



Revisiting Sarita as Sita: A Comparative Study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala*

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Abstract— *Vijay Tendulkar, the frontline of Indian theatre, is well known for sensitising his audience and readers of the dogmas of this cultural society. The social order, once framed, are discerning the women as the weaker sex and eventually trapping the rights levered in the name of social structure weaved by the myth. Though engrossed with a pack of Indian nobility, femininity portrayed in the myths like the Ramayana often show the fragility loaded in abundance in the female protagonist- Sita. Thus while portraying the character of Sarita, Tendulkar intentionally or naively has brought out the character of Sita to the view of his audience. This research article is an attempt to bring out the magnetized but feebly tabulated character of Sarita by Vijay Tendulkar in his play Kamala.*

Keywords— *women, myth, mythic models, subjugation, hypocrisy*

Padmabhushan Vijay Tendulkar is regarded as one of India's leading and influential playwrights who gave new content and form to the Indian theatre by portraying the contemporary issues and themes in a unique way. Besides writing for theatres, he was also a movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator. Being a multi-faceted dramatist in the province of Indian English Literature and Marathi theatres, he has remarkably twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one act plays and eleven children dramas. A fair number of his plays are interpreted in English and numerous other regional languages in India. He belongs to the cohort that has produced Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani who have created a national theatre for modern India which is the legacy of his generation.

Though Tendulkar is popular among the Indian readers as a feministic writer, he never misses to portray the struggle and predicament of his male characters too. With various sociological issues on screen, Vijay Tendulkar has emerged as a legend in the contemporary Indian English drama. His output which ranges from *Grihastha* to *Niyatichya Bailala*, marks the evolution of Indian theatre since four decades. He would rather call

himself an Indian writer than a Marathi writer since he explores the social issues like the existential dilemma of desire and fierceness postured by the humankind of Indian civilization.

As a constructivist author, Tendulkar has constantly explicated on man's battle for existence, the distinctive evils in the morals of individuals, the callousness in people or the savagery they face in their lives, the curtailed status of women in our society and their exploitation by the organized group of powers. Also, like other writers, Tendulkar too is away from giving solutions. Through his dramatic art, it is evident that despite hatred, struggle and adversative conditions evolving in life, an individual must learn to continue struggling for his/her identity which can be in the veil of experiences that one's life offers.

Myths have an enormous influence on any culture. As Devdutt Patanaik rightly says, "From myth come beliefs, from mythology customs. Myths condition thoughts and feelings. Mythology influences behaviours and communications. Myth and Mythology thus have a profound influence on culture". (xv). Further, the mythology of India has survived for centuries as they embody characters who symbolize certain ideals of life.

The Hindu epics *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* sermon the socially indorsed propaganda for the cultural and hierarchical maintenance of relationship and in such subjective orders the women fall at the bottom. The sermon preaches a woman to be *pativrata* (a married woman who is faithful and loyal to her husband), bolting herself in the service of her husband, her protector and her guardian. In connection to the legitimised manuals of the society, Tendulkar opines,

Just as man departs behind his shadows, values disappeared leaving meaningless rituals. They had lost their basis and we and leaves were left with nothing but hurdles. We did not know how to deal with them. Then came the alienation between values and conduct. The former were turned into tales and we kept on relating the latter to circumstances. (Tendulkar 33)

A woman is not free to paint her reflection according to her wishes; instead, she is made to perceive her image, even her shadow sketched and coloured by the society. For ages the word 'Indian culture' is looked as the exposition of male chauvinism and the exploitation of women. The gender determined social structures identify the women as a thing that glorifies the virtues of domesticity.

Tendulkar's *Kamala*, a topical drama – inspired by a real life incident published in the *Indian Express* by Ashwin Sarin, speaks a lot with loud voice about the social injustice and male hegemony in our society. Sarita, the female protagonist of the play is all seen in her kitchen space with a tray of breakfast. She is an educated woman from *Phalten* married to Jaisingh Jadhav, a journalist in a leading newspaper. The image of Sarita is characterised with stereotypical notions and traits designed by patriarchy. Also, it coalesces with the characters of legendary epics. Sarita is a wife impeccable in devotion and mighty in renunciation as the ideal woman (Sita) of the Hindu legend- *the Ramayana*.

Sita, the self-abnegating and sacrificing wife of Ram exemplifies forbearance, tolerance and preservation of family hierarchy. She is said to have faced much havoc in her conjugal life. When asked to enter the pyre in order to prove her chastity, she without any reluctance obeyed her husband's stipulation. She neither exposed nor did she revolt her destiny or her ill fate. Hence being a perfect portrayal of a meek sufferer, she is considered as an ideal wife who is set as an example for the women of Indian society. The women of traditionally cultured Indian society are expected to be the exact reflection of Sita who can conserve and foster the culture in a way of saving the earth which has been corrupted and trapped between idealism and individuality.

Women is destined to maintain the species and care for home.....the wife has no other task save the one of maintaining and caring for life in its pure and identical generality; she perpetuates the immutable, she assures the even rhythm of the days and the performance of the home she guards with locked doors; she is given no direct grasp on the future, nor on the universe; she goes beyond herself towards the group only through her husband as mouthpiece. (Beauvoir 455)

As Sita, Sarita too has her own incandescent power that determines her identity and self-respect. Her submissiveness proclaims the measure of her love towards her husband. She can be identified with mythical characters for the primary reasons of being submissive, gentle, tender and faithful.

When Jadhav brings home Kamala- a woman from flesh market in order to produce her at the press conference, Sarita cannot withstand the humiliation. Even if it comes from her spouse, Sarita is not able to endure the mortification and degradation of an innocent and helpless woman. Jadhav repeatedly perturbs about the elevation of his career and in this madness he literally forgets the existence of his wife- Sarita and her desires. He remains totally unconcerned to the domestic worries that have been the chief concern of Sarita. He boasts of his own bravery and rejoices the moment of how he got succeeded in bringing out the hidden trade of flesh market to light. But his actions are more a thunderbolt to Sarita as the success that Jadhav celebrates is all at the cost of a helpless woman's dignity. The man who speaks of working for the cause of downtrodden has shattered and ruined the trust of his companion/spouse too.

The disintegration of society born out of the dissections of value system based on gender inequality particularly in the conjugal life has been a major concern in the play *Kamala*. The preconceived concept of woman as an object of sexuality and as a thing securing significance through marriage has proved to be lapse in most women's independently recognized existence. Through the portrayal of these individuals Tendulkar tries to jog the memories of the Indian women who blindfold the reservoir of their talent and strength under the psychological stresses laid in the conjugal life and one cannot deny the fact that religion plays a vital role in sanctifying the harmonious flow of matrimony.

Jadhav is a modern male, ambitious, high spirited and an aspiring journalist. He sets his rights on Sarita and without any hesitance humiliates, exercises emotional and verbal cruelty making her forget her distinctive identity.

Jadhav's extraordinary qualities and the achievements are related only to his professional life. In reality, he is a sexual colonist with a fake shade of liberal mindedness hindering the equal space procured to femininity. In his marital life, his problems are nowhere attached to his wife about how she will start feeling about him, because all he bothers is his success in his profession. The mythical men too, very rarely do have a concern for the women and their personal spaces. In *the Ramayana*, the perfect man- Ram's concern was all about his victory over the Lankan King-Ravana who abducted his wife. Samhita Arni in her *Sita's Ramayana* claims that Ram underwent dreadful adventures only to redeem his honour. On Ram's victory over Ravana, Sita witnesses false accusation, distrust and suspicion over love, empathy and justice.

It is said that Tendulkar himself was blamed of making his wife hack away her gifted talents to tend to his desires and raise his children while he was discovering on and off the theatres the theme of the new woman and her struggles to find an expression. His wife Meena complains, "Even when I used to be working woman, soon after our marriage, he was very possessive and cautious He used to keep an eye on who I spoke with, moved about with...it is only, with age, that he has become more understanding" (36).

Sarita feels that her husband has taken a step to relegate women's honour. On the other, Jaisingh goes a step ahead proving him to be a selfish and irrational fascist who makes Kamala instrumental in unwrapping the authentic picture of the police and politicians. In fact, he takes Kamala to the press conference with the same dirty and torn rags with which she was brought. Even when she feels little shilly-shallied to go along with him in her dirty rags, he raises his voice in a hardening tone, "You will have to come, Kamala" (20). Tendulkar projects Jadhav's determination to liberate women slaves and become a champion of the cause and his aspiration for an ambitious news item at the cost of an innocent woman's reputation.

Sarita learns her own identity and her husband's clever pawn game at the cost of the dignity of a poor woman. With utter diligence, she confides her decision to have a press conference at the Press Club in order to reveal the real face of her journalist husband Jaisingh Jadhav who being a modern male keeps a human slave at home. She adds, "I have no rights in this house. Slaves don't have rights. 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, lie on the bed- they [*she is twisted in pain*]. (46).

"You can get anything you want simply by crying. Only your voice should be very loud, in fact it

should be aggressive. People will be forced to pay attention to you." (Tendulkar 31)- This statement enlivens in the rebirth of Sarita as an independent, stronger and confident woman who is now almost prepared to question the hypocrisy of her husband. Sarita, a docile housewife, progressively transforms into the central consciousness of feminine ideology. At the end, she is seen reacting to the injustices furnished to the female counterparts in the institution of marriage. The emergence of Sarita as a new woman can be compared with the deportment of the female protagonist of *the Ramayana*. Sita remains enduring when asked to undergo the fire ordeal. When the societal norms make Ram abandon her, she does not utter any word of defence nor does she cry as she did earlier out of despair. She affirms that she has not contemplated anyone other than the Scion of Raghu (Ram). Finally, in order to change the destiny of feministic struggle, she cries out and prays the abode of Madhavi- the earth goddess as she no longer wants to live a desperate life where male chauvinism takes ahead.

Through the characterisation of Sarita and her portraiture from the shades of mythical character, Tendulkar proves that the enigmatic fact behind the existence of female gender is the one that goes with hitches and sufferings. Tendulkar with his depiction of the conventional middle class society critiques the meek reception of so-called social standards, customs, ethnicities and resolutions on Indian women. Even then, it cannot be bluntly stated that Tendulkar stands for feminism or Misogyny, rather, it would be right if it is said that he believes in humanism and in the bond of empathy and humanity towards the surviving class of human kinds.

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