

Cruelty in Family and Society in Kamala

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Abstract

Tendulkar's plays have a direct, one to one relationship with reality. They do not whitewash the reality of life but exposes its evil, cruelty and brutality. Life as it is, is not very pleasant, but they have got the nerves to present the hollow and pretentious society, exposing the reality behind reality. Thus, all the plays concentrate on different aspects of human character. All of them highlight the human relationships. Tendulkar deals with the individual place against the backdrop of society and explores the tension between two. All the works contain a latent critique of modern society of mostly middle, upper and lower middle-class people, from different angles. In his play Kamala, Tendulkar unfolds the power structure through the characters of Kamala, Sarita, Kamalabai, Jaisingh and the proprietor.

Keywords cruelty, evil, brutality, pretentious,

Introduction

In the play Jaisingh buys Kamala, an Adivasi woman, at the flesh market of Luhardaga beyond Ranchi for two hundred and fifty rupees, to prove that such auctions are taking place. To get an eye-witness for human sale going on in the latter half of the century, he buys a woman but becomes a criminal violating the norms of his own profession. Defending his inhuman act, he says:

“... When I first wrote about it, I didn't have any definite facts. But I could smell something wrong. The police, as usual, washed their hand of it. The Home Minister put his hands over his ears. They made the false charge that newspaper men tell lies. So it fell on me to put the noose round the right neck with evidence” (Tendulkar: 15).

Jaisingh takes care to conceal her from others except his wife, Sarita and her uncle, Kakasaheb. Even with them he is reticent. He tells about Kamala to Sarita only after giving a warning to her to keep the secret intact till the press conference is over. And he evades proper answers to the inquiries of Kakasaheb. He doesn't reveal it even to his close friend, Jain.

Jaisingh is an insensitive opportunist. As soon as his purpose is served, he disposes of her as a wasteful commodity. He doesn't give her an inkling of his objective in buying her and lets her believe that he has purchased her like the others at the flesh market and dream of a handsome husband, children and a palace-like house. He unconsciously encourages her to nurture such hopes by asking her to think of his house as hers. He amusingly asks her:

JAISINGH. ...how do you like it here?

KAMALA. (Not emerging from the veil). It's 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!

(Tendulkar: 13)

Jaisingh openly confesses that he has no obligation to individuals and he attacks only bad trends. The first half of the statement is true but the latter is a falsification. His enthusiasm is directed towards sheer sensationalism. He creates sensationalism at the expense of Kamala. He “sold a woman— that poor and illiterate woman” to the press men for their amusement. She is made a laughing-stock. She is also exposed to the obscene interrogations of the pressmen. But Kamala is incapable of understanding her situation and enjoys it as fun.

Finally, without any compassion for Kamala, like diplomatic politicians of today, Jaisingh Jadhav discards Kamala in an orphanage of poor woman and washes off his hands for his safety, after she ceases to be an advantage to him. P.D. Dubbe says: “He duped Kamala who had come prepared to become his bonded keep with all the association feeling of sex, motherhood and living” (Dubbe 44). Jaisingh Jadhav exploits not only Kamala but also his wife Sarita. Arundhati Banerjee aptly remarks in this regard: “Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in Jadhav’s life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort” (Banerjee 17). Jaisingh treats her as his personal secretary. In his absence she has to receive a number of phone calls for him and note down the name of those who call upon him.

That is the drudgery to which Jaisingh Jadhav, the saviour of Adivasi woman, exposes his wife. It is through Sarita Tendulkar exposes the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes himself to be liberal-minded. She receives a message of his expected return. She at once becomes alert and hastens preparations to receive him. She orders her maid-servant, Kamalabai, to cook a curry for him and to get beer for him and also enquires whether his clothes are back from the dhobi. All these she does in such a flurry as if some chief guest, not her husband, not her life-partner, is coming.

Not only this Jaisingh, through his treatment of Kamala, also makes Sarita realize that she is a slave, a lovely bonded labourer to him. She observes how he refuses a bath to Kamala and takes her in clumsy clothes to the press conference for his professional profit. And by keeping Kamala ignorant of his purpose of buying her, he lets her imagine that Sarita is also his slave and wounds her deepest feelings. Kamala sympathizes with her for her lack of children and asks her for how much their master has bought her. She feels sorry for Jaisingh that he has bought her for seven hundred rupees but he has no children. In her earnestness to do justice to Jaisingh she promises her that she will have as many children as Sarita likes and do all the hard work of the house. Sarita can give company to Jaisingh in sophisticated matter. Kamala lays guidelines for their living together in future. She says, “The master bought you; he bought me too..... fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I will sleep with him, agreed” (Tendulkar: 35).

Kamala requests Sarita to tell it to their master. Kamala, thus, enlightens Sarita with the fact that Jaisingh treats her no better than a slave and he who has been her life-partner has become a master of a slave. Thus Kamala opens the real life of Sarita Jaisingh’s wife, who considers herself to be in the same situation. Jaisingh has never thought of her as an individual with a personality of her own. He argues with her angrily for refusing him his right without understanding her feelings. When she resists, his attempts to send Kamala to orphanage he snubs her by asserting his right, he says, “It’s I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else” (Tendulkar Kamala 42). In fact, “Sarita is a symbol of slavery in family system” (Dubbe 46). She is a slave for her family and cannot ask for anything in return. Sarita continues: “They (women) must only 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. When he says, come to a party, they must go” (Tendulkar Kamala 46). In this way, Jaisingh uses both the women, Kamala and Sarita as pawns in his game of chess.

It is important to note here that Tendulkar probes into the characters of the play for the exemplification of the theme of exploitation of women by the educated male society. Jaisingh’s egoism and his domination over women characters exhibit this trait appropriately. Not only Jaisingh but Kakasaheb also behaves recklessly with his wife. When he was young he did not care for her feeling. He marched forward with a confidence that she would follow him, even if she couldn’t and she did follow, the poor thing. Kakasaheb’s recapitulation of his cruelty to his wife proves that cruelty to women is an eternal manifestation in man’s life and woman is still in the modern world a symbol of Victorian womanhood— an embodiment of service, slavery and sacrifice.

Jaisingh and Kakasahib are unkind and inconsiderate to their maid servant, Kamalabai, also. They boss over her rudely. Jaisingh shouts at her for not keeping the newspapers in the rack promptly. He doesn’t mind giving trouble

to her. He asks her to prepare tea as many times as there are people in the house, commenting that she is there only to serve them. Whereas Kakasaheb who is used as a talisman to Jaisingh spares no trouble for her. It is irony that the Saviour of slaves makes slaves of his family. Through Jaisingh's exploitation of the three women in the play Tendulkar succeeds in depicting the status of woman in the male chauvinistic world of today.

Jaisingh represents male domination in the society "but he is also a slave of the bourgeois mentality of the society" (Dubbe 46), which exploits the weak and helpless. Jaisingh is a young agile aspiring sensational journalist liked very much by his colleagues and his boss. He seeks sensational news risking even his life. He travels far and wide to get evidence for his news. He faces a number of inconveniences on his way. For Instance, he has to stink for a week without bath during his visit to Luhadaga. He commits a criminal act by buying a woman in the flesh market. He commits sins after sins for his selfish gains. He is slave to money and money-minded capitalists. His sensational journalism has fetched him a bungalow in Neeti Bagh, servants and a car. He travels by plane all over the country and stays in five star hotels. He gets invitation from foreign embassies and has easy access to ministers and chief ministers. Here Tendulkar intends to say that journalism is a mercenary game. The news is printed in English for the educated few, the elite society. It effects no change in the outlook of the high class or it brings no change in the suffering of the victims. It is not pragmatic journalism as represented by Kakasahib:

"This new journalism of yours— if money making is not the object of it— then it's Vandhya— Sambhog. In case you don't understand these difficult Marathi words. I'll explain. What I mean is— nothing will ever come of it. 'Arre,' write the people's language first. Speak it. Then try and teach them" (Tendulkar: 24).

Conclusion

Tendulkar concludes the power structure by saying that: "Kamala after a time becomes a symbol. The wife of the journalist becomes "Kamala" and ultimately even he (the journalist) becomes 'Kamala' (Tendulkar The Sunday Observer October 1982). 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 the society. Jaisingh, the Persecutor, persecutes his victims-Kamala, Sarita and Kamalabai. His role shifts to that of the Victim and he is persecuted by his proprietor, the persecutor. Jaisingh is unkind to the women in the play and his proprietor is cruel to him under compulsion. So man is either a slave to others or an oppressor of others in this world. He is either submissive or aggressive. Struggle for power, suppression and submission, has been a continuous process in primitive man's life and still it continues to flourish in the life of a civilized man.

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