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Violence as Communication in Tendulkar's *Kamla and Silence, the Court is in Session*

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Abstract:

The paper purports to discuss how psychological violence, mainly in the middle class patriarchal society, can sometimes be used by men as a means of communication to exercise practically full authority and power over women. This kind of violence tends to have a negative effect on one's mind and soul and often appears when a person is made to experience fears, feelings of guilt, shame, emotional deprivation, violation of one's dignity and self worth.

Keywords: Psychological Violence, Communication, Deprivation, Persecution, Dignity.

Literature on violence is vast ranging and reveals that the process of understanding it in a comprehensive way is difficult and complicated. As an academic concept, violence as such can be a vehicle for understanding human relations and especially those aspects that correspond to the evil side of the human condition as portrayed by Tendulkar. "Violence can be seen as a form of communication between people, through the meanings transferred by them in their interaction" (Stateva 119). This meaning is predominantly characterized by the expression of the powerful of his ego, desires and frustrations in a coercive manner to the weak. In the realm of family it is primarily a communication of the intention of man to control, manipulate and subjugate the very soul of the woman to his will and purposes.

For Tendulkar this violent interaction does not mean merely physical violence or torture. It also means interpersonal relationship of dominance and violence--not only male dominance over female but also vice-versa. Sometimes it is the powerful vs the weak but sometimes the weak too acquires power out of that very same weakness. For Tendulkar human relations are power relationships and therefore are based on in-built violence. He believes that there is politics in man-woman as well as in other relationships, as every individual consciously or unconsciously tries to gain power over the other. It doesn't matter whether the domination sought is physical, intellectual or the one emerging from experience

or age. Now, this power game, whether subtle or overt, takes many forms. Looking at how violence occurs or is practiced, one finds that some use physical force while others use words, some people aggress directly and openly while others engage in passive aggression. In domestic realms, the relationship of husband and wife is regarded by Tendulkar as the most complex of all, for it has innumerable shades. "Most men," says Tendulkar, "wish to beat their wives" (Tendulkar) as circumstances and occasions come. But here, he does not differentiate between good or bad man, as he believes, "It is most probably a trait of the species, from the time of primitive man" (Tendulkar). No doubt, the culture also plays a part, because he sees a dirtier form of it amongst the middle classes as compared to lower classes. Violence among middle classes might not be physical, but it is very often psychological in nature, and that is "more despicable, more perverse form" (Tendulkar). This form of violence is expressed rather than perpetrated as it is based on "words, gestures, pictures, symbols, or deprivation of the necessities of life, so as to force others into subjugation through intimidation and fear, or specific 'rewards'" (Imbusch 23).

A lot of this kind of violence goes on in the white collar class. But such is the middle class woman's nature that she keeps mum. She learns to live through it and gets used to it. The middle class men may hide their perversity or even glorify it, but to Tendulkar's mind, it is a dirty form of violence. This form of violence is manifested each time he depicts a man-woman relationship. This type of violence or psychological abuse can be verbal or non-verbal. Its aim is to chip away at one's feelings of self-worth and independence. Emotional violence is worse than physical violence, since the scars of emotional violence are very real, and they run deep. It may be expounded that it is more insidious than other abuses and just as damaging. Through this type of persecution, partner attacks the soul abusing words and ways that inflict much pain and suffering. Overtime he systematically diminishes self-confidence and self-worth and hurts one deeply.

Tendulkar in his plays depicts that such domestic violence with psychological implications occurs when a person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person. An abuser doesn't play fair. He uses fear, guilt, shame and threat to wear one down and gain complete power over the partner. He may intimidate her, hurt her or hurt those around her. An abusive individual needs to feel in charge of relationship. He makes decisions for the family and tells one what to do, and expects one to obey without questions. He may treat the partner like a servant, child or even as his possession. Having the last word about everything, the abuser acts like a master. He defines

and rigidly abides by the traditional roles of men and women. And in doing so he emotionally hurts his partner.

Tendulkar exhibits such silent and emotional violence in a very subtle form in his play, *Kamala* (referred to as *K* now on) Here, through the character of Jaisingh, he gives a hint of the manner in which women are treated as insensitive beings in the patriarchal system. Sarita, the wife of the journalist, Jaisingh, though highly educated, is very timid and extremely sensitive to her husband's needs and tastes. She is always eager to pamper him to his whims and fancies and runs about in the house carrying out all his instructions, like taking note of all phone calls and looking after his physical and domestic needs. But Jaisingh regards none of his wife's good qualities as particularly meritorious, as they are implied by the institution of marriage itself. He fails to realize that his wife is no machine which works without complaints and feelings, but a real individual of flesh and blood, having a mind and heart of her own. He takes her patience, her aspirations, and her generosity for granted. He is still more profoundly ignorant of her desires, her fancies, her sentimental yearnings of the days she spent in Phaltan.

Jain, one of his friends and colleagues, has always felt what Sarita suddenly realizes so late in her life. He sees Jaisingh's abusive behaviour as pernicious and improper, and usually supports her by saying, "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 ...shame on you!"(K 17).

Sarita is indeed a "lovely bonded labourer"(K 17) as Jain calls her, because as a domestic servant, she looks after all his comforts, but still she is not allowed to have an identity and will of her own. When Sarita shows her unwillingness to go to the party we hear Jaisingh's biting remark: "Your will? Never noticed any sign of it before"(K 45). She is seen as a silent sufferer of the most common and yet unseen form of violence, a woman living a life as a silent victim of silent violence.

To explore his ventures, Jaisingh often goes off anywhere and comes back at odd times, not telling Sarita about his whereabouts and gets angry if anyone complains about his callous and irresponsible behaviour. Above all, he never cares to take a serious note of the terrible threatening phone calls which become a constant tension for Sarita to handle.

He keeps so many things as secrets and even shows distrust of his own wife, saying, "I am not sure about you"(K 15). Kamala's sudden entry in her life and the purpose behind it is quite disconcerting for Sarita. She is afraid, he might also be put to trial and sent to jail for this crime of flesh-trade. But it is the sensitive soul of Sarita that has to take all this, for Jaisingh seems least bothered about such issues which have become a part of his day show. Tendulkar also shows that in masculine hands logic is often a form of violence, a sly kind of tyranny. Jaisingh, older and better equipped, assumes feelings of masculine superiority and gives no weight at all to Sarita's opinions and capabilities, trying to prove that he is always right. When Sarita says that Kamala can stay with them, Jaisingh gives reasons that are "completely shallow ones."(K 42). He says, "I can't keep Kamala at home She has to stay in the orphanage. It will fortify our arguments in court..."(K 42). She doesn't grasp what is vital behind the pedantic logic with which her husband overwhelms her. She has no recourse save silence. Though, sometimes, she tries to continue the struggle by taking a stand, but she is made to realize her place in the house and in the life of Jaisingh, who asserts: "It's I who takes decisions in this house"(K 42).

Tendulkar here hints at the natural tendency of every husband, like that of Jaisingh, to dominate his partner. Because part of a male's belief system is a feeling that they own their partners and are entitled to demand absolute obedience from them be it physical, emotional or sexual in nature.

As per age old tradition woman is treated as property of man at marriage and her husband has sexual access to her, even if it violates her own desires. But when this right is denied to him, it leads to uncontrollable rages, resulting in abusing his partner. Sarita has been shown as a sexual and domestic servant but when she, in the grip of heartfelt aversion regarding press conference issue, says no to Jaisingh's overtures, he is not able to take it: "[*Slamming his fist into his hand.*]"(K 32) he calls her a bitch.

Another form of this abusive behaviour that Tendulkar deals with includes fear, which is a key element in domestic and family violence and is often the most powerful way whereby a perpetrator controls one's victim. Fear can be created by looks, gestures or any other behaviour which can be used to intimidate and render the other person powerless. The terror that Sarita lives under becomes evident when Kakasaheb questions Jaisingh about Sarita's security:

KAKASAHEB. What are you planning to do about this girl?

JAISINGH. This girl? Why?

SARITA. I haven't said anything to him....

JAISINGH. She seems to have told you quite a lot.

[He doesn't seem very pleased about it.]

SARITA. It was he who asked me.

JAISINGH. *[Rather sourly]* why don't you admit that you told him?(K:10).

Sarita always feels like she has to walk on eggshell around her partner to avoid a blow up, for she feels afraid of Jaisingh much of the time and usually avoids certain topics out of fear of angering him. Tendulkar exhibits, at many places, the fear that is real, but not necessarily actualized in events, which comes to constitute the ecology of fear in everyday life. And this becomes a constant source of psychological distress to Sarita.

Furthermore, when in isolation, the constant negative reinforcement and violence she experiences make her more confused about what is happening. She begins to feel numb inside as her perceptions of herself and her relationship become more and more distorted and painful. Such pains and sufferings are evident from her speech in which she resents ardently at being exploited and oppressed by Jaisingh:

I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I'm a slave. Slaves don't have rights....They 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. When he says, lie on the bed--they *[She is twisted in pain.]*(K 46).

It shows how she resents the way she is treated as no better than a dumb driven cattle, forced to fulfill all his demands as a wife just like a slave. This sudden realization is achieved when Kamala out of innocence asks Sarita: "How much did he buy you for?"(K 34).

Tendulkar here focuses on the experience of what lies behind being hurt, and thus enables us to understand violence against her by filtering it through the inner world of her psyche. The deep rooted feelings, embedded in Sarita's heart for a long time constitute the trauma, which ruptures the inner narrative and interrupts her life badly. This trauma now comes to surface suddenly when Kamala's question wakes her up with a shock making her realize that she is just another Kamala in this house. She realizes that she too is a pawn in his

game of chess and a mere object of use at his disposal. Tendulkar's aim here seems to describe how feelings of humiliation come to be embedded within a frayed everyday life and that even the sense of belonging to educated, rich class is also not capable of repairing this sense of being betrayed by everyday abuse.

Another character in this play, Kamala, the innocent victim of flesh trade, also gets emotionally abused, as she has been bought by Jaisingh without letting her know the motives behind it. She, after seeing Jaisingh's house, starts imagining and dreaming about her future life. Jaisingh, too, incites in her heart the feelings of enjoying a luxurious stay in such a big house forever: "Jaisingh [*Winking at Sarita*]. Would you like to stay here always Kamala? You won't have to do any work here. Just eat and relax"(K 13).

He doesn't realize what for him is just another ladder to success might shatter one's dreams and cause emotional distress. She is many a time emotionally blackmailed or even ordered like a slave, to do what her master, Jaisingh, expects from her. Kamala, after a long journey, is tired and doesn't wish to go to the press conference. Jaisingh's expression and tone of voice hardens:

JAISINGH. You will *have* to come, Kamala.

KAMALA. I'm your servant, master. But I won't come today....

JAISINGH. Then I won't go, either.

KAMALA. No, no. You *must* go. Don't do this because of Kamala, master.

JAISINGH. I've said that I'll bring you, Kamala. If you don't come, that will make me a liar. It's better if I don't go.

KAMALA. [*After a pause*].Then let's go another time. That's it.

[*Jaisingh in a dilemma.*]

JAISINGH. Kamala, you won't obey me?

KAMALA. How can that be? You are Kamala's master.

JAISINGH. I order you to come there with me. Today (K:20).

He doesn't even let her know all that is in store for her in the press conference, rather, he lures her by telling that it would be a "grand reception"(K 20) in her honour and doesn't even let her change her clothes which are "torn and dirty"(K 21). At press conference, she becomes a laughing stock for the reporters, who entertain themselves at the cost of her ignorance and vulnerability. The questions related to their free sex life are really humiliating

and disgusting. One asked, “You must be having free sex too. How many men have you slept with? You must have had some free sex with this new Seth? How did it compare?” (K 29).

Tendulkar’s construction of this situation exemplifies the degree to which women are commodified as objects, rather than treated as human beings in a capitalist patriarchy. Though Kamala could not comprehend anything and she, too, laughed with them at her own cost, but Sarita is not able to digest such irresponsible behaviour from Jaisingh and his colleagues. She feels ashamed when she hears Jaisingh and Jain, discussing all this in such a light manner. As Kakasaheb rightly says about the press conference, that Jaisingh “sold a woman to them”(K 31) to expose criminal sale of human beings and had fun “At that poor woman’s expense!”(K 30).

What interests Tendulkar here are the ways warmth and welcome can co-exist with violence or even be constituted through it; and how violence can be normalized into the mundane to the point of becoming invisible. The whole episode of Kamala is a comment not only on certain communities of India and the miserably poor status of women in their patriarchal set up, but it also reveals how it destroys the life-spirit in women and reduces them to the sub human level. Women in such structures are treated as mere commodities which man could trade in freely at their will. They are deprived of every human right. They are alienated from their own self and have no freedom to think and act independently, and their womanhood is defined in terms of their submission to male authority.

There are numerous other characters like Jyoti in *Kanyadaan*, Rama in *The Vultures*, Laxmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder* and Gauri in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, who also suffer the same silent oppressions, at the hands of their partners and family. These women have to face a system which seeks to perpetrate violence not only at their bodies but also at their minds and souls treating them as no better than animals. They are deprived of all opportunities-economic, social or cultural. It disables them in a number of ways and is largely responsible for their miseries and sufferings. This oppression of women at the mental level has been treated with critical insight by Tendulkar in many of his plays. Such insidious silent abuses can’t be separated from other forms like sexual or physical violence as every form of violence is accompanied by psychological implications of harm leading to the fears of being oppressed more in future.

Another aspect of violence that Tendulkar deals with is one of “violation of the boundaries and intrusion in the personal space, whether physical or psychological” (Stateva

127) of an individual. The experience of having been subjected to such violence has been critically analyzed by Tendulkar in terms of gender politics. Whether in normal times or during crises, it is woman who faces the agony, and the perpetrators include her own family, as in the case of Sarita, and outsiders, as in the case of Kamala. Some other harrowing fears, problems and violence a woman has to face and the extent of trauma which she undergoes in a stereotyped patriarchal society is portrayed through the character of Benare, who is a victim of such violence in Tendulkar's play, *Silence! The Court is in Session* (Referred to as SCS now on).

In the course of this play, Tendulkar shows how the privacy of a woman is violated and her individuality is splintered into ruins. An amateur theatre troupe, which goes to a village to perform a play, thinks of whiling away their time by creating an imaginary court case against a fake accused. In this theatre group, there is one school teacher, Benare, a social worker, Mr. Kashikar and his wife, Mrs. Kashikar, an ambitious lawyer, Sukhatme, and inter-failed clerk, Ponkshe and a flop actor, Karnik. There is a young boy Balu Rokde, who has been adopted by the childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar. They, all being failures in their life, envy the young and successful, independent Benare. They all decide to take Benare as an accused in that mock-trial and whisper some plan to each other, gesticulating and pointing every now and then to the room where she is. This may or may not be labeled as violence, but there is the feeling or a pre-verbal experience that there is something wrong, which is going to happen. At first they accuse Benare with the charge of infanticide leaving her stunned and later, they accuse her of getting pregnant without marriage, but that's what Sukhatme repeatedly calls "just a game"(SCS 71), for it is only a mock-trial to pass their time. In the name of this mock-trial, they expose her private life, humiliate her and hurt her feelings through the verbal and sexual harassments which result in psychological trauma leading to her break-down in the end.

Benare is fully aware that these people are jealous of her economic independence and would be very glad to make her a butt of joke and entertainment even by robbing her of her right to live independently with dignity. In love, Benare has already been cheated twice. First, in her teens, she is seduced and sexually exploited by her own maternal uncle who runs away and doesn't marry her. He is supported by her mother who holds the flag of patriarchal values. Later in her life, she falls in love with Prof. Damle whom she respects for his scholarship and intelligence. Though married, he exploits her sexually, for he doesn't care for her worship and devotion but cares only about her body. The "intellectual god took the

offering and went his way”(SCS 118), leaving her pregnant. When she is compelled to face the reality, she desires to hide it by attempting to give her child a father’s name. She suffers intensely from a psychosomatic fear of getting thrown out from her job which is her only passion and solace. Benare refers to this emotional turmoil of hers even before all the characters are introduced. The school officials are holding an enquiry against her and she is not ready to take that because her “teaching’s perfect” and she has put her “whole life into it,” worn herself “to a shadow in this job!” and given the “last drop of ...blood to teach them”(SCS 58). She hasn’t hurt anyone other than herself, but that is no “reason for throwing” her out of her job. It is this fear of stigma for herself and her child that makes her crave for marriage and beg even the undeserving men to marry her and give a father’s name to her child. In the vain attempt to do so she gets entrapped amongst her co-actors, who because of jealous and vengeful nature violate the boundaries and intrude in her personal life. They ask her age and wonder how she remained unmarried till such an advanced age. Kashikar makes sweeping generalizations over how the new modernized girls are a nuisance and a “sinful canker on the body of” (SCS 112) the society. Mrs. Kashikar wonders, “Why must she have Prof. Damle, and Damle alone, to see her home after a performance?”(SCS 100). She opens the door to a series of piercing darts on Benare. And evidence after evidence is produced against her. Mrs. Kashikar mercilessly reveals that Benare had made overtures to Rokde, much younger than herself. Ponkshe, in spite of Benare’s implorations not to expose her, blurts out how she had asked him, in the name of a friend, to marry a woman who was with a child.

Karnik also discloses her child love for her uncle. Rokde makes a devastating statement that he had seen Benare in Prof. Damle’s room in the college hostel. Once Damle’s name is disclosed with evidence, it no longer remains a mock-trial. Everyone now openly starts humiliating her more and more with stinging statements about her character. Concluding the trial, Sukhatme says that accused Benare has “made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood-which is purer than heaven”(SCS 114). For that any punishment, however great that the law may give her, will be too mild. They call her character “appalling” and “bankrupt of morality”(SCS 114). She is accused of being a “public enemy number one”(SCS 114) and they ask the court to take a stern action without getting sentimental.

Psychological trauma is inflicted on her as charge after charge is leveled against her, leaving her no route of escape, build in an atmosphere of grim execution. They disguise their snide or cutting comments as humor. Tendulkar shows that even their subtlest comments hurt

her as much as their stronger, louder and more obviously belittling statements. Tendulkar shows how the language of the gestures, malignant tones and biting sarcasm used by the so called educated middle class cut her deep within. Dialogues used in the mind game characterize the verbal and psychological violence increasingly becoming a part of modern life as witnessed by Tendulkar in this real hard world. The fears that Benare was already suffering from, regarding her job, take up frightful shape when Kashikar himself informs her that he had heard Nanasahib, the chairman, ordering angrily for her dismissal: "It is a sin to be pregnant before marriage. It would be still more immoral to let such a woman teach, in such a condition...this woman must be dismissed"(SCS 113).

Mr. Kashikar, who also accuses Benare of immorality, further accuses her of planning to impart such immorality to the youth of tomorrow. They, calling themselves saviours and protectors of humanity and human values, try to rob her of her reproductive possibilities and her only comfort, i.e. her job. They are able to contradict themselves with careless cynicism, but Benare feels these contradictions in her wounded flesh. She, in herself, embodies in concrete, man's fault; he commits the fault, but gets rid of it by leaving her alone to suffer its consequences. She becomes the target of orthodox social and moral values and as a result becomes a victim at the hands of "cultured men of twentieth century"(SCS 117). The mock-judge, Kashikar, pronounces the final savage judgment:

Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure....The crimes you have committed are most terrible....Your sin must be expiated....No memento of your sin should remain for future generations...school officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from your job (SCS 118-19).

And so she would lose her job, her only solace, and the child would be destroyed in the womb itself. Here, as Matthews says, "aggression becomes moralized and morality becomes a form of violence" (Durbach 481). This mental agony suffered by the girl throughout the play is in no way less than a legal punishment. Here, these co-actors represent the society as such and prove, as repressive agents, more violent than even the machinery of law.

The whole of the mock-trial prepares a ground for psychologically bombarding an innocent, hapless Benare who is entrapped in their cynical, sadistic pleasure-seeking game. Their trial completely ruins her self-dignity and esteem and reduces her to a mere criminal or

sinner, who ought to know her place. Benare bears her violated psyche in the monologue which forms a microcosm of the entire violence women face. It reveals how there was “wail like death” in her heart and “storms raged” (SCS 116) in her for so many years. She had a lot to say but kept her lips tight which combined the gestural wrath of the opening medley with verbal and psychological violence, as well as notions of the past, the present, and the future. This formed an ever repeating series of violent repressions and submissions, unattainable freedom, and the centrally linked metaphors of life and death. A new age girl who is dead resistant to conforming to the rules of society is made so helpless that she seems to be completely broken at heart and thus collapses. Benare’s final collapse leaves one with a feeling of pity and horror.

Sexual oppression and social ostracism leading to brutal violence that Benare faces is more extreme and immediate than the emotional abuse that Sarita suffers at the hands of her husband in *Kamala*. This kind of violence perpetuates the stereotyping of gender roles that denies human dignity to the individual and stymies human development.

Tendulkar, thus, depicts how silent forms of perpetrating violence can lead to a trauma that completely shatters one’s hopes and desires and proves destructive in the form of deep scars that it leaves on the soul of the victim. Such inflictions of humiliation leave one as more devastated and degraded than any form of physical violence can ever do. Tendulkar gauges vast dimensions and depths of this most brutal form of violence expressing the worst perversities of the powerful over the weak.

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