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A Brief Study of Role of Gender in the Works of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad

Chander Shekhar*

Assistant Professor, PKSD College, Kanina

Abstract – Gender plays a most important role in a person's life. Gender issues are reflected in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. They present a realistic picture of the plight of women in the society. How the fate of a person is affected by his/her gender? First of all, the plays of Vijay Tendulkar are discussed in the light of gender issues and then Girish Karnad's. The word gender comes from the Middle English word 'gendre' which is a derivation of the Latin word 'genus'. Both the words 'gendre' and 'genus' mean 'kind', 'type' or 'sort'. The Oxford Dictionary defines gender, "as the fact of being male or female". Linda L. Lindsey points out about gender in the book titled *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, "Gender refers to those social, cultural and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social context".

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INTRODUCTION

Gerda Lerner defines gender in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, "Gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance". Amy S. Wharton in the book titled, *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research*, says that, "Gender represented the characteristics taken on by males and females as they encountered social life and culture through socialization". Sujata Sen defines gender in her book *Gender Studies* as, "Gender refers to the social roles (e.g., men and women) and characteristics that develop their cultural interpretations of biological and anatomical sex". Or "Gender is a social construct, not a biological one. It refers to all the characteristics a society considers proper for its males and females". At this point it is important to understand the difference between the words 'sex' and 'gender'. Sex is a biological phenomenon and gender is a sociological one. The word sex pertains to the idea of a person being a male or a female; the word gender refers to the state of being masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person gets it by birth but gender is an achieved status because it must be learnt. On the basis of the above definition, it can be said that gender is a sociological phenomenon not a biological aspect. The acts and the activities performed by individuals in the society, and the roles that they play in the social set up are based on gender.

MATTER

Patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation. People have conditioned to believe that men are superior to women. These symbols are benchmarks which children learn about when they grow up, and the cycle of patriarchy continues. No society is content with the natural difference of sex, but each insists on adding to it a cultural difference of gender. It is not enough for a man to be male; he also has to appear masculine. A woman, in addition to being female, must also be feminine. In patriarchal society men enjoy a socially dominant position. Thus, from an early age, boys are helped to acquire a masculinity that allows them to assume and maintain that position. By the same token, girls are taught to cultivate a submissive femininity. Masculinity and femininity are gender qualities which are developed in response to social discrimination. Traditionally, it is believed that gender differences are natural and that certain behaviours are justified and unchangeable because they emerge between men and women as a result of their different capabilities, talents and choices. These differences are often represented as natural inequalities. But in reality gender differences are not natural as it was believed, but an outcome of the mindset of the present society.

Gender plays a most important role in a person's life. Gender issues are reflected in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. They present a realistic picture of the plight of women in the society. How the fate of a person is affected by his/her gender? First of

all, the plays of Vijay Tendulkar are discussed in the light of gender issues and then Girish Karnad's.

The first play in discussion is *Kamala* which is one of the most famous plays by Vijay Tendulkar. It is written in the naturalistic mode. The focal point of the play is the changing role of women in the Indian society. Tendulkar wrote it inspired by a real life incident which was exposed by Ashwin Sarin, a journalist in The Indian Express. Ashwin Sarin investigated into the flesh trade in Madhya Pradesh and purchased a woman named 'Kamala' for Rs.2,300 to prove the trafficking of women, in Shivpuri village. Then he wrote a series of articles exposing the trade of prostitution. Tendulkar raises certain cardinal questions regarding the value system of a modern success oriented generation who is ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself.

Jaisingh Jadhav is an Associate Editor in an English-language daily in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kamala* and is married to a woman named Sarita. He wants to get name and fame as early as possible. It is the result that he moved from Karol Bagh to a small bungalow in Neeti Bagh in Delhi. In the play, in order to expose the auctioning of women, he bought a woman, named 'Kamala' from Luhardage bazaar in Bihar for only Rs. 250. For the low cost that he paid to buy the woman, he himself says in the play, "Even a bullock costs more than that". He bought her not because he wanted to improve the condition of such women but to get fame instantly. He has nothing to do with the emotions of Kamala but he uses her in his game of getting popularity. Kakasaheb, Sarita's maternal uncle, rightly says, "Kamala is just a pawn in this game of chess". Gerda Lerner points out in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, "The exchange of woman is the first form of trade, in which women are turned into a commodity and are 'reified, that is, they are thought of more as things than as human beings". Jaisingh is not bothered about what will happen to Kamala after exhibiting her in the Press Conference. He has nothing to do with her torn out, dirty sari. His only purpose is to present her in the Press Conference to make his point strong. Jain, Jaisingh's friend says that they make a lot of fun in the Conference because of Kamala. At this Kakasaheb reacts, "Fun! At that poor woman's expense". At this Jaisingh feels irritated and says, "I just wanted to present her as evidence. And that was done" (K30).

Kamala believes in no relationship but the slave-master relationship. The only reason for this is the environment in which she was brought up. She leads a life in which women are not more than a commodity. They are sold in an auction like animals or other things. In the life of such women, how can any relationship exist except slave-master? Kamala is bought by Jaisingh Jadhav in a woman auction. When she sees Sarita, Jaisingh's wife, she thinks that even she is like her and asks Sarita, "How much did he buy you for". She asks the same question to Kamalabai, the maidservant, "Were you bought or were you hired"

. These questions are very startling to Sarita and Kamalabai but for Kamala, the questions are obvious and natural. Vijay Tendulkar himself pointed out in an interview with Gowri Ramnarayan, "In *Kamala* the wife's realisation is the result of an accidental confrontation. The village woman's innocent question, 'for how much did he buy you? is a revelation. 'How dare she ask such a question?' becomes 'She's right after all!'" . It's not Kamala's fault that she asks such questions as in her life there is no existence of any relationship but the slave-master one. She wants to do her best to make her master happy and also suggests the same to Sarita to try her best to make the master's life comfortable. She also suggests that both of them should divide their duties in serving the master and says to her, "We'll keep the master happy. We'll make him prosperous. The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children. You are an educated woman. You keep the accounts and run the house". After hearing to Kamala, Sarita also realises her status in her husband's house. Shanta Gokhale points out in the article titled "Tendulkar on his own Terms", "It is the illiterate Kamala, one step ahead of her in understanding what the man-woman relation is all about, who teaches Sarita to see where she stands"

Sarita, the wife of Jaisingh Jadhav is an educated housewife. Like a dutiful and obedient wife, she has been following all the instructions of her husband for the last ten years of their married life. In a systematic manner she records all the phone calls meant for her husband in his absence. Though educated, she is a picture of a traditional woman, who finds supreme satisfaction in following the instructions of her man and finds contentment and happiness in doing so. In the words of Maya Pandit in the article titled, "Representation of Family in Marathi Plays", "Traditional notions of family and traditional roles of men and women in it (the marathi plays) were rigorously reinforced for the discipline and control of women". After meeting Kamala, she becomes aware about the reality of her life. She tells Kakasaheb, "I was unconscious even when I was awake. Kamala woke me up. With a shock. Kamala showed me everything. Because of her! I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no right at all in the house. Because I'm a slave". Sarita's plight in the house is very well described by Jain, Jadhav's friend to her, "This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He's made a drudge out of a horse riding independent girl from a princely house... Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes slave of wife". The only difference between the two is that, Kamala is a bought slave and Sarita happens to be enslaved to Jaisingh on account of betrothal.

The husband-wife relationship between Jaisingh Jadhav and Sarita is typically one of the sort that exists in the cities like Delhi, where husbands do not find adequate time for their wives who have to contend themselves by being mere social beings. The couple have no children and Jaisingh has no time for

consummating the relationship. That's why Sarita's life is ridden with loneliness. The selfish hypocrisy of her husband is revealed to Sarita after she meets Kamala. She realises that there is no value of her 'self' in her husband's busy and materialistic life and that she is just another 'useful thing' in the house of Jaisingh Jadhav. She decides to give up her submissive attitude and to convene a Press conference to expose her husband's hypocrisy. She says to Kakasaheb, "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 is 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. 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". About Sarita, Arundhati Banerjee aptly comments in Introduction to *Five plays*, "Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in Jadhav's life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort" (xvii). When Jaisingh decides to send Kamala to an orphanage, Sarita revolts against his decision. Jaisingh's typical male mentality is evident when he says, "It's I who takes decision in this house, and no one else". The wife has no right to take any decision in the house because she is a woman and only a man has such rights. When it is a question of taking 'crucial' decisions, Jaisingh Jadhav exercises his manly authority, but is oblivious of his other responsibilities as husband. He fails to fulfil the needs of his wife. Simon de Beavours's statement of a modern man in *The Second Sex* applies aptly to Jaisingh Jadhav, "The man of today shows a certain duplicity of attitude which is painfully lacerating to women; they are willing on the whole to accept woman as a fellow being, an equal but they require her to remain the inessential".

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Corresponding Author

Chander Shekhar*

Assistant Professor, PKSD College, Kanina

E-Mail – ashokkumar.334557@gmail.com