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Vijay Tendulkar's "*Kamala*" Throwing light on the Downward Trend of Modern Journalism: A Study

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Abstract:

Journalism which once used to be friend to nation has become presently its great enemy. Today the sign of sensible journalism is hardly felt anywhere. It has become slave to modern sensational journalism. On the altar of narrow and cheap individual self-interest sensible journalism is seen to be sacrificed. Vijay Tendulkar was first a journalist and then a playwright so far as his professional career is concerned. Every journalist has his personal ethic while choosing career of journalism and Tendulkar is no exception. His ethic of journalism was based on sensible journalism and he reacted strongly against sensational journalism in his play "*Kamala*". Along with depicting the helpless and miserable status of woman in our present day society in comparison to the male chauvinistic world of today, the dramatist has well presented the true picture of present journalism in comparison to the journalism of past through verbal conflicts between the characters. This paper tries to explore how the play presents the playwright's very personal tone of criticism over sensational journalism in order to establish the ethics of sensible journalism.

Keywords: Journalism, Sensational, Sensible, Modern, Society, People

Order and discipline is the Law of Nature. As per this law adulthood comes next to youthhood and its aversion is never possible. Sensible stage of adulthood comes only after the sensational stage of youthhood passes. But in case of journalism, a total reversal of this law is seen. Instead of moving towards sensibility it is journeying towards sensationalism. And it can never be a good sign. Tracing back the historical journey of journalism one can easily find this backward tendency of journalism from sensible adulthood to sensational youthhood. Journalism which once used to be friend to nation has become presently its great enemy. Today the sign of sensible journalism is hardly felt anywhere. It has become slave to modern sensational journalism. On the altar of narrow and cheap individual self interest sensible journalism is seen to be sacrificed. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "*The sole aim of journalism should be service.*" (Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand: 1983:253) By the term "*Service*", Gandhiji means the service to nation and humanity. Showing only which is good for the public and the society, sensible journalism once did "*service*" to majority of people. But present scenario of journalism seems to be

completely different from Gandhian ideology "Service". Today Sensational journalism which is also called "Yellow Journalism" is a stigma in the name of service. Contrary to sensible journalism which associates itself only with truth and realities presenting those facts and information which are true to the core, sensational journalism misguides the masses overhyping the events and situations. Sensational journalism is blind and irresponsible to readers' feelings and sensibilities. Concentrating on personal loss and gain it is not free from editorial bias and the only motto of such journalism is to increase readership numbers instead of having any serviceable motivation to society and mankind. Increasing rate of such journalism is accountable for social instability and moral degradation. Drawing a fine analogy between "an unchained torrent of water" and excessive freedom of a press, Mahatma Gandhi shows how sensational journalism wrongs to mankind : "The newspaper press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within." (Ibid) Sensational journalists lay a trap upon which majority of people fall and believe in what they write and there are very few people who judge everything on the touchstone and then believe. "Everybody comes with prejudices, colored glasses on their eyes. Then they see everything colored according to their glasses. Yes, a few people come just like you, unprejudiced, without any idea gathered from yellow journalism." (Osho) Among those few people Vijay Tendulkar is one who wants to see everything with open eyes instead of wearing colour glasses. Tendulkar was first a journalist and then a playwright so far as his professional career is concerned. Every journalist has his personal ethic while choosing career of journalism and Tendulkar is no exception. His ethic of journalism was based on sensible journalism and he reacted strongly against sensational journalism, "I am against sensational journalism." (The Sunday Observer) This is the ethic of Tendulkar's journalism which gets well-reflected in his popular play "Kamala".

"Kamala" presents Tendulkar's very personal tone of criticism over sensational journalism in order to establish the ethics of sensible journalism. Here Tendulkar has hurled so many sharp arrows of criticism on sensational journalism. Along with depicting the helpless and miserable status of woman in our present day society in comparison to the male chauvinistic world of today, the dramatist has well presented the true picture of present journalism in comparison to the journalism of past through verbal conflicts between Kakasaheb and Jadhav. Both have their own ethics of journalism and try to establish their own counterattacking the other. Kakasaheb is a representative of sensible journalism, whereas Jadhav is a steadfast follower of sensational journalism. Symbolically old Kakasaheb stands for past and youth Jadhav for present. Both of them confute and contradict over sensible journalism of past and sensational journalism of present throughout the play. "Tendulkar makes a jibe at the modern concept of journalism. For this, he uses Kakasaheb, a journalist of the old school, who runs a small paper with his own

resources. Kakasaheb provides the true ideals of journalism and in contrast to these, Jadhav's concept of newspaper reporting is shown a critical light.” (Arundhati, Banerjee: 1992: XVII)

Being a sensational journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav is seen all through the play always busy in seeking sensational news. He travels far and wide even taking risk of his life. He always falls in some trouble or other but never thinks twice over the cause of trouble, rather he takes them part of his profession. Telephonic threats are common in his life but he pays no heed to such threats. He has no time for his wife and his family save his career. His sole aim of his professional career is to earn money and publicity and in order to reach at his aim he is always ready with some evidence or other to prove his sensational news. Criticizing Jadhav's journalism, Kakasaheb says to Sarita, Jadhav's wife: *“I'm honoured. Who asks after me now? I'm a back number- a remnant of times past. A dead journalist- who's just about staying alive! Now it is the day of your husband's type of journalism. The High-Speed type! Something catches fire- and there he runs! There is a riot somewhere else- and off he flies. If there's an atrocity in the heavens or a ministry topples in the sky- why, there he is! Eye-witness report! Being on the spot- that's what's important! Never mind what you write.” (Tendulkar, Vijay: 1992:05)* When Sarita defends her husband against Kakasaheb's allegations, Kakasaheb makes her understand that journalism should focus more on sensible commentary than sensational description: *“My dear, it's not the facts of an occurrence that are important. But the topic is. Discuss that. Comment on it. Suggest a way to stop it- suggest that. After all any murder, rape or arson is like any other. What difference can there be? Why waste our country's time, and ours, writing accounts of them? What sort of journalism is it that smacks its lips as it writes blood-thirsty descriptions instead of commentary? Its business isn't news- it is bloodshed!” (Ibid 06)*

That sensational journalism can go to any extreme is made clear in Tendulkar's *“Kamala”* through the well- portrayal of Jaisingh Jadhav. Addiction to earn more money and publicity makes a journalist blind to his social duties and responsibilities. To make a nice front page item, a sensational journalist sometimes becomes inhuman and involves into criminal and offensive acts. In the play Jadhav commits a crime buying Kamala from the flesh market of Luhardanga in order to use her as a pawn in his game of journalism. He treats her as an object that can bring for him promotion and reputation in his professional career. Doing so he was less attentive to Kamala's future and more attentive to his own career. He never thinks what will happen to Kamala after her exposure in the media. Outwardly Jadhav appears as a committed journalist, striving to expose the inhuman practice of women being bought at open auctions and then sold into prostitution but inwardly he is a hypocrite in the name of reformist. He wants to create sensationalism at the expense of Kamala so that he can earn more money and publicity in future than present. Jadhav has all the characteristics a sensational journalist has. He knows very well how to make news spicy and eye catching. Jadhav truly conforms to what the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood says about sensational journalists in her novel *“Alias Grace”*. Sensational journalists , according to Margaret Atwood in her novel *“Alias Grace”*, *“like to believe the*

worst; they can sell more papers that way, ... for even upstanding and respectable people dearly love to read ill of others." (Atwood, Margaret: 2009: Ch. 43)

To Kakasaheb, Jadhav's journalism is, "*just another form of mercenary journalism*" (Tendulkar, Vijay: 1992:23) and in support of his view he says to Jadhav that five years ago Jadhav was living outside a house in Karol Bagh, and presently he is in a bungalow in Neeti Bagh and he has servants, a car. He travels by plane all over the country. He stays in five-star hotels. He gets invitations from foreign embassies. He has access to ministers and chief ministers or even to the Prime Minister. Kakasaheb calls sensational journalism a risky game. "*It's as difficult as riding a tiger.*" (Ibid) Jadhav's self supporting statement in support of sensational journalism, "*There's a commitment behind it, there's a social purpose*" (Ibid), is rejected by Kakasaheb on the ground that majority of people remains far from the coverage of such journalism which covers only few English spoken people. Kakasaheb plainly says to Jadhav, "*This new journalism of yours- if money-making is not the object of it- then it's a 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.*" (Ibid 24) What sensational journalism appears is different from reality. In the guise of doing service for people, it only concentrates to fulfill the needs of certain elites, their language, their manners and their lifestyle. They betray majorities for the self-interest of minorities to which they generally belong. There is hardly any sensational journalist who is free and unbiased from the minority class of people who hold the rein of authority over everything. All of them come into this system. Freedom from this system hardly seems possible: "*Those who occupy managerial positions in the media, or gain status within them as commentators, belong to the same privileged elites, and might be expected to share the perceptions, aspirations, and attitudes of their associates, reflecting their own class interests as well. Journalists entering the system are unlikely to make their way unless they conform to these ideological pressures, generally by internalizing the values; it is not easy to say one thing and believe another, and those who fail to conform will tend to be weeded out by familiar mechanisms.*" (Chomsky, Noam: 1989: 08)

Jaisingh's purpose in purchasing Kamala is to present a sensational report, rather to make a protest against illegal business of flesh marketing. He uses her for his purpose and when his purpose is completed, he throws her away. Kamala serves the role of pawn in Jadhav's game of chess. She has no role to play rather dancing on his tune. Jadhav makes her a display in the Press Club. While presenting half naked Kamala in torn sari to the journalists he remains completely insensitive to Kamala's feelings. In Jadhav's words to Kakasaheb, "*Kakasaheb, your son-in-law showed us a terrific tamasha today.*" (Tendulkar, Vijay: 1992:27) She becomes a laughing stock among journalists. There everybody pokes fun of her. They make vulgar inquiries to her. Jadhav sells poor illiterate Kamala to the press men for his personal profit. Jadhav's indifferent attitude to Kamala crosses all the limits when he abandons her to an orphanage realizing that she has no advantageous role to play in his life. Jadhav's 'use and throw' mentality throws shadowy light on

his character and personality. “*He duped Kamala who had come prepared to his bonded keep with all the associated feeling of sex, motherhood and living.*” (Dubbe, P.D.: 1993-94: 44)

According to the French novelist Honoré de Balzac, “*Journalism is the religion of modern society.*” (Balzac, Honoré de: 2016) A true journalist is one who is sensible to society. Kakasaheb is the true representative of sensible journalism. Behind his journalism, there had always been a great cause. Kakasaheb was a freedom fighter. Prior to independence India, he tried to make people sensible through his journalism. For this he had to fight against the British Raj and even had to go to jail. As a sensible journalist, Kaksahab never compromised with injustices and crimes. His journalism was free from any kind of pressure coming from the state machinery of the British Raj. His journalism was full of independent ideas which had kindled the fire of independence among the Indian masses. Being a true believer in the independency of press Kaksahab fought freely against the British Raj to restore peace and justice among people with his weapon of sensible journalism. Kakasaheb’s ethos of journalism reminds us the famous saying of Albert Camus, “*A free press can, of course, be good or bad, but, most certainly without freedom, the press will never be anything but bad...With freedom of the press, nations are not sure of going toward justice and peace. But without it, they are sure of not going there.*” (Camus, Albert: 1995) As an ardent supporter for the freedom of the press, Kakasaheb truly serves the mouthpiece of Tendulkar in the play. As a foil to Jadhav, he also plays an important role in the dramatic design. His contrasting idea of sensible journalism from Jadhav’s sensational journalism proves helpful to point out and reveal the demerits of modern sensational journalism in the play.

That modern sensational journalism is completely hollow and empty becomes clearer towards the close of Tendulkar’s “*Kamala*”. Here we see modern sensational journalism crawling over the threshold of the ‘big people’. Jaisingh Jadhav is sacked by his proprietor after his report about flesh market comes out. This happens because the ‘big people’ who are involved in the business of flesh market create pressure upon the proprietor and he is forced to dismiss Jadhav. This shows how fake sensational journalism is. This incident brings Jadhav to the ground of reality. He is completely disillusioned. He no longer remains a devout follower of sensational journalism. Burning in the fire of despair and anguish he abuses at Seth Singhanian, “*A bloody capitalist. A swindler. A black marketer. A bloody income-tax evader. A criminal. I’ll hold a press conference tomorrow- I’ll strip the cover off him! I’ll expose all his dirty secrets! I’ll strip him naked! I’ll tear him to pieces- the dirty pig!*” (Tendulkar, Vijay: 1992:50-51) When Kakasaheb learns about the dismissal of Jadhav from Jain, Jadhav’s colleague, he does not bear this injustice done to a man who has worked hard to make his proprietor’s paper famous and respected. Thereupon, Jadhav makes Kakashaeb familiar with the true picture of modern sensational journalism, “*A big paper doesn’t recognize respect and all that, Kakasaheb- it only knows about circulation and advertisement. And profit and loss.*” (Ibid 48) Here Jain plays an important role exposing the modern sensational journalism in the dramatic design of Tendulkar.

"By introducing Jadhav's colleague into the play, Tendulkar is able to depict the true nature of rat-race that goes on in this milieu." (Arundhati, Banerjee: 1992: XVII)

Tendulkar's *Kamala* is more a debate between traditional sensible journalism and modern sensational journalism than a cheap dramatic stuff only written for mere public entertainment. It is threat to all those journalists who misguide people in the name of social service. According to Napoleon, a journalist serves at a time many fold roles. He *"is a grumbler, a censorer, a giver of advice, a regent of sovereign, a tutor of nations"*. (Napoleon Bonaparte) A nation's future chiefly rests on his role. The role of journalism is so great that the Irish Statesman Edmund Burke has called it *"the fourth state"* in a parliamentary debate in 1787 - the other three being the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary: *"There are three estates in Parliament but in the Reporters' Gallery yonder there sits a Fourth Estate more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech or witty saying, it is a literal fact, very momentous to us in these times."* (Ingelhart, Louis Edward: 1998:119) But today cheap money making mentality of journalists has polluted its noble place. Who is responsible for this? Present journalism or people who have made such wrong and erroneous choice. Just as water has no shape and takes the shape of a container upon which it is poured, likewise journalism is just a term of a word and it depends on its professionals how they take it. *"The useful and the useless must, like good and evil generally, go on together, and man must make his choice."* (Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand: 1983:253) Writing *Kamala* Tendulkar seems to give the message that foul choice never brings fair result. Jadhav's journalism which is intentionally wrong choice from the beginning brings no good result for him at the end. Written in a discussion style from the beginning to the end the play finally wins its case for sensible journalism in against of sensational journalism and thereby establishes the superiority of the former over the later.

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