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Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*: Master – Slave Dialectics

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is the famous playwright who undertook experiments in play-writing. His plays became controversial because of themes he has handled. He has raised social, political, ethical issues in his plays. The aim of the present paper is to show how Hegel's 'Master – Slave Dialectics' is employed in *Kamala*. Masters exploit subordinating people and make them slaves. All the weak persons in *Kamala* are made slaves by other dominating persons – masters. After awareness of 'self as a subject', some persons try to revolt against their slavery. But ultimately either they defeat or comprise with condition while some are unknown of their slavery. Kamala, the protagonist of the play, is exploited and made slave by the social situation but she does not know the fact. Sarita has been exploited by her husband and she was unknown of her exploitation and slavery. Like Kamala, she also takes it as the way of the world. However, she tries to revolt against her slavery but she has to compromise, as her uncle tells it as a requirement. Kakasaheb's wife is also exploited but Kakasaheb says that she was unknown of her exploitation and she followed Kakasaheb. Kakasaheb is also exploited by the bureaucracy for not issuing his quota of papers. Jaisingh Jadhav, the very dominant and successful journalist, a master, is dismissed and made slave by his employer in spite of his honest efforts in bringing out social evils.

Keywords: master, slave, exploitation, revolt, social evils, trafficking, corruption

Vijay Tendulkar is doubtlessly a well-known Indian playwright. He is famous for his experimental, innovative and creative genius in writing plays. Even though, he tried his hand in novels, short stories, translated works, literary essays, political journalism, screen and television writing, he performed his best in plays and contributed substantially in this literary genre. 'Tendulkar's plays derived inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals,

which provides clear light on harsh realities.’ As a result, his plays became famous and controversial and considered as the milestones in the development of Indian drama. For over five decades, Tendulkar had been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality. He is recipient of twelve awards including *Sangeet Natak Akademy Award*, *Padma Bhushan Award*, *Kamalabai Chattopadhyay Award*, *National Film Award*, *Filmfare Award*, *Saraswati Samman*, *Kalidas Samman* and *Maharashtra State Government Award* which show his great contribution to plays. No doubt, other experimental dramatists like Badal Sarkar, Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and others also contributed to the development of Indian drama. Tendulkar’s experiments and innovations have been reflected through his plays like *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* (1972) *Gidhade*, (1961) *Kamala*, (1981). Tendulkar handles ethical, social and political themes in his plays. In many of his plays, he shows how people are exploited, tortured, victimized and made slave by different ways. Weak, powerless, helpless, and socially, politically economically deprived are born to be exploited. In short, there is an instinct in human being to become master and to make weak his slave.

Kamala is based on real life incident. Ashwin Sarin, a journalist, investigated into flesh trade in Shivpuri village, Madhya Pradesh. He purchased a woman for Rs. 2300/- to prove the trafficking of women. Ashwin Sarin then wrote a series of articles exposing the prostitution trade and involvement of political leaders and police in it on 17th, 20th, 30th April and 2nd May, 1981. Vijay Tendulkar wrote a play ‘*Kamala*’ based on the news of the *Indian Express*. The play shows Tendulkar’s concern of the harsh realities in social problems. Tendulkar says, “*Kamala* for me is not just a character, she is a living person, and she just doesn’t remain on my papers.” (Raturi, Prachi. Interview with Vijay Tendulkar: 2000)

The present paper aims at exploring Hegel’s ‘Master – Slave – Dialectics’ in *Kamala*. Hegel’s dialectics is about ‘master-self-consciousness’ and ‘slave-self-consciousness.’ These two figures – master and slave – stand opposite to each other after their consciousness. Master exploits and slave revolts and in this conflict the result is affected by many factors like social, traditional, conventional, economic, ethical, utilitarian etc. It is important to see how the various persons in the play are exploited by various masters - oppressors and in various ways. It is interesting to note that at some places masters - oppressors are also oppressed and made slaves. The exploitation also takes place on physical, mental, emotional, social, political and economic levels.

Like his earlier plays, Tendulkar shows in *Kamala* the situation of the middle class women in Indian society and at the same time the women who live in rural villages affected by utter poverty. *Kamala* is a typical play in which he shows how women are victimized, tortured, and exploited in the patriarchal society. Tendulkar shows the exploitation and suffering of Kamala, Sarita, Kamalabai, and Kakasaheb's wife by the dominating males. The women are tortured and exploited by the conventional practices, emotional blackmailing, certain tricks, physical force or violence etc. Tendulkar observed these evil practices in society and had firsthand experiences so he says, "I think a lot before I write. My creativity has been shaped more by experiences than by imagination." (Wadikar, 39)

Women are considered as means or objects of men's achievements as if they have no feelings in Indian society. There are three women characters in the play and one is referred by Kakasaheb, his wife. Tendulkar shows how Kamala and Sarita are prohibited from doing some essential works. They suffer an unfair justice, emotional and mental crises. Sarita realizes that like Kamala, she is also just 'a pawn' for her husband's goal. She becomes aware of herself i. e. 'an awareness of self'. So she says, "Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb. Not just Kamala, Kakasaheb. Me too...me too." (CP, 43) The play *Kamala* projects exploitation on various levels and in various fields of life. Tendulkar also brings out various forms of protest against exploitation.

Tendulkar shows how people are exploited, tortured, victimized and made slave in Indian society. *Kamala* is a play which deals with the theme of exploitation and revolt especially of women. However, a detail study shows that it is not only exploitation of women but men are also exploited equally. Women characters – Kamala, Sarita, Kamalabai, and Kakasaheb's wife – are exploited and at the same time, Jaisingh Jadhav and Kakasaheb are also exploited. Some of the characters try to revolt against their exploitation but unfortunately their revolt is weak and meek that it could not materialize anything. At the same time, some persons do not revolt rather they do not know that they are exploited and some persons, in the course of time, realize that they are exploited and then they start to revolt but unfortunately they compromise with the situation. These aspects are highlighted in the present paper.

First of all, the character of Kamala should be evaluated. She is the protagonist of the play and the title goes behind her. Certainly, Tendulkar wrote the play for exposing the flesh market or trafficking. Kamala is exploited and she is a victim of contemporary social and economic situation. Utter poverty is responsible for selling and buying girls. In this way,

innumerable girls became victims in this independent country. This is very horrible and shameful practice. However, people those who have been involved in this flesh market are shameless. Even though Kamala is sold and bought, she is totally unaware of her humiliation. She considers it as a usual practice and nothing is wrong in it. She is shown happy for getting bellyful of food. Tendulkar perhaps wants to show that how the flesh market is deeply inculcated in psychic of women. Kamala five times refers to Jaisingh as a master in her speech. Kamala says,

The master bought you; he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us. Didn't he? ... We'll keep the master happy. We'll make him prosperous. The master will have children. ... (you) ...make merry with the master. ... Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed? (CP, 35)

She considers Jaisingh as her master – owner and husband. No doubt he is her master – exploiter. In the case of Kamala, there is no 'awareness of self as a subject' i.e. 'slave-self-consciousness.' So there is no chance for struggle for rights like Sarita.

The humiliation and exploitation of Kamala do not end here. Jaisingh mercilessly puts her in an orphanage – Women's Home - after serving his purpose. Jaisingh has no compassion for her. He uses her as an instrument for his mission as Kakasaheb says, “Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess.” (CP, 43) He becomes one of the exploiters of Kamala. The theme of *Kamala* is flesh market and how well-known young journalist like Jaisingh Jadhav wants to capitalize on it. He wants to advance his career without caring for the victim, Kamala. He is indifferent to the humanness. Kamala is an instrument for both types of people – those who involved in flesh market and those who expose it. Only Sarita and Kakasaheb hold human attitude towards the fate of Kamala and they try to convince this to Jaisingh but he is far away to listen them. Jaisingh purchased a woman from the flesh market for getting him a promotion in his job. He becomes dictator and says, “It's I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else. Do you understand?” (CP, 42) The human sentiments in the form of Kakaseheb and Sarita become fruitless. They keep quiet and Jaisingh does what he wants.

The next person exploited and made slave in the play is Sarita. At first she is very happy with her married life. For her, her home is blissful paradise with her successful and ambitious husband. She is truly better half of Jaisingh and often engaged in the work for Jaisingh. She takes care of all his phone calls, his cloths, his drinks, his meetings, attends his physical

needs, runs about in the house carrying out all his works. She dissolved her existence in her husband's works and duties. She is made for him. She is an ideal, obedient and dedicated wife. She feels proud to work for her husband. But Jain exposes the truth and describes very aptly Jaisingh's acts and criticizes him thus:

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! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes a slave of wife! ... lovely bonded labourer – (CP, 17)

Jaisingh is working against exploitation and slavery and he made Sarita his slave. This is irony. Still Sarita does not understand the fact that she is exploited. Even when Jaisingh brings Kamala in home, she does not bother about that. However, her eyes open when Kamala asks her, "How much did he buy you for?" (CP, 34) At first Sarita confuses on this question but gradually recovering says, "For seven hundred." Sarita realizes that her status is also like Kamala in the home. Then onwards she comes to know about her exploitation and slavery. She enjoys no freedom but she is puppet in the hands of Jaisingh. She totally devoted her life for her husband and his career. She has not spared for herself. Sarita understands that there is no difference between herself and Kamala. Both are slaves. She immediately and completely changes herself. She becomes totally independent and assertive woman. She wants to expose Jaisingh's real identity and tyranny before a Press Conference at the Press Club. She expresses her anger while saying,

I am going to present man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I am 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. Listen to the story of how he brought home 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 sum. (CP, 46)

She uses the word 'slave' for six times in above tirade whereas Kamala uses the word 'master' for five times in her speech. This shows the difference between attitude and approach of both of these women. She was intellectual and outstanding in her college days. She has many awards and honours at her credit. After the marriage, she has to limit herself to the household

duties. As an ideal wife, she devoted her life for her husband. She has been exploited and made slave by her husband. Unfortunately, both Sarita and Jaisingh are not aware of this fact. First time, Kamala's simple, straightforward, and innocent question lets Sarita know this fact. Then Sarita confesses,

I was asleep. 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 rights at all in this house. Because I'm slave. Slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? ... Laugh, when he says, laugh. Cry, when he says, cry. (CP, 46)

There is 'awareness of self as a subject' i.e. 'slave-self-consciousness' with Sarita. So there is ensuing struggle for rights. Then she tries to fight against her exploitation and slavery. The tension between the husband and the wife arises because wife knows why she is revolting and husband does not know why she revolts and what she wants. 'The realization of self-consciousness is really a struggle for recognition between two individuals bound to one another as unequal in a relationship of dependence.'

Kakasaheb comes in between this quarrel. He advises Sarita not to quarrel against her husband. He gives the example of his wife and shows how she had devoted her life for husband's mission. In that case, his wife is also suffered a loss, a kind of exploitation. While convincing Sarita, Kakasaheb seems to be traditional but instead of being traditional he is a practical. He sees no way out of this situation. So 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." (CP, 47) However, Sarita denies the compromise and asks, "Why? Why can't men limp behind?" (CP, 47)

Kakasaheb tries to convince her practical compromise. He tries to console her. Even though, she has been exploited, she was unknown of the fact. From now onwards, she will not be exploited. So she affirms,

But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And

I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it. [*Kakasaheb is fascinated and impressed by the quiet determination in her words.*] (CP, 52)

At the end, when Jaisingh is dismissed from the post of Associate Editor, he collapses. He needs support. Sarita determined not to assist him but ultimately, she has to support her husband. The result of this struggle is governed by social, ethical, utilitarian factors. She changes her mind and decides to live with him. But before that she says, "But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I will no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it. ... How innocent even the masters look when they're asleep, don't they? Let me stay here. I'll stay here with him." (CP, 52)

The third female character exploited is not shown in the play, but it is only referred to. That female character is Kakasaheb's wife. Her exploitation is told by Kakasaheb. He says,

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, ... And she did follow, the poor thing. (CP, 47)

She is also slave like Kamala and Sarita. But she did not know that she had been exploited. She considered it as her duty. There was not awareness of 'self as a subject'. So there was not a problem of revolt and struggle. Kakasaheb shows that all the women are exploited more or less by saying, "but it's true. If the world is to go on, marriage must go on. And it will only go on like this." (CP, 47) He indicates that for smooth running of a family, society and the world, one has to sacrifice and unfortunately that is a woman.

Kamalabai is also exploited and enslaved. Jaisingh always shouts at her, "Kamalabai! ...How often have I told you that once I've read the papers, you are to fold them and put them on that rack? ... When? Tomorrow? Put them up – pick them up at once." (CP, 39) After all she is maidservant, she has other work also but without considering this fact, Jaisingh shouts at her. And she is exploited in this way. Jaisingh is famous journalist and it is expected that he should be sympathetic and should know how to behave with old maidservants. However, he only thinks only of himself.

All these female characters have been exploited on the basis of gender discrimination in a patriarchal society. Social and familial conventions play dominant role in such exploitations. But the nature of their exploitation is different in each case as well as their response. The modes in which they are exploited are also different. Not only female but also male characters have also been shown as exploited and made slave. Political corruption and red-tape are responsible for the exploitation of male characters in the play.

Jaisingh is successful and popular journalist. He takes risks in his investigation and brings out social evils. He becomes respectable journalist. But he forgets his limits and crosses the boundaries and wages a war against dominant rulers. Jain states the reason of Jaisingh's dismissal, "His mistake was to cross the path of the wrong people. He jeopardized the wrong friendships." (CP, 48) His enthusiastic and innocent discovery of social evils turns against him. His discovery of flesh market as a social evil is insulting and shocking to political personalities. Jaisingh Jadhav is dismissed from his job. Political corruption is everywhere in India. Jaisingh Jadhav becomes the victim of political corruption. He was a master of Kamala and Sarita. But he became slave of his proprietor and political bigwigs. When master becomes a slave, he feels very insulting. The 'master-self-consciousness' makes him angry. He says, "A bloody capitalist. A swindler. A black marketeer. A bloody income-tax evader. A criminal." (CP, 50) In this way, Jaisingh Jadhav is exploited and made a slave. His 'awareness of self as a subject' leads him to think that 'subjects are also objects to other subjects'. His realization of self-consciousness is really a struggle for recognition. Tendulkar employed the poetic justice with Jaisingh. It is irony that master has to become slave. It is applicable to Jaisingh what Abraham Lincoln said, "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it." (letter to H.L. Pierce, April 6, 1859)

The last character to be discussed here is Kakaseheb. Kakasaheb came Delhi for "a quota of papers for his magazine." Because of some official difficulties, he could not get his allotted quota of papers. He wrote letters but of no use. He came to Delhi to pursue the matter personally. However, he is not satisfied by the treatment given in the office. He tells his experiences, "I got tired of sending them reminders. So I came here myself. I spent yesterday being posted from desk to desk. Finally, someone took pity on me. He has promised to do something." (CP, 10) Jaisingh Jadhav wants to help him by executing his influence, so he says, "I'll phone the Secretary of the Department." In short, Kakasaheb has to employ unwanted instruments. He is "under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi." (CP, 03) This is against his principles. But he has no other alternatives than to employ such means still he

denies. His exploitation is also important because it suggests the contemporary Indian bureaucracy. The bureaucracy is the hindrance in social progress and all common people are slaves of it.

Even proprietor, Jaisingh's master, is helpless and a slave of political leaders. Jain explains why Jaisingh is dismissed from his job. Jain says, "There have been pressures on the proprietor. I learnt that some very big people are involved in this flesh racket." (CP, 48)

In this way, the play *Kamala* explores the theme of 'master-slave dialectics'. The exploitation and slavery are not of only female characters as it is considered by many scholars but it is of male characters also. Tendulkar shows varieties of causes of for the exploitation. The exploitation of Kamala, Sarita, and Kakasaheb's wife is due to social causes. The exploitation of Jaisingh Jadhav and Kakasaheb is because of political system and bureaucracy. More than that human instinct to dominate, to exploit and to enslave other is important. Hence, the play is 'Master – Slave Dialectics.'

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