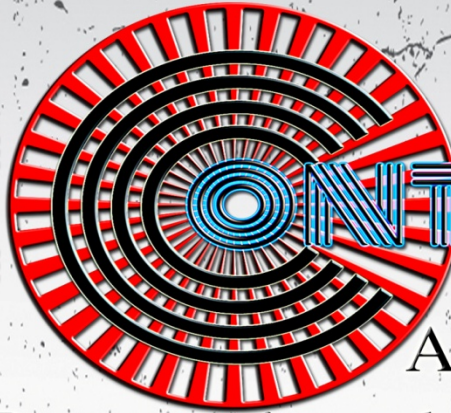


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# Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*: A Pathetic Picture of Women in Indian Society


Shovan Dhibar

## Abstract

*Since the Vedic Age women remain under the shadow of men, the dictator of the then society. With almost same ability and talent they were subdued with the ways of rituals, manners and religious workings. They are learnt and understood that they are nothing but the shadow of men whose only divine works are to beget child, take a better care of their husbands, show great respect towards the elders and maintain various household works. In Tendulkar's Kamala, we can see that the scenario has not been changed. They are still 'used' by men and rather treated as commodity. 'Personality' is a mocking word which knows its meaning in the dictionary only. They don't have it. But sometimes it peeps up through various experiences though for a moment only and vanishes again. This paper aims at to seek the lack of scope and opportunity of women for the growth of their personality in male dominated Indian society, to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles from a feministic viewpoint and try to find out any probable way out of it. And the most important of all the theme of protest as presented by the playwright.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Dalit, Gender Issue, Patriarchy, Power Structure.

## Introduction

 Vijay Tendulkar(1928-2008) is one of the greatest playwrights of India along with Badal Sarkar, Mahesh Dattani and Girish Karnad who began his journey as a playwright and finalised being a chairman of Sangeet Natak Academy. In between he wrote 27 full length plays, 24 one-act plays, 16 plays for children, 2 novels and 5 anthologies of short of stories. As a prolific writer he also contributed to essays, political writings, journalism, screen and television writings, translation, social commentaries and novels. He is best known for his plays *Silence! The Court is in Session!* (1967)), *The Vultures* (1971), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kamala* (1981) and *Kanyadan* (1983). They have created a storm and intellectual argument in the society.

The play *Kamala* (1981) is based on a real life incident. A contemporary correspondent of the Indian Express named Aswin Sarin bought a girl from a rural flesh market and exposed her at the press conference. In the play the incident is the same where Jaising Jadav is the journalist and Kamala is that girl. Tendulkar uses the play as to expose the characteristic sufferings of the Indian middle class women who have made to suffer by the cruel, selfish, cleaver and hypocritical male. Through him we are acquainted with the nature of gender inequality in society. It is obviously a problem play where the problem is in two-folds; one directed towards the buying and selling of tribal women in the post-War India and the other is hinted at the direct question: What is the position of women in Indian society in relation to her husband and home?...The play does not deal with rights of women; rather it sticks to the point of gradual loosening of the women psyche in the patriarchal India.

## The Play

It is a two-act play. **Act one** opens with a morning scene. Jaisingh's wife Sarita's uncle Kakasaheb is seen busy in the phone. Actually it is the noble duty of Sarita to receive the phone calls and note down the details of the caller as „he“ would be angry if the details would not be found later. Jaisingh Jadav is a journalist and he has to stay outside to collect outstanding news. Sarita has been anxiously waiting for his return. It is a boring life in Delhi. She has a maid named Kamalabai for her constant companion. The phone rings again. This time it is Surinder who informs that Jaisingh is coming by the next hour. Sarita is little bit puzzled by this news. She rushes towards the kitchen calling the maid to accompany her. Kakasaheb is very much eager to meet him as it is rare for him to come to Delhi. He is now worried about the threats coming through phone calls as Jaisingh has been exposing the secrets of some important people as news. At this point “the doorbell rings four or five times in an uneven pattern”. Sarita opens the door and Jaisingh enters with “a village woman draped in a dirty white shari”. Soon he asks about the phone calls and Sarita obediently hands him the note book. Kakababu's first speech is, “You're being threatened with murder.” Jaisingh has been habituated with this kind of phone calls and so smiles slightly. Sarita enters with a cup of tea. The husband in a casual authoritative tone asks her to “put it down.” While sipping the tea he is busy with some Jaspalji in phone. From this conversation we are informed of a “Mission” which has been partially completed. In the press conference in the evening it would be a success. Kakasaheb is watching all these and scents a new trouble. He tells him about the new danger but Jaisingh ignores it like flying a fly. Kakasaheb was himself a journalist by profession, so a kind of eagerness is still there in him. Seeing the unknown girl he asks the vital question, “...what are you planning to do about this girl?” He is annoyed at this question. That girl Kamala enters and like a slave answers all the questions asked to her submissively, politely, with a shy and dropping her head down all the time. Kakasaheb again asks, “Who's this woman?” Jaisingh this time is “little embarrassed” and informs a little of having her “Here and there... over in Bihar.” He has to escort her to some other place. Sarita leaves the room for arranging water in the bathroom. Jaisingh follows her. Kamalabai and Kamala are alone in the room. Kamalabai thinks herself superior to her and she now asks her questions with a kind of dignity in her tone. From this interrogation the most important information has come out that Kamala has been bought by “He...the gentleman.” Readers as well as Kamalabai get surprised by the news.

The movement of the play takes a new turn. Women are commodity. They can be sold in the open market. Jaisingh intends to reveal the system of selling women till with a true journalistic attitude. Jaysingh is taking care of her because she will be the front page news from his paper after the press conference. He better understands his business. Very politely he tells her, “You won't have to do any work ...Just eat and relax.” With this kind of attitude he thinks, he is doing a great favour to her. And so when Kamala wants to do something in return as gratitude Jaisingh shows his wife that how “These downtrodden people are happy at the slightest excuse.” Sarita thinks that “She's an innocent, the poor thing.” The real shock comes when Jaisingh informs, “I have bought her in the Luhardaga Bazar in Bihar...For two hundred and fifty rupees.” This slaps directly on the face of society, on the very existence of women in lower middle class society. He continues, “They sell human beings at the bazaar at Luhardaga beyond Ranchi. Human beings! They have an open auction for women for all sorts of ages. People come from long distances to make their bids.” Overwhelmed with this news Sarita grudgingly asks him why he went there. Jaisingh's good intention is exposed: “To prove that such auctions are taking place...in this country...at this very moment.” Lots of people do not know that this kind of practice is going. The police know everything but do not admit it. Now it is the duty of the reporters to stir the society with sensational news like this. So he buys her as evidence. He is rather proud of himself that he is “the first journalist to reach it.” It must be remained as secret till the evening press conference. He is very cautious; he warns his wife not to disclose this to anyone; he suggests Kamalabai to

ask the name and then open the door when a knock is heard. Even when he finds his closest friend Jatin to the door he totally hides the matter from him. In his mind he wants him to leave the house as early as possible. So when after his leaving, Sarita tells, “Lunch was ready—he could have eaten before he left”, he bursts out in anger “Are you a fool?” He warns Sarita not to bathe her, not to dress her; he wants her in the conference in her original dress. After a while Sarita informs that Kamala is not feeling well and is sleeping. Jaisingh’s bitter heartiness, inhumanity and hypocrisy are revealed. He curtly tells her, “Wake her up? ... I want to talk to her.” Sarita stands where she is for a moment. This annoys him and in a dominating manly voice rebukes, “What did I just say? Can’t you hear?”

Alas! She has nothing but to obey her husband’s command. A very minute picture of the relation between a husband and a wife is presented with a graphic detail. The husband’s word is the rule in the domestic affairs. Sarita goes inside and brings Kamala with her. Jaisingh addresses her, “Come here, Kamala...Sit down” like a master to his dog. When Kamala slightly objects to be present in the conference with her torn and sullen dress he asserts, “You will have to come, Kamala.” A glimpse of very little self respect and self reliance is seen as she says, “I’m your servant, master. But I won’t come today. I’ll come tomorrow or day after. As soon as I’m well.” At this point Jaisingh emotionally blackmails her, “Kamala, you won’t obey me.” Kamala dissolves, “How can that be? You are kamala’s master.” Very cunningly he takes the situation in his favour saying, “I order you to come with me today.” She submits herself to his will. Sarita interrupts when decency matters to that woman. Jaisingh wants, “She will come to the Press Conference in the same clothes she’s wearing now.” Sarita declares with a sort of strength in her voice, “She’s a woman, after all. And her sari is torn.” He denies and his will is the law of the house—the picture of almost all the houses in our society. Sarita leaves and Kakasaheb enters. A formal talk of his paper business is going on. From his paternal affection he asks Jaisingh about his unnecessary taking of risks, “...why are taking such desperate risks?” Jaisingh eagerly answers, “There’s a commitment behind it, there’s a social purpose.” He also adds that there would be someone to take the leading role to stop vices in society, to protect against the evils. So why not is it himself? It is his inner consciousness which compels people like him to do that. Sarita enters and the argument ends.

Kamalabai is seen coming with news of “That creature.” She is also the victim of society who does not even know her own actual position. She remains happy being a maid. She cannot think of a better situation than which she is in. She is rather proud of her present state. With utter astonishment she continues, “She asks me, were you bought or were you hired? ...She asks me, how much did they hire you for? What works do you have to do? Me, she’s asking me. I said, what’s it got to do with you? Do you know what she said? Servants shouldn’t raise their head and answer back. They should be grateful for their daily bread....” Every word of Kamala hurt and pinch deep into the nest of so called civilized society. It actually slaps on the face. Women beware of women. Kamalabai cannot bear Kamala anymore. She prays for her departure. Kamala is a touchstone. She discloses the true position of Kamalabai by her language. Sarita manages to hush Kamalabai by taking her away. When again she enters Jaisingh informs that he wants to put Kamala in “a women’s home.” Sarita is little bit surprised. A note of sympathy towards Kamala is slowly growing in her from right now. She is anxious of how her condition will be in the “home”. Jaisingh has a set notion of happiness which is inherited from the society, “...She’ll find the home a luxury after serving the way she used to. Two square meals a day and no work to do. A proper roof over her head. She’ll be more than happy.” He is machine in the machine age. No emotion, no sympathy, no humanity at all. He is rather proud of what he has done with her. He sees only the outward luxury, the mere skin of happiness only. But where will be the peace of mind? Sarita

gradually understands the situation in which Kamala is in; she implores her husband for the last time not to take her away. But again a masculine tone dictates, “Chalo, Kamala” (Come, Kamala).

**Act two** opens like the atmosphere which remains calm after a thunderous storm. It is night. The conference is over. Jaising comes back with Kamala and Jain. Jain’s comment, “You rascal, I salute you” ensures that the conference has been a great success. Kakasaheb, Jain and Jaisingh gossip about the “tamashas” and Sarita, the wife, is ordained with the duty of serving tea and other drinks and food from time to time. The details of the conference are being discussed. And from it comes out how the reporters sack Kamala with all sorts of questions whatever shameless they may be. Kamala has actually been treated as animals shown in cages in a zoo where people go, buy tickets, watch them and having fun. Questions rained down upon Kamala. She was exhausted. She was made a laughing stock. Sarita does not like that. From her growing consciousness she asks her husband, “So while they were asking her those terrible questions, and making fun of her—you just sat and watched, did you?” She cannot believe her husband to watch her effortless. It makes a hard impact on her mind. From now on she can explore the unknown zones of her husband. She cannot believe him being so heartless. Kakassaheb blames Jaisingh for buying a poor and illiterate woman. He points out the guilty side of him. It enrages Jaisingh. A new argument begins. Kakasaheb becomes sullen and wants to go out of the house soon. Before it goes too far, it is Sarita who interrupts and controls the situation. Both take apologies from each other and ending up with bidding good nights. All these things make Sarita a little bit annoyed with her husband that forces her to reject her husband’s proposal of going to bed together and have that pleasure after so long a time. Jaisingh implores her again and again and the wife denies all the time. Jaisingh says, “Don’t I have the right to have my wife when I feel like it? Don’t I? I’m hungry for that too—I’ve been hungry for six days. Is it a crime to ask for it? Answer me?” But the wife does not bother to answer and choose to leave the place. His hunger is to be suppressed that comes out with a violent force of attack, “The Bitch!” It shows the utter patriarchy is on the wake.

A happy married life needs a fifty-fifty share in everything to mould the relation into a stronger one. It is rather a friendship. But what Jaisingh does shows everything but friendship. After spending years with her he still needs more time to comprehend her psyche. He comes after a long gap and wants to do that; that is enough. No respect for her will, no understanding; not even a little self-control—what he has actually, the utmost respect and care for his job. At this point the play takes a crescent turn. Sarita’s self is developing. From now on she is introspective. Her individuality has started its journey. Leaving her husband in a sudden shock, she comes to Kamala. And the next important phase of the play begins. This conversation between those two girls ensures the destiny of the play. Kamala asks some questions and Sarita answers. Kamala is infatuated with Saheb (Jaisingh). She praises that house as a royal palace. The irony comes next when Sarita informs that she and Jaisingh have no children. Kamala can only utter, “God’s ways are strange, such a big house...and...” This unfinished sentence reveals the sorrow of the couple. They are rich but unhappy; they have luxury but don’t have enough time to know each other. Then with a little bit hesitation Kamala asks her, “How much did he buy for you?” Sarita is amazed and speechless. She cannot understand. Kamala repeats her question. This time Sarita in playful manner informs, “For Seven hundred.” That is almost three times bigger amount than which Kamala was bought. The latter becomes surprised and thinks it a crime of not giving a child to the generous man in return. Jaisingh paid more for Sarita (by taking dowry) so it her duty to return him more. The more money involves, the more responsibility descends.

With a little bit hesitation Kamala discloses her heart in a very serious tone, “Memsahab, ... The master bought you; he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us. A man has to labour like an ox to do

it. So, memsahib, both of us must stay here together like sisters.... The master will have children. ...Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?" Sarita is too much moved by this speech and only utters in a benumbed voice, "Agreed." The night is thus over and the agreement remains the same. A new vista has been opened up to Sarita. She can scan the hypocrisy lies behind the very marriage system. The plain thing is that a woman is bought in the marriage. That is all. Kamala again works as a touchstone. She helps to wake up the personality lying dormant in Sarita. It is morning now; both in nature and in Sarita's life. Both Kakasaheb and Jaisingh are sitting with their newspapers searching for the news of Jaisingh's Kamala. Kakasaheb finds, "Almost all the papers seem to have carried the news." Greetings come through the phone calls. Jaisingh is really happy. Sarita enters with tea. Jaisingh leaves the room and just throws the words, "I'll be upstairs. Send me some tea." And what she does? She just calls Kamalabai and tells, "Take this tea upstairs to Saheb." Her own individuality has grown. But she has not lost her sympathetic mind and weeps on the news of leaving of Kakasaheb. She implores, "Stay for today at least." The old uncle cannot argue and stay. Jaisingh comes back from upstairs. He is busy enough. He tells the maid to prepare Kamala. The old man asks, "Where are you taking Kamala?" He curtly answers, "To the Women's Home." The phone rings. Kakasaheb takes it. It is from Neeti Bagh Police Station. They want Jaisingh for some urgent business. Sarita is afraid. Jaisingh just says, "It's the effect of the yesterday's Press Conference." Sarita cannot understand. He again says, "My buying Kamala in an auction is a criminal offence." The phone rings again and this time Sarita speaks with the inspector. Kamala comes wearing one of Sarita's saris. Jaisingh bursts out in laughter and praises, "How atrocious." Kakasaheb also thinks her nice in that dress. Jaisingh knows his duty and tells, "Come, Kamala. Bring your luggage. Hurry." The new-found pleasure is dashed. In feeble tones she asks, "Won't we be coming back?" Sarita is furious and blames her husband, "You're deceiving her." The personality has worked. She says with a kind of determination in her tone, "I'm telling you this very seriously. Kamala is going to stay here...like Kamalabai does." Jaisingh is not habituated with this kind of protest from her. It surprises him and says, "Have you gone mad or something?" He then orders Kamalabai to bring her clothes. She does so and "Kamala goes to the door as if she is being dragged there". Jaisingh is gone saying, "Bye, I'll be back tonight." Kamalabai breathes a sigh of relief, "Good thing she's gone. She was a bad sort."

Sarita now better understands her position. There is no value of her wish. The male voice dominates all the time and that is the law. Kakasaheb brings light to the hypocrisy saying, "...Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess." When Jaisingh returns in the evening expecting her wife to be ready for the party, Kamalabai informs, "She's lying down upstairs....She's not come out of her room at all." After sometime she comes down. She does not answer to Jaisingh; only asks about Kamala. "She's in the Women's Home" that is the reply. Now the most important conversation follows----

**JAISINGH.** ....Don't you want to come to the party?

**SARITA.** No.

**JAISINGH.** You don't want to come? Why?

**SARITA.** That's my will.

**JAISINGH** [Rather surprised]. Your will?

**SARITA.** Aren't I allowed to have a will of my own?

**JAISINGH** [Sarcastically]. Never noticed any signs of it before. If you didn't want to come, you could at least have told me earlier. Then I wouldn't have accepted for both of us.

**SARITA.** Did you ask me?

**JAISINGH.** Of course! I left a message with Kamalabai.

**SARITA.** That isn't called asking.

**JAISINGH.** You could have phoned me back.

**SARITA.** You could have waited till I came on the phone.

**JAISINGH.** I was busy.

**SARITA.** I didn't feel like phoning you.

**JAISINGH.** What's special about your feelings today?

Oh! What a conversation! A silkworm is coming out of its cocoon. Like Nora in Ibsen's famous play *A Doll's House*, Sarita is conscious of her own will, her new-found personality. Jaisingh is amazed at this and leaves alone for the party. Kakasaheb enters and Sarita bursts out, "I'm planning for something.....A press conference.....I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here at Delhi. Jaisingh Jadv. 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 bought the slave Kamala and use of her. The other slave he got free—not just free—the slave's father shelled out the money—a big sum. Ask him what he did with it." Kakasaheb is now alarmed and asks eagerly, "What on earth happened between you two?" She replies, "Marriage" and adds that she was asleep; she was unconscious even when she awoke physically. It is Kamala who wakes her up with a shock. Because of her she sees things clearly. She feels that the man she thought her partner is actually the master of a slave. She has no rights at all in this house because she is a slave. Then in a more pathetic tone she utters, "Slaves don't have rights, do they, Kakasaheb? 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 twisted in pain]." Kakasaheb consoles her by saying he himself gave her aunt a lot of trouble. It may be unpleasant, but it is true. "That's why he's a man. And that's why there is manhood in the world."

The volcanic eruptions continue, "Why aren't women ever the masters? Why can't a woman at least ask to live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have the right to be a man? Does he have extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can." Kamala's touch has made her gold now. She is completely free from biasness of the custom of society which says, "Don't question; don't raise your voice; just perform what is said. Kakasaheb has not expected those questions. He is rather wonder-struck and cannot answer. At this crucial point of the play a knock is heard and Jain comes with a "terrible news" of Jaisingh's dismissal from his job. The letter will come on the next day. He makes a phone call to Jaisingh at the party. He returns and asks, "What's the matter? Why did you call me?" He cannot believe what Jain has said. He wants to call the editor but he is out of Delhi. He is getting more and more agitated. At this time of crisis what can Sarita do? She has to lock all her consciousness in mind again and in a motherly sympathetic tone consoles her partner, "All right. But sit down, at least. Eat just a little bit." Actually she is a very nice and good girl like others of her sex. And this goodness hinders their right with the man.

## Conclusion

A sensational play ends in a sensational manner. Tendulkar's craftsmanship is on the height. His creation of the character Sarita is great. She is the real Kamala in that sense. The moral hypocrisy is exposed by showing the treatment of women as commodity. The hidden violence and unbearable mental torture against women has been presented with a fine craftsmanship. The picture is so vivid and realistic that anyone can easily involve



himself or herself while reading the play. Women of all regions in the world can identify herself with Kamala and Sarita. Thus the play achieves a universal support which becomes the voice of protest against the hypocrisies in the Indian social mindset. Sarita becomes silent at the end of the play. Once again she silences her awakened individuality in the cocoon of love, sympathy, responsibility, duty, humanity and toleration. But it does not show that this silence will remain forever as when Kakasaheb asks, “You mean, you still feel like that?” Sarita concludes, “I’ll go on feeling it. 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.”

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