

Depiction of Slavery in Vijay Tendulkar's Kamala

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Abstract: *Vijay Tendulkar is a modern Indian playwright who is known for writing plays in Marathi and English. Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, Ghashiram Kotwal and The Vultures are his popular plays that earned him national and international acclaim. Kamala is a topical play that is inspired by a real-life incident- the Indian Express expose by Ashwin Sarin who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a Press Conference. Using this incident as a launching pad, Tendulkar raises certain cardinal questions regarding the values system of a modern success-oriented generation which is ready to sacrifice humanity itself. The central character of the play is a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, who treats the women he has purchased from the flesh market as an object that can buy him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. He treats even his wife Sarita like a slave. Jaisingh himself is a slave to his employer. In this paper we shall concentrate on the slavery of the characters of play Kamala.*

Keywords: Slavery, Topical, Expose, Success-Oriented, Generation, Humanity

In Kamala, Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism of modern Indian male who believes himself liberal-minded and regards women like a slave. Sarita, like Kamala, is also a slave in Jadhav life, a slave that provides him physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. Kamala's entry into Sarita's house reveals to her the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the insignificance of her own existence. On the opposite side, Jadhav's dismissal from his job reveals him the futility of reputation in professional life. In the play, Tendulkar depicts the true nature of so called success-oriented generation of modern India who treat not only women but also men like objects. Obviously, "Kamala is an indictment of the success-oriented male dominated society where women are often victims or stepping stones in men's achievement." (Banerjee:583)

Jaisingh Jadhav is a journalist who works in an English newspaper. His wife Sarita toils for his comfort from early morning to late night. She manages his house, his professional calls and keeps the record of his report and many more. Jaisingh spends most of his days out of house. In his absence, Sarita has to look after his professional activities, if she misses any call and asking names he gets angry with her for not asking. Tendulkar delineates the rat-race of his profession and "makes a jibe at the modern concept of journalism which stresses sensation." (Banerjee:583)

Jadhav brings home an Adivasi woman, Kamala whom he bought at the flesh market at Luhardaga Bazaar in Bihar for two hundred and fifty rupees. He wants to present her at the Press Conference in order to prove that such actions are taking place in this country at this very moment. It is the irony of Jadhav's ideology who wants to expose such illegal profession but by buying Kamala he has involved himself in this unlawful act. He has bought Kamala not to redeem her from this world but to earn promotion and fame in his profession. He is insensitive and does not have sympathy for Kamala like women. He urges to Sarita that there is nothing unusual about the Luhardaga flesh market because women are sold in many places like that all over the country. He stresses that, "That's not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga- the technique of it. The art lies in

presenting the case."(Tendulkar: Collected Plays:15) Jadhav's hypocritical attitude to Kamala reveals the attitude of elites to lower class who demean them and ignore their significance in the society. Tendulkar through Jadhav here shows the hypocrisy and unsympathetic mentality of upper class to marginalized section.

Jaisingh Jadhav is playing with women's sentiment, prestige and identity. He brings Kamala here by showing her a dream of happy life. Kamala like a slave obeys him like a master. Since she is innocent women who does not know the cruelty of outer world. As women in her area are bought and sold like a stuff and Kamala thinks that women are obliged to obey her master. She is happy in Jadhav's house. She thinks that this is the house where she will live forever but Jadhav has brought her here to use her as a means. He sees in her his success. Jadhav, pointing out Sarita, asks Kamala, Kamala, how do you like it here? Kamala,(Not emerging from the veil) Its nice. Such a big house! Like a royal Palace. Jaisingh,(Winking at Sarita) Would you like to stay here always, Kamala? Kamala (Nodding her head delightedly) Yes! Jaisingh: You don't have to do any work here. Just eat and relax. (Tendulkar: Collected Plays:13)

Obviously Kamala has become a victim of Jaisingh's diplomacy as "He duped Kamala who had come prepared to become his bonded keep with all the associated feelings of sex, motherhood and living."(Dubbe:44)

Kamala is unaware of his purpose of buying her. She could not realize his motives and she happily and willingly accompanies him. Jadhav's opinion that "there is a social purpose" wants to present her at a Press Conference to prove himself as a liberator of oppressed. On the other hands, Sarita is dumfounded by seeing the true nature of her husband. His treatment to Kamala arises compassion for her in her heart. Kamala's intrusion into her family enlightens her and makes her aware of her position in her family. She realizes herself just like Kamala who has been bought for his professional profit. Kamala thinks that Sarita is also a slave in this house and considers her "an expensive bargain,"

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because she has not begotten any children. She shares her wishes with Sarita and tells her that the master will have children. She says Sarita," The master bought you; he bought me too....Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?" (Tendulkar. Collected Plays:35) She further urges Sarita that we shall stay here together like sisters. We shall keep the master happy and make him prosperous. Tendulkar choosing two different characters of two different background shows their condition in the same pattern. He shows how women are treated in male dominated society. Sarita realizes that Jaisingh treats her not better than Kamala. He never gives her space, value and respect. He always behaves her like a slave not like a life-partner. Now she has become numb because, "Kamala opens the real life of Sarita, Jaisingh's wife, who considers himself to be in the same position."(Dubbe:14)

Jaisingh, after conference, wants to send Kamala to an orphanage because she can be danger for him in charge of human trafficking. But Sarita is adamant to keep her at home like Kamalabai. He like a ruthless diplomat wants to get rid of her. He presents her logic behind sending her to that place as he wishes to fortify his argument in the court. Kakasaheb is socked at his heartlessness. He says," Kamala is just pawn in his game of chess."(Tendulkar. Collected Plays:43) In his reply, Sarita expresses her anguish," Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb(Trying to control her misery) Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb. Me too.....Me too."(Tendulkar.Collected Plays:43)

She has a soft corner towards Kamala who is helpless to face the exploitation at the hands of her husband. Jaisingh's treatment towards women has crushed her psyche. She could not control herself and her anger against him burst out from her like a volcano. She wants to expose him in a Press Conference; " 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: this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He does not 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 does not think of it-nothing at all. Listen to the story of how he brought 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."(Tendulkar. Collected Plays:46)

She could not do anything helplessly for Kamala who has come in her life like a messenger to realize her significance in her house for which she has sacrificed her life. She never expresses her grudge and always takes care of his every comfort yet she is underestimated. Obviously, it can be said that " Sarita is a symbol of slavery in family system." (Dubbe:46)

It is the irony of the play that Jaisingh himself is a slave in the eye of his proprietor. His master dismisses him from his job in the fear of case that can be filed against him in the charge of promoting human trafficking.

Thus, Kamala reveals the slavery of all characters. Tendulkar exposes not only bonded but also elite slavery of society. Kamala is bonded to her master and Sarita is obliged to her husband. Kamala's suffering shows that both women and men are oppressed by their master directly and indirectly. Mrs. P. Pramila Devi expresses, " Kamala is a symbol of slavery. Sarita is a symbol of sophisticated slavery. Kamalabai is a slave to her master and mistress. Jaisingh himself is a slave to his employer. So none is free from the cruelty of their oppressors in our society."(Devi:147)

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