



Cry against Male-Chauvenism in Vijay Tendulkar's Play *KAMALA*

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Gender discrimination has been a burning topic for authors, journalists and social reformers of all times. Women, in all ages, have been the victims of male-hegemony. They are being treated as the daughters of lesser-gods where they are harassed, humiliated and exploited physically, sexually and emotionally. Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kamala* very beautifully deals with the theme of gender discrimination and women-issues.

Vijay Tendulkar - a journalist-cum-dramatist-writes in Marathi. His plays focus on modern issues. Exploitation of women, the poor and the subaltern are the key-issues he ponders over through his writings. Most of his works, written originally in Marathi, have been translated into English. Tendulkar extracts his raw material from the society around him. He is a keen observer of human relationships, especially in lower and middle class society.

His famous play *Kamala* is based on a real life incident. Ashwin Sarin, an Indian Express reporter, actually bought a girl from the rural flesh market to expose the brutal exploitation of women in rural areas. Tendulkar creates characters and situations in *Kamala* that allow him to explore the issues of exploitation and self-respect of women. This play being gyno-centric in nature, revolves around the female protagonist Sarita, the wife of a flamboyant investigative journalist Jaisingh Jadhav who is associated with an English daily published by an unscrupulous press-baron Seth Singhania. It is the journey of self-recognition and self-definition for Sarita who emerges from being a docile wife to an assertive and mature woman at the end of the play. Sarita is a well-educated but docile woman. Though highly educated, she lets herself be reduced to the status of a slavishly docile wife. Juxtaposed with her is another character Kamala, an ignorant and illiterate woman Jadhav has bought for two hundred and fifty rupees at an auction in a flesh market in Madhya Pradesh.

Tendulkar structures the play around three long conversations. The first is between Kamala and Sarita, the second between Jadhav and Sarita and third between Sarita and her uncle Kakasaheb, an old fashioned newspaper owner-editor. The play opens with a conversation between Sarita and her uncle triggered by a phone

call when Sarita asks Kakasaheb to note the name of the caller. Kakasaheb comments that the caller did not give his name and he feels that noting names is not very important. Sarita says, "That's the way you see it. My husband sees it differently. If I say they do not tell me their names, he gets angry with me for not asking".

After a while, when Sarita comes to know that her husband is coming from Delhi, she starts making all arrangements for a warm welcome. As a docile wife she is extremely sensitive about the needs and tastes of her husband. She asks Kamalabai, the maid, to make a curry of cauliflower, spread some mangoes on the plate and also to keep his beer ready. She seems to be blindly in love with her husband and wants to keep him happy at any cost. She never expects her husband to be grateful to her for her services and care.

Jadhav's reputation as a journalist is excellent but as a husband he seems to be a little authoritarian. When Jadhav returns home with Kamala whom he has bought from flesh market, his friend Jain comes to meet him. Addressing Sarita, Jain Says:

Hi, Bhabiji, I mean an English 'hi' to him and a Marathi 'hai' to you. The 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 the anti-exploitation campaign makes a slave of his wife (to Sarita). Bye, lovely bonded labourer....(KAMALA p.17).

Indeed, Sarita is treated as a 'bonded labourer' or atleast as a 'domestic labourer' and this view is beautifully suggested by N.S. Dharan also when he says, "Sarita is a lovely bonded labourer, taking note of all phone calls, attending to Jadhav's physical needs and running about in the house carrying out all his presumptuous instructions".

Condition of poor women is really alarming. How they are sold like goods in open market gets clear when Jadhav tells his wife about the auction at flesh bazaar, he says:

They have an open auction for women for all sorts of ages... 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 (KAMALA p.14).

Sarita asks him to stop all this, she does not want to hear any more of it. Jadhav then warns her not to tell anyone that he is going to exhibit Kamala at a surprise press conference as a sound proof that such things still happen in modern democratic India where women are treated like commodities of the business world. On the other hand, Kamala is so ignorant that she herself has no idea why she has been bought and what has been planned for her. She thinks that Jadhav has bought her in order to keep her in his house as his mistress. When Jadhav asks her to get ready to attend the press conference, she tells him that she will not go with him in her rags. Jadhav tries

to tell her that people want to meet and talk to her. He also says that there is a big feast and all this is in her honour. When she refuses to go, Jadhav asks her sternly to go with him. Finally she agrees to accompany him in her rags.

The next part of the play opens with Jaisingh Jadhav and his friend celebrating his success at the press conference. When they were discussing the questions asked at the press conference, Sarita says, "Weren't they ashamed to ask such questions." She was all shocked to see her husband flourishing as a journalist and least bothered about the privacy of a poor, innocent woman. She then angrily asks them, "So while they were asking those terrible questions and making fun of her, you just sat and watched, did you?" At this Jadhav replies, "I did not hold this press conference for my own benefit. It was to drag this criminal role of human beings into the light of the day."

Jadhav actually does not have any respect for women. He is one who wants to use and utilise them for his selfish interests. After the guests have departed, Jadhav tries to embrace Sarita and drags her to the bedroom so as to satisfy his lust. Sarita repels his advances and does not allow him to do so. At this, Jadhav asks her: "Tell me, come on. I am your husband after all. What was wrong about what I said? ... 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 have been hungry for six days. Is it a crime to ask for it? Answer me" (*KAMALA* p.32.)

Sarita tries to control her anger and protest and goes to kitchen and Jadhav goes upstairs drunk, enraged and dejected for his authority is not paid attention and his lordship is disobeyed. Like Kamala, Sarita too comes to realize that she also functions as a mere pawn in Jadhav's game of Chess. She compares herself with Kamala and realizes that there is not much difference between Kamala and her. However, She becomes aware of her real situation when Kamala asks her what price Jadhav has paid for her. This question creates ripples in the heart and soul of this simple, husband-adoring Sarita and now she comes to define her real situation. N.S. Dharan comments:

Kamala's question opens Sarita's eyes suddenly and, for the first time she finds no difference between herself and Kamala whom her husband has bought to exhibit at the press-conference. She coolly tells Kamala that Jadhav bought her for seven hundred rupees (*The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*).

Illiterate Kamala acts one step ahead of Sarita's understanding what the man-woman relationship is all about. Kamala teaches Sarita to see where she stands. Kamala now expresses her readiness to bear Jadhav's children to make his home pleasant to live in. Through a long dialogue Kamala tells Sarita:

Memsahib, If you won't misunderstand me. I'll tell you. The master bought you, he bought me too. He spent a lot of money on both of us. Didn't he So memsahib both of us must stay here together like sisters. We'll keep the master happy. I'll do the hard work and I'll bring forth the children and I'll bring them up. You are an educated woman. 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, Agreed? (KAMALA p.35).

Fully shocked and astonished at Kamala's suggestion, Sarita at once says – "Agreed". This one word "agreed" reveals the doldrum going on in the heart of the female protagonist. Now she realizes that her status is not that of a beloved wife but that of a sex-slave and a mere domestic help. Comments Shanta Gokhale, "Once Sarita sees herself in the light of a slave, the sole purpose of whole life is to please the master, everything falls into place".

On return from Nari-Niketan, Jadhav asks his wife to go with him to a party. Sarita, in her changed mental state defiantly tells him that she does not want to accompany him there. On Jadhav's asking the reason, she retorts by saying, "This is my will. Aren't I allowed to have a will of my own?" Jadhav, surprised and dejected, leaves for the party alone. Sarita's eyes now open and she realizes that in Jadhav's scheme of things there is hardly any difference between her and Kamala. He uses Kamala as a mere object to get success in his professional life. Similarly, it does not make much difference to him when his wife refuses to accompany him to the party. Sarita loses no time to understand that her husband merely uses her to get recognition in his social life and this fact starkly stares into her face.

This encounter between Sarita and Jadhav points to change in the future for Sarita. This change is indicated in the discussion between Sarita and her uncle. She says:

"I am going to present a man who in the year 1982, still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi, Jaisingh Jadhav. I am going to say that this man is a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her 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" (KAMALA p.46).

An uncontrollable sob bursts out from Sarita . She controls it and further says:

"I was asleep Kamala woke me up. With a shock, Kamala showed me everything. I saw a man, I thought my partner was the master of a slave. Slaves don't have rights, do they Kakasaheb..... they 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 come to the party, they must go. When he says lie on the bed. they..." (KAMALA p.46).

Sarita now, revolts against the tyranny of chauvinistic males. She protestingly and forcefully says:

"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? Does he have one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can This must be changed"(KAMALA p. 47).

Sarita also says, "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 will 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." Sarita, in spite of being highly educated, is tradition-bound. She has always accepted her husband's authority. However, after all the trauma she has experienced, she emerges from a docile wife to an independent woman. Now, she tries to find her own identity and she is now ready to wage a struggle to establish her identity.

Thus, in *Kamala* Tendulkar tries to reflect the real picture of an Indian woman, her attitude and feeling of sacrifice towards her male counterpart. The play ends on a futuristic note. A glimpse of realization dawns on Sarita- the central protagonist- that she is only an object for her husband. Though she does not revolt openly against her husband, she makes it a point not to surrender under his pressure and promises to herself that on a given opportunity she has the capacity and will to defend her rights as a woman and as a wife. Tendulkar, through this play, has a significant contribution towards the upliftment of women-status and advocates forcefully that for natural and balanced growth, the second half of the society must be allowed to enjoy equal opportunities & rights where they could lead a life of respect and dignity.

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