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Vijay Tendulkar's Kamala : A Gyno-centric Stance



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Research Paper :

Vijay Tendulkar is a well-known playwright in contemporary Indian theatre along with Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh. His Kamala is a gyno-centric play focusing on a stereotypical confined life of an Indian woman. He has a tremendous exposure to Marathi theatre from his childhood. He points out the contemporary socio-political issues through his plays. He seeks to portray the

intricacies of human character, individual stress and tensions, and a web of the natural relationship between a husband and a wife. The focus of his writing is on the plight and predicament of women in the urban middle-class society. Kamala is a real story of a journalist who purchased the woman from the rural sex industry which shows the involvement of police and politics in this trade. In the words of N. S. Dharan :

“In Tendulkar’s plays, generally, women are at the centre. It is around women that most of the action revolves. The roles Tendulkar’s female protagonists play eclipse those played by the men figuring in them. It is Leela Benare in *Silence!* And Sarita in *Kamala* who play the leading roles in these plays which present a world apparently dominated by male chauvinists. And, the dramatic action in these gain in intensity mainly because of the presence of these women figuring in them. Both Leela Benare and Sarita are educated and efficient and refuse to be cowed down by men.”¹ (Dharan N. S., *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*. P. 28.)

This is an adaptation of Vijay Tendulkar's famous play 'Kamala'. It has been made into a serial on Colors Marathi nowadays. Prior to this, it is one of the much acclaimed plays made into a film in 1985. In the film, Deepti Naval played Kamla's character with Shabana Azmi and Marc Zuber. As per the news displayed in The Times of India, the serial introduces theatre artist Ashwini Kasar in the supposed role whereas TV actors Akshar Kothari and Deepti Ketkar played the other two characters.

The serial clearly shows issues faced by women. His *Kamla* was initially inspired by a true story where a journalist bids for a girl, in order to expose the flesh trade prevalent in a village. Ajay Mayekar, the director of the play states that the play merely remains as an inspiration and the serial raises many questions that curse women today. The play mainly focuses on the plight of Kamla and the mission of the journalist to expose the flesh trade. The serial has emphasized more on the life of Devashish, a journalist and his wife Sharayu. The serial begins where the

play ends and the story is naturally presented through the point of view of Sharayu. Most importantly, she sacrificed everything to support her husband although she has many opportunities to make her a bright career. What exactly a woman expects to have from her husband is highly remarkable in this context. And what makes her so disturbed in her marital life? Kamla is all about Sharayu's inner conflicts and problems that arise when Devashish decides to marry Kamla on his lawyer's advice. Deepti talks about her role as a role of a lifetime and every woman can relate her life to Sharayu's journey.

Kamala is a two-Act play written by Vijay Tendulkar. The theme of this play is a flesh-trade. It's a true story of Jaisingh Jadhav, a journalist who wants to be successful in his profession. The writer uses the play as a means to express the unending suffering of the Indian middle class woman. He brings out a man-woman relationship through his plays. In Kamala he presents a complex relationship between Jadhav and Sarita, his wife. It is a gyno-centric play because the character Sarita becomes an aggressive and mature wife from being a domestic one earlier. Sarita is highly educated but still she is a slavish wife confined within the four walls of stereotypical social boundaries. Kakasaheb is Sarita's uncle who leads a simple life on Gandhian doctrines of life. In Act I, hectic phone calls create the ambience of work which needs to be completed with care. The failure in it leads to domestic disturbances and dishonor to Jadhav. Kamala is a servant woman of Sarita who almost does all the household activities. Sarita as a wife is extremely honest and sensitive to her husband's needs and different tastes. She looks after her husband as an ideal Indian woman does. Despite being an independent and educated woman, it is difficult to know what makes her so slave-like to her husband. In the play, Kakasaheb says : "You may be highly educated, Sarita, but you are still a girl from the old Mohite 'Wada'." (Kamala p. 5.) Jadhav's safety being a journalist is a serious concern to all members in the family. Jadhav turns a deaf ear to the advice given by his wife about his own individual security. Jaisingh Jadhav

purchased Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees from a village in Bihar. Vijay Tendulkar thus mentions flesh-trade happening in the remote villages in India.

The intent of a journalist behind purchasing Kamala for 250 rupees is to present her in the conference for his name and fame sake. She also thinks that Jadhav bought her home to keep her as his mistress. The threatening calls that Jadhav receives does not affect him at all in the play. Kakasaheb replies : "You're being threatened with murder." (Kamala, P. 8.) Instead of fear and anxiety, he reports to his editor over the phone about the completion of his mission, Press Conference and purchase of Kamala as a proof of flesh-trade.

Jadhav is a self-centred journalist. Whenever Kakasaheb talks to him about his personal safety, Jadhav says to him that his brain is sharpened by his wife. His life was at risk as he got involved into investigative journalism by profession. His job being a journalist is highly reputable in the office, but the same person is enviable as a husband at home.

In this play, Sarita is simply treated as a 'lovely bonded labourer'. She quietly attends phone calls, follows his instructions and satisfies his physical needs. Sarita receives a shock and much worried to hear from Jadhav that her husband has purchased Kamala for 250 rupees in the Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar. He adds : "They sell human beings at this bazaar...They have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages." He continues, "The men who want to bid handle the women to inspect them...How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and..."(Kamala 14).

Even Kamala is not allowed to bathe and wear a fresh sari for the Press Conference as she is to be presented at the Press Conference as she is like an object or a thing. Jadhav says: "Just let this evening's Press Conference get over. It's very important."(Kamala, 18.)

Sarita silently listens to her husband. Jadhav wishes to prove that newspapermen never tell lies. For the sake of Press Conference only, Jadhav was deceptive in his conversation with Kamala as quoted below :

Jaisingh : How do you like it here, Kamala?

Kamala : Very much, Sahib.

Jaisingh : Kamala, this evening we're going out together.

Kamala : Oh, I'll see Bombay! They say it's a very big city.² (Kamala, 19.)

Kamala refuses to accompany Jadhav in her rags, but he compels her to be with him at the Press Conference. She is simple and illiterate as she does not know the place where she is. She thinks that the place is Bombay, but in fact she is in Delhi. She is unwillingly forced to interact with the people at the Press Conference in her rags. The playwright points out the contrast between journalism in the vernacular and in English. Media can bring socio-political change in the society. But it is important to know whom we address and what language and medium we prefer to reach the common man. Act I thus ends in the success to take Kamala to the Press Conference letting a great relief to Jadhav and Sarita.

In Act II, one of the most ironic episodes in the play is as follows :

Kamala : Can I ask you something? You won't be angry?

Sarita : No, Go on.

Kamala: How much did he buy you for?³ (Kamala, 34)

Most importantly, Sarita begins to realize that there is no difference between her own identity at home and Kamala whom her husband bought her to exhibit at the Press Conference. She says to her that Jadhav bought her for 700 rupees. It is observed in the play that a woman can understand another woman. Although Kamala is illiterate and quite simple believing in her jungle deity, she can understand how a woman suffers a lot in her married life by her mother-in-law, a husband and society. She sympathizes with Sarita over her barrenness. Their long dialogues show Kamala's readiness to produce children.

"...If you pay seven hundred and there are no children...

Sarita : How many children do you have, Kamala?

Kamala : I'll have as many as you want."⁴ (Kamala, 34.)

Her simple, selfless and straightforward nature clearly reflect through the following lines :

Memsahab, if you won't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you; he bought me too...So, memsahab, both of us must stay here like sisters. We'll keep the master happy...The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children. I'll bring them up. 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?

Sarita : "Agreed" ⁵(Kamala, 35.)

Sarita thinks herself as an object which is used for sexual satisfaction and social status at parties. She also resembles Kamala being an Indian woman trapped in a male-dominated society. But still, Kamala considers Jadhav as his love whereas Sarita as a right.

In the course of time, Sarita undergoes radical changes in her like Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House. She becomes an independent woman finally. It is a true story of a woman who discovers her real identity. Sarita declares the state of affairs at home. She says that the man has bought home a slave and exploits her. Both Sarita and Kamala suffer a lot in this context. Sarita says :

"...I saw that the man I thought my master was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Slaves don't have rights, do Kakasahab?...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, lie on the bed-she (she is twisted in pain)."⁶(Kamala, 46)

Kakasahab then opines :

"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."⁷ (Kamala, 47)

Sheth Singhania, the press baron dismisses Jadhav because of his expose of flesh-trade at the Press Conference. Jain, his friend informs Sarita and Kakasaheb about this. There is a pressure on the proprietor as some big people got involved in the flesh racket. After listening to this shocking news, Sarita still thinks about her husband and asks him to come home from the party. Jadhav is shocked to hear this news. He curses his boss and drinks. The play focuses on an intricate husband-wife relationship and marriage as a social institution. Sarita decides to forget what happened in her life and become an independent and confident woman.

Sarita thinks :

“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, no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I’ll pay whatever price I have to pay for it.”⁸ (Kamala, 52.)

Sarita's sacrifice in a domestic world finally leads her to become an able modern woman, strong willed, optimistic and free.

The play shows the radical changes in the life of a modern woman who always dreams to retain her status in Indian society. She seeks to rebel against all the oddities that she faces in her life.

Undoubtedly Kamala is a gyno-centric play. In this context, N. S. Dhavan points out :

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.”⁹(Dharan N. S., The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar. P28.)

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