

Gender Deformity in Vijay Tendulkar's Kamala and Kanyadaan

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Abstract – Vijay Tendulkar was a leading contemporary Indian playwright, movie and televisionwriter, literary essayist and political journalist. He started his career as a journalist in 'Marathi Weekly' he wrote all his plays in his native language 'Marathi'. But most of his plays have been translated and performed in many Indian languages. English versions of his works are more popular than that of other language versions. During his life time, he produced twenty-eight full length plays and twenty-four one act plays, articles, editorials and eleven plays for children. He was also the author of original stories and screen plays for eight films like: Akrosh, Gahrayi, Manthan, Nishant, Kamala, Musafir, Ardhasatya and Umbartha. The aim of this paper is to show how women in society are victimized, oppressed, suffered, tortured and exploited and how gender deformity plays an important role in his famous plays Kamala and Kanyadan.

Key Words: Victimized, Oppressed, Suffered, Tortured and Exploited, Deformity.

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Tendulkar's plays highlight the ugly cultural deformity of society. He explores gender deformity in *Kamala*, political deformity in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, physical deformity in *Sakharam Binder*, mental deformity in *Encounter in Umbugl* and *Kanyadan* and spiritual deformity in *The Vultures*.

Gender Deformity is the type of deformity which is based on the gender of the person. Generally women are considered inferior than men so far as their education, career, economic advancement and political influences are concerned. Deformity based on gender including sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination and unequal pay for women who do the similar jobs as men. Gender inequality refers unfair rights between male and female based on different gender roles unequal treatment in life. As per the Indian literature and society female child is always treated inferior to male child and this leaves indelible mark upon the mind of female child.

Kamala (1981), a play of two acts, portrays the terrible position of women who are treated as puppets. They can be bought, sold, abused, humiliated...etc. The play *Kamala* portrays a true picture of self-centered modern society that does not hesitate to sacrifice human values. Though all the plays of Tendulkar are concerned with genderdeformity, his *Kamala* treats this cultural malady more elaborately. The play was inspired by true 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. Jaisingh Jadav is courageous journalist. He and Sarita, his sophisticated wife, remain ignorant of their being exploited and oppressed until *Kamala*, an uneducated tribal woman, triggers their awareness.

"... *Kamala* after a time becomes a symbol. The wife of the journalist becomes 'Kamala', and ultimately even he [the journalist] becomes *Kamala*."1

The protagonist of the play Jaisingh exploits *Kamala*'s situation for name and reputation and leaves her to her fate as soon as his purpose is served. The questions which are asked to *Kamala* during the press conference shows that society is always interested in reassertion of individuals who are wretched. Nobody comes for her and they even remain unknown about how she is brutally abused in public.

Both the female characters in the play *Sarita* and *Kamala* symbolize subordination of women of the former, within the walls of the house, and of the latter, outside by them Jaisingh acquires fame, status, and authority in the society. Although *Sarita* remains a source of inspiration throughout his successful career, he shows total indifference towards her. Tendulkar takes no side-neither of

Kamala and Sarita nor of Jaisingh. But the audience feels that he is on the side of Kamala and Sarita, because both of them are used, or rather disapproved by their male-counterpart. The character of Jaisingh exhibits selfishness of the modern young generation, and the oppressive nature of the society. And conversely, through the characters of Kamala and Sarita he exhibits innocence, sincerity, generosity, and spirit of devotion of women to their male domination. That is why Sarita feels sympathy for Jaisingh and provides him emotional support when he loses his job.

She is one of Tendulkar's New Women who shows no hitch or hesitation showing her husband's concern for the tribal woman as a gesture towards her rehabilitation, offering her social justice.

In the play *Kamala*, Jaisingh exploits Sarita and Kamala for the fulfillment in desired journalistic goal. Although Sarita is the wife of a reputed journalist, her condition is much different than Kamala. Sarita's character shows women's exploitation inside inferiority and that of Kamala, outside the family. Both of them are the fellow travellers, sailing in the same sinking boat.

The protagonist of the play *Kamala* Jaisingh Jadhav uses not only a girl from rural flesh market but his wife also as objects to fulfill his needs and whims. The playwright ridicules the drawbacks of the so-called civilized, modern, successful society, where the youths are seen pursuing their goals at the cost of human values.

The protagonist of the play *Kamala* is a courageous and ready to face risks publishing paper with sensational news. However, harsh circumstance changes him at the end of the play. The news that he is deprived of his job breaks him mentally. He seems feeble even emotionally and physically, and collapses on the sofa.

It is through the husband-and-wife relationship of Jaisingh and Sarita that believes in institution of marriage. Sarita, an educated girl from an aristocratic family looks like a slave for her husband Jaisingh. Kamala's entry in her house makes her to subordinate or trivial position. Despite the fact that she becomes aware of her selfishness and hypocrisy, she provides him with an emotional support when he loses his job. But the play ends on an optimistic note that she will revolt against the injustice done to the Sarita's emancipation from her husband's bondage, N. S. Dharan comments:

*"Kamala is a gyro-centric play in the sense that it is built on the metamorphosis of Sarita emerging from being a docile wife to an assertive, mature woman in the end."*²

In the play *Kamala*, Tendulkar speaks bitter about the field of journalism and the institution of marriage.

By depicting a real-life incident, that is, a presentation of Kamala, a girl is taken from a rural flesh market, in the press-conference; Tendulkar exposes selfishness and meanness of the young generation.

Kamala's entry in her house reveals to Sarita her husband's egoistic, selfish nature. He fetches Kamala not to improve her lot but to achieve name and money. He needs Sarita to provide him with social companionship, domestic comfort, and physical pleasure. She is there with her husband not temporarily like Kamala, proved help for him permanently till the end of his or her days.

*"By depicting the real life incident in the play Kamala, Tendulkar exposes the role of a woman in the male-dominated society in India. Kamala, a girl from flesh market is conscious that she is the slave. Kamala's views on this is, they (Kamala and Sarita) have to adjust with Jaisingh are like a revelation for Sarita, she says, 'Memsahib, if you don't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you; he is your master too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us. Didn't he? It isn't easy to earn money. A man has to labor like an ox to do it. So, memsahib, both of us must stay here like sisters. We'll keep the master happy. We'll make him prosperous. The master will be get children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children. I'll bring them up. You are a matured woman. You keep the accounts and run the house. Put on lovely clothes and make things ready with the master. Go out with on holidays and feast days... Fifteen days of the month you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him.'"*³

Jaisingh treats both Kamala and Sarita not as human beings but as objects of the fun. The former brings him a promotion in his job and reputation in his professional place and the latter provides him with domestic comfort, social companionship, and sexual pleasure. The play puts a satire on the institution of marriage. Jaisingh brings Kamala for Rs. 250/- only, but received Rs. 700/- as a dowry from Sarita's father years ago, in addition to Sarita's services as a woman-servant in the name of wife. That only Sarita quite rightly, bursts forth: Listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala to use of her. The other slave he got free – not just free – the slave's father shelled out money a big sum.

Arundhati Banerjee, in her Introduction, states:

"From the formal point of view, kamala has nothing new to contribute to Marathi theatre. But the evaluation of the role of an Indian woman within the institution called marriage, considered to be the holiest of the holy in our society, definitely provides a completely novel point of view showing that women are still mere slaves to their male-owners in Indian society in the latter half of the twentieth

century... all three female characters in kamala are in some way or the other subjected by the dominant male character Jaisingh. Jadhav, who occupies the center of the plot.”⁴

Women have been exploited for centuries in Indian society. They are impaired of freedom of speech and action. They have neither rights nor justice. They cannot even shout. If at all they raise a voice of rebellion, it is immediately suppressed.

Kanyadaan (1983), a controversial play has two acts, five scenes with a limited number of characters. The actions of the play revolve round the theme of inter-caste marriage. It shows how unequal marriage can be a cause of unpredicted complex problems. Having the historical background of the play *Kanyadaan* shows how the low caste is struggling in Maharashtra; Brahman vs. Dalit. Joyti marries in Dalit and suffers a lot by the hands of Dalit husband.

Jyoti and Nath are seen suffering a lot in the life of their efforts to convert the ideal into the real. The play *Kanyadan* centers round the theme of marriage. Jyoti, a daughter of the Brahmin activist couple, Nath and Seva, marries Arun, a Dalit poet. She ignores the conditions laid by her mother and brother who fear that she will find it difficult to cope with her marital career. Arun's inhuman treatment to Jyoti, despite her pregnancy, breaks her father Nath. Her father's former admiration for Arun changes now into dislike. But the inhuman beating by Arun becomes a routine affair with Jyoti. Her marriage turns into a nightmare. The failure of marriage changes her from a simple, sensitive girl into an assertive, determined lady. The play ends with the accusation of her father that it is he who has made her mentally crippled. Jyoti becomes the object of audience's sympathy and Arun that of antipathy.

The play *Kanyadaan* also depicts the senseless wastage of Jyoti in fulfilling her father's dreams or idealistic values into reality. The play *Kanyadaan* portrays a middle class progressive family. Impressed by her father's social work, Seva, her mother and Nath, her father Jyoti takes a decision of an inter-caste marriage. Both, her father and mother, are very sincere in their social commitments. However, they differ in their views, opinions, and approaches. Seva works for the problems of Dalits with a conscious mind. She is well aware of the reality of their lives. She objects Jyoti's decision of marrying a Dalit boy and tries her best to give her a caution about the risks in it. But Nath hardly cares to think of the prospects of such a marriage. With her father's permission, Jyoti marries Arun and later on faces the evil consequences of her decision as feared by her mother. She follows the dictates of her sentimental, idealistic father and ignores the warnings of her cautious, rational mother and invites serious threats to her marriage.

In the play *Kanyadan*, Tendulkar exposes the characters that are victims of their sham hollow idealism. Painting a true picture of women characters play roles as important as Tendulkar shows them exploited, oppressed and humiliated. Even education does not incur substantial change in their miserable condition. Instead, it provides sophisticated woman like Sarita or social victims like Benare. Suffering is their lot, their inescapable fate. It is so because-

*“...humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is ... the Absolute-she is the Other.”*⁵

Tendulkar's plays churn the public opinion as they present life in all its aspects. The characters portrayed in these plays are angry and frustrated, and achieve their desired goals in their lives. Most of the characters in Tendulkar's plays have tragic dimensions for one reason or another.

However, they differ drastically from Shakespeare's in that their suffering is due to the environment in which they are born and brought up or due to their wickedness shrouding completely their otherwise good nature. In Shakespeare, we see the hero's inherent weakness or some chance which is the root cause of his sufferings.

Thus, all the characters in Tendulkar's plays are the victims either of their evil nature or of hostile circumstances and bitter experiences in their individual lives leave them frustrated, harsh and crude and others tragic. The simple, sensitive, tender hearted characters suffer miseries calmly and quietly and the violent, aggressive characters suffer miseries on others as a part of their revenge on society. In the sadist tendencies of the characters can be seen the deterministic overtones of the plays. So, what is remarkable about the Tendulkar's play is neither the story nor the character but the extreme situation reflected of the fate, circumstance, or chance. However, one may see that the characters are, to use existentialist jargon, 'condemned to be free' while they are facing their entrapment or predicament.

To sum up, Vijay Tendulkar saw the society as an operation theatre where he did surgery tools to see the inner side of man. Being a psychoanalyst, he presents before the society the dark image of modern man. He is preacher of equality and representative of modern exploited young man in hegemonic society.

Vijay Tendulkar is obviously a writer of modern generation to depict the human problems and sufferings in a skillful and realistic manner. Thus we can say that everything goes on changing; only women's position remains the same as showcased in both the plays *Kamala* and *Kanyadan*.

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