

**ASSERTING SELF : KAMALA AND SARITA IN
VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *KAMALA***

Dr. Parul Tyagi,
Reader, Dept. of English
I.N. Mahila P.G. College
Meerut (U.P.)

Surete
Research Scholar
Mewar University
Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Abstract

Exploitation, marginalization and mistreatment of women in male chauvinistic society is not unknown to anyone. Woman however overlooks every kind of torture practises on her by man and considers it her duty to respect man and faithfully performs all the responsibilities assigned to her in this male dominated society. Though she knows her true worth and real status yet she remains calm and sacrifices all her desires to maintain peaceful atmosphere, honestly fulfilling her duty of keeping herself at second position to man. The present paper highlights the same thought by presenting examples of Sarita and Kamala from the play *Kamala* by Vijay Tendulkar.

Keywords: marginalization, male dominated society, chauvinistic society, self assertion, responsibility, harassment.

“Dhol, Ganwar, Sudra, Pashu, Nari, sakal tarna ke adhikari”
-(p769, doha 58, chopai 3)

In Ramcharitmanas, the sea deity, Samudra speaks the above lines when Lord Rama in anger takes out his weapon to evaporate the whole sea. The sea deity appears and requests Rama not to get angry and not to force the deity to cross the boundaries that are set by God himself for the sea in order to control his creations. Just as the drums, the illiterate, lower caste, animals and women deserve a beating to straighten up and need to maintain their boundaries, in the same way, the Sea also needs to reside within the boundaries created by God. And hence, Samudra gave the suggestion of creation of the iconic Ram Sethu.

These lines clearly explain the status of women in male dominated society which expects her to stay within the decided boundaries. In the name of controlling women, her exploitation, harassment, humiliation and torture by male dominated world is as old as the birth of human

being on this planet. Even mata Sita was not spared from facing the agni-pareeksha to prove her loyalty and purity towards her husband Ram.

Women are harassed everywhere in every sphere of life be it home or workplace or any other place. At workplaces they are marginalized, at homes they are often even worse off, treated as an object of slavery and enjoyment and mistreated in many other ways. It is the general acceptance of man's superiority over woman that has resulted into indifference and an attitude of objectifying women. It is thought that the right place of women is within the four walls of home. It is her duty from cooking food to do all household jobs. They are considered as an object of producing and bringing up the children and obeying their husbands and in-laws. They have been deprived of their rightful place in society and this mistreatment and exploitation of women has been going on for centuries. Women in India are looked upon as an economic liability on her parents. Her contribution as a housewife towards home is not recognized. All her sacrifices go unnoticed because untold sacrifices are never valued, and women will never speak about the sacrifices made by her because it is taught to her since childhood that it is her duty to obey father before marriage and obey husband after marriage.

It is the mental makeup of the society that women are only the objects of pleasure and are made to be ruled by man. Women are kept confined as dumb cattle within the boundaries of the house and to obey blindly is considered as their most sacred duty. Though conditions are improving and in matter of social legislations, women are far more ahead than women elsewhere but implementation of laws granting rights to women has been so slow that puts women far behind men in every sphere. People do not feel happy at the birth of a girl child and daughters are looked upon as a curse for the family. After marriage she has to obey husband blindly and even the educated and modernized husbands want their wife to walk two steps behind them in every sphere. For a woman no matter the husband is good or bad, for her he is her lord and god.

Kamala by Tendulkar is a realistic and naturalistic play based on real life incident where a journalist Ashwin Sarin investigated into flesh market of Madhya Pradesh and purchased a woman Kamala to prove the trafficking of women in Shivpuri village. In the play Tendulkar has not only criticized the urban middle class society but also have raised his voice against discrimination against women. All the female characters of the play, Kamala, Sarita and Kamlabai face gender discrimination. By picturing these exploited and tormented women Vijay Tendulkar has succeeded in presenting the status of downtrodden women in society in comparison to male chauvinistic world of present time.

The play brings into light a flesh trade dealing with the issue of buying and selling of tribal women. In the play Jaisingh Jadhav is a young, ambitious and daring journalist who is not afraid of taking any kind of risk for getting success in his career and life. He makes an outwardly show that he is working for social cause and is very much devoted towards his work and society being a journalist. However, the inner reality is that he is hungry for name, fame, money and success. To achieve his goals and ambitions he can go to any extent. For fulfilling his purpose he does not even care for the feelings and emotions of his loving wife Sarita and treats her like a slave in the house. Shibu Simon remarks, "Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who believes him-self to be liberal through his delineation of Sarita's character." (Simon,187)

Sarita is like a dumb cattle who is expected to run at one voice of Jaisingh and obey him blindly. Jaisingh is a dominating husband and status of Sarita in Jaisingh's life is very well picturised in the lines when he comes home and in an orderly tone calls for Sarita:

JAISINGH : Oh, and also bring some tea. And that suitcase has four days worth of dirty clothes in it. Take them out and give them for a wash. But hold your nose while you do it. They must be stinking. Don't tell me I didn't warn you.(8)

Sarita being an obedient wife follows every order of her husband taking care not to annoy him. She is an educated urban lady who is not aware of the slave- like existence of her. Jaisingh buys a tribal woman Kamala from the flesh market for two hundred and fifty rupees just to present this woman in a press conference to prove the existence of the flesh trade racket in the country. Though Jaisingh says that this would shut the mouth of people who blame the reporters for misusing the freedom of press but the actual truth is that he is not doing it for a social benefit but for gaining his own name and fame. His motive is selfish one behind the purchase of Kamala:

JAISINGH: They made the false charge that newspapermen tell lies. So it fell on me to put the noose around the right neck- with evidence....the point is how we project Luhardaga – the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case – not in case itself. (15)

Thus it is clear that Jaisingh is doing it just to create a great drama at the press conference to get fame to his name. In order to add more strength to this case he decides to present Kamala in the most miserable condition before the press conference. He does not allow her to take a bath and wants to take her to the press conference in the same old , dirty and torn saree:

JAISINGH: That's exactly what I'm telling you. She will come to the Press Conference in the same clothes she's wearing now.

SARITA: She's a woman, after all . And her sari is torn.

JAISINGH: I know, I know! You don't have to tell me, understand?". (22) .

By doing so he wants to show that how great deed he did by bringing out Kamala from such a pathetic and miserable situation. He scolds Sarita when she opposes the idea of presenting Kamala in the same old and torn saree, which shows that Jaisingh does not care even a bit for what Sarita thinks and does not gives importance to her opinion. He wants Sarita to obey him without questioning him. Moreover, he has no humanity and shame in him as he decides to present the unlucky woman Kamala in the same torn saree in front of all people in press-conference. He does not care for the plight of the helpless woman and just uses Kamala as a ladder for achieving success.

Shailaja Wadikar rightly observes about Jaisingh,“ He accepts such a dangerous task not with a view to reforming Kamala's life but as a part of his professional commitment. Kamala, for him , is a means by which he can get a promotion in his job and win reputation in his professional career. He never stops to think what will happen to kamala after this expose.”(Wadikar, 24)

Jaisingh is a person devoid of humanity and respect for women. In the press conference when people asked vulgar questions to Kamala he did not object even once. Moreover, after the press conference is over, Jaisingh and his friend Jain both shamelessly discussed the questions put to Kamala in the press conference , as if they have done a great praiseworthy deed by putting a helpless woman to face all kinds of cheap questions by the people. His shameless attitude is clearly seen when he talks to Jain and laughs and joyfully shakes his head when Jain discusses the questions that were asked to Kamala. While terrible questions were asked to Kamala and she was made a laughing stock, Jaisingh and Jain both just sat and watched without any guilt or shame:

JAISINGH: He thought all adivasis indulged in free sex day and night. What nonsense!

JAIN: With that, another one began to itch to ask a question. He asked, you must be having free sex too. How many men have you slept with? (29).

Sarita too is used by him just as an object of enjoyment and as a slave to look after him and his house. Sarita's support to Jaisingh in his career does not matter for him. When Sarita refuses for making physical relation with Jaisingh, he calls her a bitch. This shows selfishness of Jaisingh. Catherine Thankamma rightly remarks "Jaisingh remains totally indifferent to Sarita's feelings. He expects Sarita to submit to his desire for intercourse whether she wants it or not and calls her a 'bitch' when she refuses to cooperate with him". (Thankamma,81). In the play through Jaisingh's character male egoism, domination, selfishness and hypocrisy of modern success- oriented generation is presented. In the play Sarita and Kamala both are exploited by Jaisingh. Sarita is a true picture of a modern Indian woman who is suffering between the two opposite forces in the web of tradition and modernity. Sarita in the beginning does not realize the selfishness of her husband but when she interacts with Kamala, then the curtain is removed from her eyes and that is the time when all of a sudden she realizes that since her marriage with Jaisingh, she is being used as a puppet in his hands. It is the entry of Kamala into Sarita's life that brings a change in her thinking and she realizes that in the name of wedlock she is turned into a permanent slave and an object of enjoyment for fulfilling Jaisingh's wishes. Shailaja Wadikar rightly observes, "Sarita realizes that she is bound to her husband in the wedlock to slave for him permanently after the entry of 'Kamala' in her house." (Wadikar, 77)

Sarita is too much affected and moved by Kamala's thinking and innocence and one such innocently asked question by Kamala removes the veil from Sarita's eyes and ignites in her a feeling of self identity:

KAMALA: I said, how much did he buy you for?(34)

These words of Kamala ignite a spark of self – assertion in Sarita and her thinking is changed and she decides to bring dignity to herself and her relation. Earlier she used to obey Jaisingh blindly but now when after the press conference Jaisingh decides to send Kamala to an orphanage, Sarita objects at it and refuses to come to the success party in honor of her husband to celebrate his success. She is so much hurt and angry that she even thinks of arranging a press conference to expose Jaisingh's selfish behavior in front of the world:

SARITA: I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I'm 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. One you can use and throw away....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. (46)

These lines by Sarita clearly present a picture where women like Sarita are marginalized within the four walls of the house as well as outside the house in the society too just like Kamala is exploited by Jaisingh and others in the press conference.

R.S. Pathak rightly suggests that the marginal has the only option left is to speak, "It has to speak, voice, not hide its tears, fears and angst and wrath in as many forms as possible. Tongue, if unused, is a fleshy burden, tantamounting to its own detonguing. Moreover, marginals cannot for long persist with their monologue of identity or difference. It has to disidentity itself and open itself to intervening positive influences for larger identity." (Pathak, 15)

Sarita highlights the helplessness of a woman in front of man:

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.(47)

But when Sarita got the news that some powerful politicians did not like this exposure of flesh trade and as a result Jaisingh and his boss have been dismissed from their job, Sarita is filled with human sympathy for her husband and postpones her rebellion. Sarita's greatness as a wife and as a woman can be clearly seen when she finds her husband in trouble. She decides to stop her anger for the time being keeping alive the spark of self identification and self respect which Kamala ignited in Sarita's mind:

SARITA: I'll go on feeling it. 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, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it. (52).

In the words of Shanta Gokhale, "Sarita is a compassionate human being who defers her rebellion against her husband as he is in acute need of her moral support." (Gokhale, 42). Just like Sarita, it is in the blood of Indian women that no matter how rudely and badly they are treated by their husband, they will never leave him when there is hardship and difficult time. Indian woman has carried the burden of the family. She has slaved, for her husband, for her family. She takes pride in suffering and living with the idea of subjugation that is made to dissolve in their blood following the rules made by male chauvinistic society where woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multiple roles in the family and as a wife and a mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Mild submissiveness, domesticated, unprotesting and self-sacrificing woman was an essential adornment of the patriarchal social set up all over the world.

It is true that untold sacrifices are never valued, therefore it is really a high time and needs the attention of people that women should come forward and ask for their rights and demand for their individuality. Woman has borne the tyranny of man for too long. The time has come for a crusade. The thing women have yet to learn is that nobody will give them the power, they have to snatch it from people themselves. Women must come forward and fight against exploitation and for their rights of equality.

Abigail Adams in a letter to her husband John Adams dated march 31,1776 rightly says, "*Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.*" (Adams,72).

Thus, through the characters of Kamala and Sarita in the play , Tendulkar throws light on the issue of marginalization of women highlighting the thought that Indian women like Sarita even if know what respect they truly deserve and how oppositely they actually are treated will never leave their husband in critical time.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Abigail. The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letter of the Adams Family, 1762-1784. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

Gokhale, Shanta. Tendulkar on his own terms. Madge, V.M. *Vijay Tendulkar's Plays: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2007. Print.

Pathak, R.S. “Indian English Literature: Marginalized Voices.”Ed.Avadesh K.Singh, New Delhi:Creative Books, 2003.

Simon, Shibu. Man- Woman Relationship in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar. The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar Critical Explorations.eds. Amar Nath Prasad, Satish Barbuddhe. New Delhi : Sarup & Sons, 2008.

Tendulkar Vijay. *Five Plays*. New Delhi : Oxford India Paperbacks, 1995. Print.

Thankamma, Catherine. Women that Patriarchy Created: The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Mahasweta Devi. Madge.V.M. *Vijay Tendulkar’s Plays An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi:Penkraft International, 2007. Print.

Tulsidas. Sri Ramcharitmanas. Gorakhpur: Geeta Pres, 1999.Print.

Wadikar, Shaijaja B. *Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors(P) Ltd. , 2008. Print.