

Estranged and Enslaved in the Patriarchal Loops: The Plight of Women in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*

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Sexual colonization means a relationship of man and woman based on dominance and subservience. According to Kate Millet, it refers to the connection between sex and power: "Through this system a most ingenious form of interior colonization has been achieved."¹ She sees through the game of patriarchal politics that the sexual domination is the most pervasive ideology and fundamental concept of power. The sexual politics of patriarchy situates man as the sovereign subject while a woman is required to find her total fulfillment in submissive drudgery. Male bias has been spread in the culture to such an extent that women never have a chance to see themselves through their own eyes as individuals. Mary Wollstonecraft as early as in 1792 in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* pleaded that "women were not endowed with less intellect than men and therefore women's suppression was uncalled for and unjust."² On the surface level women are called 'goddesses' and 'devis' and underneath are hidden their devilish motives. Suppression, oppression, cruelty and mal-treatment to women are quite common. The three and a half millennia that have followed the *Laws of Manu* have taken their toll on women and left them as second rate citizens in desperate need of redemption.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* comments: "One of the important obstacles to a woman's freedom is not her biology or the political or legal constraints placed upon her, or even her economic situation; rather it is the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in the society."³

Exploitation, harassment, physical and mental torture are a daily thing in the life of most of the women in India. Though one section boasts about advancement and improved life style of Indian women, there is the other section that is even denied fundamental rights and is leading a dilapidated life. Discrimination against women can be seen from the womb as the female foetus is aborted, education has been denied for them and are forced to act as slaves in their own houses as well as in the houses of their in-laws. Women have to suffer for dowry, which may lead to suicide or murder. Women have been treated as an object of luxury and lust. In our patriarchal society, male domination has reduced them to nonentity and have been bartered, sold and used as stepping stones for the so-called success that male race enjoys.

The concept of patriarchy as a social and cultural code is another axis of women's exploitation and deterioration in the male-dominated society. To empower women, power must be given to them, presumably by an entity that already has it and that entity is patriarchy. All the power in Indian middle class society is in the hands of males which ultimately leads to the pathetic condition of females. The dominating nature of males throws women into a well of oppression of every kind.

"Gender, the socially constructed definitions of what it means to be a woman and a man, is a fundamental category of any analysis of social life."⁴ Gender is a social construct and not a biological category. "Sex and gender conceptions are manipulated in patriarchal society to better assure the status quo of male domination---Sex is used to exclude women from power and privilege and hijack material benefits from women. In the process of civilization, sex is used to create gender roles and problems."⁵ Sexual taboos withdraw women from social life. It is the

patriarchal hegemony that consider female as biologically inferior. To define patriarchy, it is “a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film. At the heart of patriarchy is the oppression of women, which takes several forms.”⁶ The dogmatic concepts of patriarchy are upheld so as to restrain any mobility of women.

The role of women are devalued or underestimated in all walks of life in the male-controlled society. *Kamala* by Vijay Tendulkar is the story of Kamala, a victim of flesh business sold away in the flesh market and a so-called happy housewife, Sarita married to a daring journalist, both having a revelation of finding themselves on the common platform of sexual slavery in this male dominated world. The female body is the object of male sexual fantasy and desire. All women characters in his plays are the marginalized objects in interlocking system of sexual politics and power politics.

Jaisingh Jadhav, a young journalist working as an associate editor in English language daily, goes to Ludhardaga and buys Kamala and brings her to Delhi and keeps her in his house to present her at a press conference in the evening in order to expose the inhuman trade which is rampant even in the remote villages of India. But his real purpose is not to expose this inhuman practice for the welfare of its victims, but to gain name, fame and promotion in his job through this exposure. Jai Singh, on the one hand makes effort to expose the business of flesh trading in our country (though for his personal gains) but on the other hand, he behaves inhuman like those flesh traders by treating his wife Sarita as a slave, not as a fellow human being. Jai Singh has totally dominated Sarita as she is not allowed even to make a single decision in the house she has been serving for ten years. He warns her, “It’s I who take decisions in this house and no one else. Do you understand?”⁷(Tendulkar⁴²).

He takes Kamala to the press conference where she is humiliated very badly. It was a direct hit to her womanhood and chastity. He like other customers wants her to be presented in a torn sari for attracting the attention of the press conference. She is unable to answer any questions. It was a direct hit to her womanhood and chastity. All the men at the press conference enjoy the state of Kamala as an object, with the same instinct the people looked at her in Ludhardaga. Generally a woman’s identity is defined by others in terms of her relationship with men that is as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother etc. The question ‘what a woman does’ is never asked, but ‘who she belongs to’ is always considered important as though she is a commodity which is for sale. She does not have an identity of her own and she is always expected to dance to the tune of a man, whether it be her father, brother, husband or master. Everything was funny and part of the game for him and Kamala was a pawn which could be used and thrown out after the game is over.

Sarita, Jaisingh’s wife is an embodiment of the Indian women who are used either as slaves, menial servants, or stepping stones for the success of their male counterparts. Jaisingh treats both Kamala and Sarita not as human beings, but as objects of exhibition. The former brings him promotion in his job and reputation in his professional career and the latter provides him with domestic comfort and sexual pleasure in conjugal life. The play thus, exposes slavery of women in the male dominated society in India. Even education fails to bring any substantial change in their status in family and society. After marriage, woman becomes a slave to her husband, no personality, no dignity, even the way of life changes after getting married. She has to be submissive in her husband’s home and does all the duties related to her husband’s family.

Sarita does everything the way her husband would want it, right from maintaining his phone calls for him, to which kind of parties to attend. She lives her life believing it is normal for a wife

to do everything in accordance to the choices of her husband. But it is only after meeting Kamala and talking to her that she realizes that, she is not very different from her. If Kamala was a slave, so was she, the only difference being she is legally tied to Jaisingh.

Thus unaware of her real status in the house, Sarita behaves like a slave who dances to the tunes of her master. Other people are aware of her status in Jai Singh's life but she herself is not. She does not know that she is just a lovely bonded slave to him as Jain, a friend of Jaisingh, perfectly points out:

Hi, Bhabhiji, I mean an English 'hi' to him and a Marathi 'hai' to you. This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He has made a drudge out of horse-riding independent girl from a princely house. Hai, hai! [Theatrically, to Jai Singh.] Shame on you! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns make slaves of wife!.(To Sarita) lovely bonded labour. (Tendulkar17)

It is Kamala through her innocent questions who makes Sarita realize her position in Jai Singh's life. She makes Sarita realize that she is not different from her, she is also a slave- an educated slave.

Kamala : Can I ask you something? You wont be angry? Sarita : No, Go on. Kamala: How much did he buy you for?[Sarita is confused at first] Sarita :What? Kamala : I said how much did he buy you for? Sarita[recovering]: Me, look here, Kamala (changes her mind and sits down beside her) For seven hundred. Kamala: My God! Seven hundred? Sarita: why was it too little? Kamala : It was an expensive bargain, memshanib. If you pay seven hundred, and there are no children.(Tendulkar34)

Sarita concludes that she is just a fancy slave whom Jaisingh brought or married. She has to be there for him sexually, as a domestic servant and as a well-educated modern wife to show off in society and she has no say in any of his decisions like Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Kamala, very innocently proposes to her that

The master bought you, he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us...We'll keep the master happy...The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children...You keep accounts...Put on lovely clothes and make merry with the master...Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed? (Tendulkar 35)

The innocent words and approach of Kamala moves Sarita from within and her hidden conflict bubbles up thinking about her position in the house. Jai Singh brought Kamala for Rs 250 but for Sarita he received a dowry of Rs. 700 from her father. Kamala will bring him a name, fame and promotion in his job and Sarita provides him with sexual pleasure, social companionship and domestic comfort in conjugal life. Further, she realises that not just Kamala alone, but even she is a pawn in Jaisingh's game of chess. The ill-treatment of both women in the hands of Jaisingh served as an emotional shock to her and her whole life seems naked. This is a very frequent and routine situation in the Indian middle class society. It does not mean that women have never thought about their slave like positions in the house; but they are scared to utter their thoughts aloud because of the constraints of the society.

Jaisingh Jadhav is a representative of husbands who want their wives to be tolerant, faithful and uncomplaining. He throws his violent whims on the women around, be it Sarita, his wife; be it Kamala, a woman from a flesh market or Kamalabai, the house maid. The manner in which Jai

Singh tells Sarita how he brought Kamala at the auction reveals the pathetic situation of women in this so called democratic country: “Jaisingh...They sell human beings...They have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages. People come from long distances to make their bids. Sarita. They auction – women? How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and....”(Tendulkar14). Sarita becomes furious and asks Jaisingh to stop.

The man- woman relationship is political relation as it is based on power. Throughout this play, the dramatist wants to show that even educated people in this century still treat woman as a slave and as an object of sex. They act as the open minded people but in reality, they are all same. In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir says: “The men of today show 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 still require her to remain the inessential.”⁸ Man treats woman as a use and throw object. Woman has to obey man unconditionally. Social norms and social conditions play a major role in woman suppression. Mainly, man tries to use violence and emotional abuse to control his family.

For Jaisingh, Sarita is only needed for satisfying his physical, mental, social needs, and for household works. He doesn't treat her as human being and exploits her in every way. But since Sarita is married to Jaisingh, in a patriarchal society, she has to bear that torture of Jaisingh, because in patriarchal society the females are considered as inferior to males and they have to listen to their husband, or father. Apart from Jaisingh's wife, she has no other recognition. It is total subjugation and suppression under the chauvinism of her husband. Virginia Woolf correctly mirrors the position of women in society:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates lives of kings and conquers in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any body whose parents forced a ring upon her finger... and in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell and was the property of her husband.⁹

Tendulkar in a realistic way makes the audience realize that even a married woman can be exploited like a victim of flesh business. Sarita's frustration and pain about this slavery can be seen in following conversation. Sarita: 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 money. Ask him what he did with it” (Tendulkar 46).

Her shocking realization that Jadhav uses her as a mere object to satisfy his own carnal desire, and as an object to parade his own status in the capacity of his wife at parties is expressed in the following words:

I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I'm a slave. Slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? They must slave away. 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.(Tendulkar46)

The husband-wife relationship between Jaising and Sarita is typical of the sort existing in the cities like Mumbai, where husbands, having been in employment do not have enough time for their wives and kids and therefore they have to content themselves by being mere social beings.. Through Kamala and Sarita, Tendulkar expresses the male chauvinistic spirit where male believes in liberty of themselves and at the same time they try to suppress the voice of women in the society either by force or trickery.

The most interesting part about Tendulkar's women characters is that in spite of belonging to different social strata, their plight is the same. They go through the same ill-treatment and oppression in this male – dominated society. She realizes the fact that no matter how much she does for her husband, to him she is nothing but a 'lovely bonded laborer'. She is his 'trophy – wife' to show off at parties, his secretary to take his calls at home, his cook and manager of his house in his absence, and when he comes back home, she is his sex slave. Sarita is initially stunned by this realization, but eventually she gets composed and is determined to bring about a change. Sarita encounters Jaisingh and refuses him what he asks for. The following dialogue shows her state of mind:

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. 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.(Tendulkar 46)

Writing in the 1950's Simone de Beauvoir writes that, "Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism."¹⁰ Man wants to dominate woman its universal and our traditional marriage provides ample opportunities for this. Husband wants his wife to be patient, all suffering, ever faithful, and ever-pure wife. If she fails in any of these, then as a husband he forces violence on her to tame like an animal. Mira Kumaraswamy states that the source of inconsistency lay with society itself and not with the individual woman. According to her, the remedy for the solution is not in individual therapy but rather in social reconstruction. "The fault is with the actively cruel social environment, not with her."¹¹ The destiny of all women is mostly the same whether they are educated or not, from tribal or urban area, from high or low class with less or more differences. They are helpless in front of men's conspiracies. Sometimes women do not have the full courage to overcome any unjust norms. Moreover, they are very much emotional and their emotion can affect their decision. They keep delaying their decision until they forget their revolution. Considering her upbringing as a traditional Indian girl, it is difficult to break marriage vows for a woman. In the same vein, Sarita in the end, even though she had understood that she could not tolerate the torture anymore, decides to stay with her husband and to postpone her decision to expose him in public.

Kakasaheb is also a part of that patriarchal society. Kakasheb belonged to the generation before Jaisingh and Sarita. The expectations from wife were the same as they are in their generations too and they are true even today in the 21st century. The patriarchal dominance, the institution of marriage, the rights of husband, the duty of the wife, all are stressed in his speech and it shows that he does not find any fault with how Jaisingh treats Sarita. He says, "Look Sarita, Jaisingh is no different from other men. He is not unusual. You're wrong to think that he is a bad man. A man is always too proud of his achievements"(Tendulkar 47). Sarita rebels against such an explanation and asks that if a man is great, does that entitle him to keep a slave. Kakasahib just answers by something which is no answer at all. He says, "That's why he's a man. And that's why there's manhood in the world" (Tendulkar 47). Kakasahib is asking Sarita to accept the way of the world and not to try to change the way things are.

Tendulkar, through Kakasaheb's character, succeeds to present gender discrimination as a social norm passed down through generations. He also brings to notice that the position of

women remains the same for centuries. He tells Sarita that “I too was just like this. Don’t go by what I seem to be today. I gave your aunt a lot of trouble. As if it was my right. I didn’t care what she felt at all. I just marched straight ahead looking in front of me. I was confident she would follow, even if she was limping. And she did follow, the poor thing” (Tendulkar 47). Both Kakasaheb and Jaisingh do not look very much different from the patriarchal ideology. They are also a part of the patriarchal system. Kakasaheb, who firmly believes in principles and ethics, does not see Jaisingh’s treatment of his wife as unusual practice in marriage life. He says, “It may be unpleasant, but it’s true. If the world is to go on, marriage must go on. And it will only go on like this”(Tendulkar 47). He gives Sarita some advice to adjust and to make a compromise in such a male dominated society.

The two men, both Jaisingh and Kakasaheb represent two generations which project male chauvinism that persisted in both the generations. It might continue to be the same. It highlights the unawareness among the people who look at woman as an object and do not find anything wrong with that. Men in the society go into two roles to perform. Either they look down upon women as objects, something inferior and secondly, they remain only the mute observers of the events where women are treated like slaves, as an inferior object to be enjoyed, make fun of them, use and throw away. The society, at large, does not consider women able to think independently and women accept it without questioning them. They too had internalized their otherness and surrender themselves easily and get protected by patriarchy fitting them in its own structure. Mary Wollstonecraft says: “Man, from the remotest antiquity found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion.”¹²

The harsh reality of exploitation and slavery of women in traditional Indian patriarchal society can be related to the modern Indian society as well. Finally, whether women like Kamala who was bought by Jaisingh from a bazaar in Bihar at merely two hundred and fifty rupees still exists or not is debatable but what exists, as a poignant reality is that till today women in India are exploited, oppressed and dominated by men in varied forms. Be it physical, mental or psychological violence, the psyche of Indian male largely, considers women as slaves whose chief duty is to serve him and to lead a life as per his whims and fancies.

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