



# EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL REALITY AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S KAMALA

**Purna Chandra Haldar**

*Assistant Professor, Kalyani Mahavidyalaya*

## ABSTRACT

*Drama, as an artistic expression, is not only a delightful source of entertainment but also a powerful vehicle for instruction and reformation. The Indian dramatists artfully delve into contemporary socio-cultural issues and delineate the reality in an artistic form. Vijay Tendulkar as an iconic dramatist with social vision raises his voice against injustices meted out to the poor and the victims of structured violence in a brilliant manner. Women characters are given a crucial role in his plays. His plays are concerned with social, cultural, gender, and man-woman relationships in traditional Indian society. He presents the male-centric Indian society where women are forced to live as mere parasites. The male chauvinism remains at root in most of his plays. He exposes those issues with artistic delineation and attacks the moral standards of the patriarchal middle class society of contemporary India. This paper aims to present the social realism and the position of women in the play Kamala.*

**KEY WORKS:** *Artistic, Injustice, Hypocrisy, Chauvinism, Patriarchal*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar, a renowned Indian playwright appeared during post-independent India and steered the Indian theatre to a higher scale of success, The Marathi theatre over last few decades. He wrote a number of plays most of which are socially concerned. He illumined the Indian drama with his famous plays as Kamala, Silence: The Court is in Session, Sakharan Binder, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland, Ghashiram Kotwal, A Friend's Story, and Kanyadan. He was much more preoccupied with the contemporary Indian society. His plays are mainly concerned with contemporary social and political issues, man-woman relationships, position of women in Post-independent India, psychological crisis, judicial injustice, bourgeois rise, clash between modern and traditional values and etcetera. He voices against the vicious nature of human being and unveils their hypocrisy.

Gender oppression is central to feminism. The first national-level conference of autonomous women's groups took place in Bombay in 1980 Feminists give primacy to fighting the hierarchical and oppressive relationship between the sexes to achieve gender equality. Class, caste and communal oppressions are fitted into this paradigm. With this point of departure, their primary emphasis in practice shifts to gender-related issues like rape, dowry, dowry-killings and other forms of domestic violence, the unequal division of labour at home, the regulation of fertility and women's control over her body, the repression of women's sexuality etc.

Kamala, a topical play, published in 1981, throws light on the evils in the so-called modern cultured contemporary society and physical as well as mental exploitation of women within the

family and outside it (Tendulkar 3). The play Kamala is based on a real-life incident.

## II. SOCIAL REALITY AND KAMALA

Realism is a literary theory that writers use to present the reality as it exists. According to M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "...realism, on the other hand, said to represent life as it really is.(Abrams 333)" Therefore, realism is the artistic representation of real life and incidents without addition, deletion. It is the faithful record of life and social world as it really visible. The play, Kamala is a naturalistic play. Tendulkar has structured his play Kamala keeping in mind the real incident. Jaising, the protagonist is career oriented. He purchased a young teen girl, Kamala from the remote village, Luhardaga, Bihar, and sheltered her in his own bungalow along with his wife, Sarita and maid, Kamalabai. He prepares for press conference the following day to expose the girl not for claiming the girl's freedom but for his professional interest. Kamala, the slave girl feels relax and comfort after reaching there but could not imagine that she would be exposed to public not for her sake but for her master's interest. Amiable in nature, she adjusted herself with the mistress of the house, Sarita, who also feels friendly to her. She was given hospitality and benign behaviour from the mistress. During a long discussion with Sarita, she realizes the outer and the inner world of women. Both Sarita and Kamala feel their same existence as women, one living in luxury and other in destitute but Sarita feels her own status in her husband's custody, where she is under the code of do's and don'ts. Through the conversation between Kamala and Sarita, Tendulkar exposes the reality of their lives both indoor and outdoor.



The contrast between Kamala, the slave girl, and Sarita, an educated one, draws critical attention to the readers. Kamala lives in utter depravity due to her low birth and lack of education and she is converted into a saleable commodity in the flesh market. Sarita despite having high education lives a life of parasite. She as a housewife of a reputed journalist enjoys domestic comfort but never enjoys the freedom of life. She is compelled to do and respond to her husband's wants. Kamala's appearance unveils the mask of male hypocrisy. Sarita realizes the verisimilitude between Kamala and she herself.

Jaisingh, a well-known young journalist working as an Associate Editor in an English-Language Daily, makes a report in his Daily about political leader in Madhya Pradesh, who suspected his servant and locked him up illegally,

Kakasaheb: Didn't bother to give his name. Just made threats?

Sarita: That was Yesterday. I remember... He wrote about an M.P. from Madhya Pradesh, who suspected his servant of theft. And locked him up and gave him a thrashing- all quite illegal (Tendulkar 6).

This anonymous telephone call of threats, harassment and murder is not the unprecedented but becomes a daily phenomenon,

Sarita: Oh, that's nothing unusual. We get those from time to time. Sometimes the phone rings in the middle of the night. If I pick it up, I have to hear some terrible things. Often, my husband isn't at home. And I wouldn't know where to look for him. I've got used to it" (Tendulkar 7).

The social and political nexus causes atrocity, rape, rapine and murder. The society suffers and blood. It is Kakasaheb's observation,

Kakasaheb: Tell him. Go on, tell him! How will he find the time to reply to it? Even if he's here when you start telling him- by the time you finish he'll be in Biharsharif- or perched on Laldenga's roof- gathering eyewitness evidence! And what will he be observing? Murder, bloodshed, rape, atrocity, arson!"

Jaisingh is out of Delhi for few days as he undergoes on a mission. He goes to slave market at Lohardaga in Bihar to collect information about slave trade there for his news paper." He returns with a girl bought from the slave market with two hundred and fifty. Women are openly exposed to market for auction and are sexually abused as Jaising says,

Jaising: Yes, women. Can't believe it, can you? The men who want to 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 ...." (14).

Tendulkar brings into notice the status of women as saleable commodity.

### III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN KAMALA

Kamala and Sarita engage into short conversation and reveal their own existence. The enquiry of Kamala to Sarita stirs Sarita and makes her know her own status in society,

Kamala: How much did he buy you for?

(Sarita is confused at first)

Sarita: What?

Kamala: I said, how much did he buy you for?

Sarita (Recovering): Me? Look here, Kamala, (Changes her mind and sits down beside her), for seven hundred.

Kamala: My god! Seven hundred!(34).

Sarita gradually wakes out of her unconsciousness. She starts brooding over her own status in family. She finds no difference between Kamala and herself though the latter is highly educated. Both are purchased to maintain the household chores and fulfill the desires of male. Kamala sparks Sarita's consciousness. During the conversation with Kakasaheb, Sarita appears as with a different tone. She reveals that her existence in society is mere slave. Her likes and dislikes, emotions and passions, do's and don'ts are governed by her husband. She is taught to live as a woman 'limping behind man' and Kakasaheb encourages Sarita,

Kakasaheb: Sarita, the questions you are asking have only one answer. Because he's like that. That's why he's a man. And that's why there's manhood in the world. I too was just like this. Don't go by what I seem to be today. I gave your aunt a lot of trouble. As if it was my right."

Kakasaheb, the uncle of Sarita, stands for old generation with patriarchic attitudes in his pockets. Patriarchal dominance was considered as a right of man. Time changes but patriarchic mindset never undergoes any noticeable change in the society. Women are, according to Kakasaheb, taught to adjust with men with less degree of honour. With the change of time, masculine attitude towards woman has not been altered. The women are grasped and are converted as mere object of pleasure. The traumatic domestic life of women is well exposed through the Sarita. Again, the Kamala as a piece of commodity is passed over from one person to another. She sold to Jaisingh by the slave trader. She is again to be passed to the police or somewhere else of unknown destination. Therefore, Tendulkar artfully presents the pathetic existence of women in society where they are destined by men.

### IV. MALE HYPOCRISY

The meeting between Sarita and Kamala is a turning point of the play. Jaisingh's hypocrisy is revealed as Sarita finds no difference between Kamala and herself. He keeps Sarita into stern constriction of domestic chores. She has no freedom of life. Her likes and dislikes, feelings and passions are never considered and are dictated by her husband. She has to respond according to her husband's desires,

Sarita: I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps as a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I'm going to say: this man's 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 gig sum. As him what he did with it (an uncontrollable sob bursts from her. She controls it). Sorry.(Tendulkar 46)

Sarita gradually emerges out of her disgrace life of domestic slavery and dreams for an independent life, the life beyond the grip of male. She steps ahead with a series of questions and tries to emancipate herself. Through the portrayal Sarita and Kamala, Tendulkar presents the harsh reality of position of women in traditional Indian society. Sarita voices against the male dominance over the female life. Tendulkar fashions Sarita with self-consciousness.

Kakasaheb: It may be unpleasant, but it's true. If the world is to go on, marriage must go on. And it will only go on like this.

Sarita: 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(Tendulkar 47).

Kamala was exposed to press conference on the following day. The news spread with a thunder speed. Jaising went to attend a party. In the meantime, Jain, rushed to Jaising's house with the information that the Editor of the Daily decided to terminate Jaising's as a journalist. Jaising hurried home and collapsed on hearing this incident. Jain reports that Jaising has been dismissed due to the exposure of the slave in the press conference that evening. He further reports that there was a flesh racket with big people,

Jain: There have been pressures on the proprietor. I learnt that some very big people are involved in this flesh racket. Kakasaheb: But a man who's doing such a wonderful job-proprietor's paper has become famous and respected because of it.

Jain: A big paper doesn't recognize respect and all that, Kakasaheb- it only knows about circulation and advertisements. And profit and loss.

Jaising has been sacked as he jeopardizes the wrong friendships. Jaising thinks of his own promotional interest by exposing the flesh trade racket. His supposed termination from his job unveils the mask of hypocrisy of the modern media system as Jaising uses abusive language in retaliation against his proprietor,

Jaising (Get up roaring): No! Shut up! Let me speak-Yu shut up. What does he imagine himself to be? What is he? A bloody capitalist. A swindler. A black marketer. A

bloody income tax evader. I'll hold a press conference tomorrow- I'll strip of cover off him! I'll expose all his dirty secrets! I'll tear him to pieces-the dirty pig!

Tendulkar exposes not only the domestic exploitation and discrimination between man and woman but also exposes prevalent pictures of hollowness, black marketer of the modern journalism and so called the masked bourgeois class. Journalism is a pillar of democracy whereas it is used as means of professional profit.

The inherent self-deception is exposed dramatically by Tendulkar. At the centre of the play, there is a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, who treats the woman he has bought from the flesh market as an object that can buy for him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. He is one of those modern day individuals with a single track mind, who pursues their goal unquestioningly. Jaising never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after this exposure. Tendulkar takes 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.

## V. CONCLUSION

Tendulkar attributes the characters with their own personality. The play focuses on the rural girl Kamala, the urban woman Sarita, bourgeois capitalist, the proprietor of the Daily and the aspiring journalist, Jaisingh, are not the mouth speakers of Tendulkar but they are the real, topical and are associated with their own cultural views and stands. Kakasaheb bears old generation style of media whereas Jaisingh the new. The male dominance over the female is encouraged by Kakasaheb and enacted by Jaisingh. Thus throughout the play, Tendulkar incorporates the characters of Jaisingh, Kakasaheb, Sarita, Kamala, proprietor of the Daily, and some other including political figures involved in nexus. Each character represents some social, cultural, and political reality.

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