hand in the ox's mouth, it's going to feel cold... whether you're a man or a woman." (Five 47) He also explains to Sarita that when he was young he, too, was like Jadhav. He didn't care for his wife and always wanted his wife to follow him. May be, Kakasaheb said these words to ease his niece but it cannot be denied that he justifies patriarchy when he says that "Jaisingh is no different from other men. He's not unusual... A man is always too proud of his achievements" (Five 46) and "If the world is to go on, marriage must go on. And it will go on like this." (Five 47) He could not illustrate to Sarita the true ideals of marriage and masculinity. In remaining silent on witnessing the gender abuse going on in Jadhav's house, he, too, becomes an indirect associate in Jadhav's crime. Rightly has Shanta Gokhale explained in her essay "Tendulkar on his own Terms": "Tendulkar's case is that all men are exploiters of women, even those who wear the garb of education and liberalism." (Madge 42-43)

Jain, Jadhav's friend and colleague, is also a journalist in Jadhav's office. He has a small role in the play but a significant one. We first meet him in Act I when he comes to meet Jaisingh after the latter returns from Bihar. Jain enters and talks to Jadhav but at the same time he satirises the condition of Sarita. Jain's address to Sarita as "Hai" (Alas!) and a "lovely bonded labourer" (Five 17) unmistakably indicates Tendulkar's consciousness to the oppression of even educated, independent women in the intellectual society in the hands of the patriarch. Tendulkar makes Jain say:

This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He's made a drudge out of a horse-riding independent girl from a princely house. Hai, hai! [Theatrically to Jaisingh.] Shame on you! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes a slave of wife!" (Five 17)

To be sure, Sarita is lessened to a slave in Jadhav's home who needs to observe all the telephone calls and furthermore take care of all his physical and emotional needs failing which she needs to procure her husband's masculine form of savagery. This is very well noted in the play where a minor deviation of Sarita from her husband's decision or thought calls for abusive response of Jadhav towards her. In Act I, it seemed that Jain might be an advocate of women liberty but our opinion change in Act II where we find that he also becomes a party to Kamala's exploitation at the press conference and does not hesitate to explain the 'fun' to Sarita and Kakasaheb.

Thus, we find that the male characters in Kamala are the advocates of sexual violence on women in one way or the other. Kate Millett, in her *Sexual Politics* reveals patriarchy as a leading power-force in society that degrade women as subservient sexual objects. This is true in this play where a journalist like Jadhav, who is expected to work for the welfare of the society, inflicts violence on women in the name of humanity in both his private and public spheres. Kakasaheb's silence and Jain's companionship of the inhuman project of Jadhav make them almost equal in their way of imposing sexual violence on women in society. Tendulkar may be trying to hint through Kakasaheb that barely following Gandhian principles cannot make anyone humane unless

he applies those principles to stand for the voice of the oppressed. To conclude with the precise observation of N. S. Dharan: “We can see in these plays that Tendulkar, though not a self-acknowledged feminist, treats his women characters with understanding and compassion, while pitting them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious. So, these plays can justifiably be defined as gyno-centric.” (Dharan 28)

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