

Marginalization Of Women In Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial females have always been reined in and commanded in an organised way in a male-dominated society worldwide. Tendulkar in *Kamala* depicts the psychological and emotional marginalisation of women in a domestic milieu through the characters of Sarita and Kamala. Sarita keeps working day and night to take care of all the needs her husband desires. In her own home, she enjoys no identity and is thus constantly marginalised. Women like Kamala who is a victim of flesh trade are still living a life of degradation and Tendulkar exhibits their predicament by depicting the auction of women in this play. The playwright's depiction of the character of Kamala seems to comment not only on certain sections of society in India but also on the miserable condition of women in a patriarchal society which tears down the life spirit in women and reduces them to the level of a slave.

Keywords: Marginalisation, Victimisation, Discrimination, Patriarchal, Kamala, Jaisingh, Sarita.

Since time immemorial females have always been reined in and commanded in an organised way in a male-dominated society worldwide. Simon de Beauvoir remarks, "Throughout history they [women] have always been subordinated to men" (xxiv). Women have always been marginalised and subordinated in the conventional establishment of patriarchy and History. Beauvoir further points out that "It is not the inferiority of women that is responsible for their historical significance but it is the historical insignificance that has doomed women to inferiority" (167). Even beauty specifications which should be the sole prerogative of females are also fixed according to the male gaze. Since ages females have also considered themselves as an object which is worthy of disdain and they never apprehended their marginalised status in the society. They never gathered the courage to raise their voice against this unjust system of marginalisation which denies equal status to females. It took many centuries for women to gain the confidence to protest against their subaltern and marginalized status.

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the great Marathi dramatists of the twentieth century. He has been widely acclaimed for his short stories, screen plays, essays and plays. Tendulkar has written twenty seven full-length and twenty five one act plays. Real life incidents form the plot of many of his plays resulting in bringing harsh realities on the stage and sparking endless discussions about his views and vision of life. He has "nothing to hide but everything to expose and present the social ills and evils in all their stark reality" (Chatterjee 203). Through the medium of his writings Tendulkar brings out unequal treatment meted out to women in Indian society. The present paper deals with the socio-psychological marginalization of women in the social milieu in Indian society.

Tendulkar in *Kamala* depicts the psychological and emotional marginalisation of women in a domestic milieu through the characters of Sarita and Kamala. Tendulkar "depicts the theme of subaltern subjectivity and resistance throwing light on the plight of a woman as a slave in the family" (Sonkar 3). Sarita is a highly educated lady but she is very apprehensive and highly susceptible to the needs of her husband Jaisingh a journalist. She is a typical Indian woman who is always ready to execute all the directives given to her by Jaisingh. She takes note of all phone calls and attends to his every physical and domestic need. But on the contrary, his attitude towards his wife is that of indifference. He takes her care, her patience, her desire for granted. There is no recognition of his wife's good qualities though she works day and night in her household. Jaisingh is completely

ignorant of her dreams, her fancies and her wistful desires and is treated as a slave and as an animal that has no feelings and emotions of her own.

Women have traditionally and historically been enduring marginalization under patriarchal hegemony. A woman's conduct is predominantly governed by the strict patriarchal code which denies a woman her own selfhood. Wifhood and motherhood are generally considered to be the so-called domain of a woman wherein she spends all her life in the service of others. In this play, Jaisingh always maintains unpredictability about his whereabouts. He leaves for his journey and turns up home at odd times. He often loses his temper if somebody complains about his 'irresponsible behaviour'. He is in habit of keeping things secret and treats her own life partner with suspicion, saying, "I am not sure about you" (K 15). While taking note of all phone calls she has to face threatening phone calls, resulting in a continual tension for Sarita, attracts no serious note on his part.

The sudden entry of Kamala in her home and the hidden agenda behind all these leaves a long-lasting impression on her mind. She is frightened because she is aware of the crime committed by Jaisingh which can bring trails for him and send him behind bars. But it does not affect him because such adventures have become a part of his profession. It is the sensitive soul of Sarita who bears all these. His colleague Jain sees Jaisingh's attitude towards his wife as unjust and biased. Further, he comments in a satirical manner and says, "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... shame on you!" (K 17). He calls Sarita a "lovely bonded labourer" (K 17) who keeps working day and night to take care of all the needs her husband desires. In her own home, she enjoys no identity and is thus constantly marginalised. In this play Tendulkar "portrays the hollowness of husband and wife relationship" (Sharma and Mishra 714). While expressing her unwillingness to go to the party Sarita states that an I not allowed "to have a will of my own" (K 45). At this Jaisingh sarcastically remarks "Your will? Never noticed any sign of it before" (K 45). Thus, it speaks volumes of the marginalized status of a woman who is constantly made a victim of such psychological torture.

Sarita's opinions and accomplishment hold no ground before Jaisingh because of his sense of superiority. He always tries to prove that he is never wrong and pays no attention to Sarita's advice. When Sarita insists on that Kamala is not going anywhere; "she'll stay here like Kamalabai does... I have given it a lot of thought. Kamala and I have already discussed it" (K 42). But Jaisingh is adamant enough to send her to the orphanage. Sarita shows some courage and tries to take a stand of what she deems justified but she is immediately realised her status by Jaisingh who says forcefully "it's I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else. Do you understand? Chalo Kamala" (K 42). Jaisingh gives such reasons which are completely shallow. He shows his helplessness in keeping Kamala at home. He puts forth his view that "she has to stay in the orphanage. It will fortify our argument in court...(K 42). Though she finds no logic in his argument but she has no other option rather accepting it resentfully.

Tendulkar here seems to depict the marginalised status of an educated woman in the 20th century where a woman like Sarita is still striving hard to find a place of her own in her own household. The playwright beautifully highlights the egocentric tendencies of a husband like that of Jaisingh. Because of these tendencies, a male believes that he owns his life partner. This so-called superiority complex of a male stirs him up to demand complete acquiescence from his life partner be it emotional, physical or sexual. In a traditional Indian family, a woman is merely treated as a property of her husband who has absolute sexual access to her. A husband deems it his right to violet the desires of his wife. If a husband is denied of any right it becomes a source of conflict between the two sometimes resulting in abusing his life partner. Jaisingh sees Sarita in the light of a slave whose sole purpose is to obey his master and fulfil his desires. The heart of Sarita is filled with hatred regarding the issue of the press conference which leads her to show her unwillingness in fulfilling the sexual pleasure of her husband. This little incident provokes Jaisingh's anger and he slams his fist into his hand calling Sarita "The bitch" (K 32).

The condition of a housewife is best depicted through Sarita's character who is always afraid of Jaisingh. She sometimes avoids talking on those issues which can incite his anger. The stress and

marginalisation which she constantly faces at home fill her mind with uncertainty regarding her future with Jaisingh. She sees herself in the light of a slave and her relationship with husband becomes more distorted and stressful. She feels that she is also purchased legally through marriage transactions and feels suppressed, exploited and marginalised at home. While talking with Kakasaheb the pains and suffering of Sarita are quite evident:

I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. JaisinghJadhav. 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... he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes and doesn't think anything of it- nothing at all. [*An uncontrollable sob bursts from her...*] (K 46).

Furthermore, when Kakasaheb raises some concerns about their relationship and asks "what on earth happened between you two" Sarita instantly speaks "marriage" (K 46). She further asserts that she was asleep but Kamala woke her up and enabled her to see things clearly. She suddenly realises that she has no rights at all in this house because of her being a slave. She states, "slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? They must only slave away. Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says, laugh. Cry, when he says cry, cry. When he says pickup 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.*]"(K 46).It shows in which manners she has been treated at home. She has been forced by her husband to fulfil all the demands as a slave. In fact, Sarita becomes "a play thing in the game of marriage" (Latha 108). She came to realise this bitter truth when Kamala asks innocently "How much did he buy you for?"(K 34).

The playwright here seems to focus on the feminine psyche and how it affects the man-woman relationship. The bitter experiences of her married life for a prolonged period add up to her trauma which comes to the fore when Kamala's question shakes her conscious enabling her to assess the fact that her status is also like that of Kamala in the house. When Kakasaheb says that Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess; Sarita replies "Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb [*Trying to control her misery.*]... me too... me too."(K 43). Tendulkar seems to highlight how everyday humiliation leads to the shattering of the soul of a woman in an Indian household. But Sarita's traumatic experience fills her mind with positive thoughts. She determines that she will live a free life and she is ready to pay any price for it. At the end of the play, she finally states that "a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave... I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me" (K 52).

Kamala, a victim of flesh trade, is another such female character in the play who is exploited socially and emotionally. She has been purchased by Jaisingh from Luhardaga without letting her know the hidden motives behind such deal. She starts dreaming of her bright future life when she enters into Jaisingh's house. Jaisingh also incites in her heart the feeling of having a comfortable life in such a big house: " Jaisingh [*winking at Sarita*]. Would you like to stay here always Kamala? You won't have to do any work here. Just eat and relax" (K 13). The emotional exploitation of a poor girl comes to the surface after this little incident.

Women like Kamala are still living a life of degradation and Tendulkar exhibits their predicament by depicting the auction of women in this play. She is purchased by Jaisingh and agreed to come with him fully prepared "to become his bonded keep with all the associated feeling of sex, motherhood and living" (Dubbe 44).Kamala for Jaisingh is just a mean which will bring huge success for him in the field of journalism. He pays no heed to Kamala's dreams and emotions. She has been frequently blackmailed and ordered by Jaisinghlike a slave whose sole aim is to obey her master without having a will of her own. After a long journey, Kamala is in a shabby condition and tired and not in a position to go to the Press Conference. When Kamala shows some unwillingness to go there Jaisingh speaks rigidly; "Kamala you won't obey me? I order you to come there with me. Today" (K 20). He doesn't even let her change her clothes which are "torn and dirty" (K 21). He lures the innocent girl by telling her that the press conference will be a grand reception for you. The poor girl is unable to understand the real intentions of her master and at the press conference; she innocently bears the embarrassing

situation. The journalist entertains themselves “At that poor woman's expense!”(K 30). Some of the questions were extremely humiliating. One stupid reporter asked “You must be having free sex too. How many men have you slept with? You must have had some free sex with this new Seth? How did it compare?” (K 29). The well known critics rightly remarks that “the play *Kamala* draws a picture of selfish narrow-minded, self-centered modern society that doesn't hesitate to sacrifice their human values” (Sharma and Mishra 715).The poor woman is expected to answer these questions because these are asked by “the right people” and if the right people ask you; you must give the right answer” (K 21). They are ‘right people’ because they belong to a privileged class; but a poor tribal lady is not the ‘right one’ as she is helpless, powerless and victimised by the big people of a big city.

Kamala, a rustic tribal woman, does not question the practice of flesh trade. She thinks that a rich man like Jaisingh purchases the woman from the open market. They are expected to do hard work for their master in every respect. When she enters the home of Jaisingh she imagines that all women in the house are either bought or hired slaves. That's why she asks Kamalabai, “Were you bought or were you hired” (K 25). She even thinks that Saritais also a bought woman like her and she seems to be very confident when she asks Sarita “How much did he [Jaisingh] buy you for” (K 43). She has experienced in her whole life howwomen are sold in open markets; how men auction women just like animals.Kamala innocently says to Sarita that their master has spent a lot of money on us andnow it becomes our responsibility to make him happy and prosperous. Our master will have children and land of his own; “Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen. I'll sleep with him. Agreed?” (K 35). This seemingly unethical plan of Kamala makes a deep impact on the psyche of Sarita who is awakened after a long slumber.

Thus, through the characters of Kamala and Sarita, the playwright expresses “the Male chauvinistic spirit where male believes in liberty of themselves and at the same time they try to suppress the voice of women in the society either by force or trickery”. (Patnaik 86).The playwright's depiction of such a situation epitomizes the degree to which women are treated not as human beings but as an object. The playwright's depiction of the character of Kamala seems to comment not only on certain sections of society in India but also on the miserable condition of women in a patriarchal society which tears down the life spirit in women and reduces them to the level of a slave.

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