

Vijay Tendulkar's "Kamala": Masculine Violence and Media

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ABSTRACT

Media plays a significant role in exposing the drawbacks of institutions but there are instances where media itself is subject to criticism on account of gender discrimination and unethical professionalism. This paper attempts to trace the construction of masculinity in the Indian context and relate it to violence against women, where media is involved. The paper would brief the sociologist Connell's masculinity theory and then it would delineate the construction of masculinities in India. Masculinity rests on power that forces men and women to adhere to its pressure and authority.

Working within this framework, the paper would analyse how the protagonist, who is one of the leading reporters of his area employs deviant means to attain success at the cost of discrimination of women, patriarchy and abuse of the power of media. His working strategy not only hurts his ego but also ends in a crucial social position where he is subjected to disgrace for interfering in matters that involve people in more powerful social standing. This results in his gradual relegation to a subordinate masculine position from the earlier hegemonic one. His attitude of extreme discrimination against women and the use of women to climb the ladder of success suffer a reversal due to the influence of greater powerful forces that control his life and change his perception of media power. This way, one understands how media has its political games that affect the construction of masculinities, which is influenced by several factors that include age, class, gender, caste, status and social rank.

Keywords

Masculinity, Media, Power, Violence, Patriarchy.

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Introduction

This paper argues that the predominance of violence against women by men could be associated to the construction of masculinity in the Indian social milieu. This paper concentrates on delineating the way media creates or involves in situations in the play “Kamala” that bring success at the expense of women, thereby creating unhealthy relationships among people. Competition among men holding positions in society could be responsible for the continuing abuse of women and subordination of men thereby resulting in breach of human rights.

The sociologist Connell asserts that masculinity cannot be considered to be a monolithic concept because men differ from each other on the grounds of race, class, sexual orientation, age, (dis)ability, education and migration backgrounds. Some men differ from each other more than individual men and women from, for instance with regard to the same class or religion. It would be appropriate to use the plural term masculinities than the singular masculinity. The use of plural masculinities indicates that men and the attributes of masculinity keep changing due to changes in social, economic, cultural and political leanings. The attributes that are considered masculine or feminine at a certain period of time could be different over other periods of time.

Connell (1995) opines: “To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity; relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on” (p.37). The recognition of men with other men worldwide is based on certain criteria that legitimize oppression and assure advantaged position of some groups of men with respect to others. Certain practices are employed by the privileged through which they establish their superior status in comparison with other men of different cultural, social, political and economic backgrounds. These practices range from exercising power, oppression, forced servitude, control of others, playing dominant roles in society, maintaining linguistic, educational and religious superiority, racial superiority, rigorously practicing class and caste distinctions and regulating freedom of exercising individual rights.

The dominant masculine asserts his supremacy over the others to claim his superior status. Foucault (1988) defines power as “the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behavior of another... ” (p.12). In such an imbalanced relationship it is natural that one exerts control over the other and measures could be taken to assert one’s role in the other individual’s life. Such an authoritarian stance would deploy violence to instill fear in the minds of the suppressed. This way, the society internalises the status of individuals and

behave in the ways dictated by the superior groups of men. Gender hegemony operates not only through the subordination of women but also through the subordination and marginalization of other masculinities, which is true in the Indian scenario.

While not only men suffer, women are also made victims of male violence as Connell (1995) notices that "...the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p.77). This could be the reason for the persistence of gender-based violence and inequality among men and in relation to women. Women are forced to abide by the norms set up by the dominant class. They are considered secondary to men because of biological differences and the need for care and protection. Men are endowed with social, political, economic and cultural opportunities in comparison with women because of their natural inclinations.

Analysis

Jaisingh Jadhav, a well-known journalist who works as an Associate Editor in English language daily lives in Neeti Bagh in Delhi with his educated housewife Sarita. The house runs by his orders and he is known to be a person who gives importance to his stature in society. His aim is to succeed in his field by adopting any means. He gets involved in a case related to the auctioning of women in Luhardaga flesh market in Bihar and resolves to expose the people who are involved in this crime. Jaisingh's stance is ironic because he has imprisoned his wife at home, not allowing her the freedom she deserves as an individual.

Sarita's condition is in contrast to the expectations of the society because Jaisingh has confined her within the house and it is only because of her presence at home that he is able to carry out his duties as a journalist. Sarita, who once led a life of complete freedom, is imprisoned by her husband after marriage. As Jain, Jaisingh's colleague mentions: "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 slave of wife! (I. 258-60). Jaisingh has restrained Sarita from going for a job or pursuing a career. She does not have an identity of her own. The play raises the issue of freedom that should be given to women when they are in a relationship or bond as marriage. The role of the wife is a matter of question in the play. Sarita has to depend on the husband for all expenses and the servant has to work to the liking of Jaisingh because he pays her salary. Such instances prove Jaisingh's dubious role in propagating humanitarian values in society. While he fights for justice for women, he treats his wife as a slave. His act of abuse is a form of violence that he perpetrates because of his power at home.

Jaisingh's attitude to his wife could be related to his idea of masculinity that grants a subordinate position to women in the society, especially the wife. Jaisingh cannot stand the fact that his wife may attain a position above him in society. In a patriarchal society, strict sex-roles are maintained. The man is the bread-winner of the family and the woman's role is confined to domestic chores and mothering. The happiness of a woman should rest in unquestionable service to husband. The man assumes the role of the protector and the woman is under his care. Jaisingh discloses to Sarita the issue regarding the Luhardaga flesh market in Bihar. Women are inspected by men before they are bought in the flesh market. They are subjected to inhuman treatment when they are personally checked by men, "Whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and ..." (I. 201-03). Trading of women to meet ends is a practice where women are sold like commodities in a market with a price tag. Women are degraded since they are treated like animals that are mute and helpless. Each part of their body is inspected to ensure maximum amount for the best woman sold out. This situation in India is pitiable because it is violation of basic human rights. This trade involves gangster groups, underworld dons and politicians who make illegal money to run their business. The people who run the business are protected by the politicians and the police who obey the orders of the local persons. The police are given a share of the business profit and they could have a woman of their choice.

Jaisingh is interested in media coverage of the trade to expose the criminals. His intention is to draw the attention of the masses to this trade in Bihar by exposing Kamala, a poor victim of the black business. His intention is to gain fame and earn a higher position in his field. Jaisingh has purchased Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees from the market and brought her with him. Sarita is shocked at the sight of Kamala who is in tatters. Her clothes speak about her poverty and the circumstances that would have led her to the market.

Jaisingh considers his purchase to be "dirty cheap" (I. 350), because "...a bullock costs more than that" (I. 312). Kamala had no bidders and Jaisingh decided to purchase her to serve his purpose. Kakasaheb, Sarita's uncle mentions that the world gives importance to journalism that brings news that could create an impression immediately. Media is more interested in keeping itself alive by bringing in news that could sell fast. In the competition to survive, they write "any old nonsense!" (I. 112). Jaisingh has not written any nonsense but he has made use of the opportunity where he can make a mark for himself.

Kakasaheb tells Sarita that journalism should maintain certain ethics. Journalism is not about providing facts but discussing issues. He says: "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? It's business isn't news -it is bloodshed!"(I. 135). Kakasaheb points to the situation in India where the media is not sincere in reporting major events or discussing issues of national importance. Media only provides detailed descriptions on minor issues such as arson or a riot where there is bloodshed, but does not detail news of significance. He explicates that it is not manliness to be bold to disclose shadowy incidents while remaining ignorant of the threat that is involved in such cases.

Jaisingh does not care about his personal security, while dealing with people in position. He has purchased Kamala to present her at the press conference. He is concerned about the technique he would use to present her at the press conference. As Jaisingh comments: "What's so unusual about the Luhardaga flesh market? Women are sold in many places like that, all over the country. How do you think all the red-light districts could operate-without that? That's not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga- the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case- not in the case itself!"(I. 421). Kamala is only a strategic tool that would secure status in his profession. Jaisingh is more concerned about his power and prestige than the condition of Kamala, who is only a means to achieve his desirable end.

Kamala thinks Jaisingh to be her master. In rescuing her from the market, Kamala believes that Jaisingh has the upper hand in matters concerning her welfare. Her relationship with Jaisingh is one of a master and servant. Kamala grants Jaisingh the stature of a master because she thinks it is her duty to serve him. Kamala could be compared to a docile, hapless animal that cannot plead its cause. Kamala is a poor, uneducated woman who does not know her rights. She is ignorant that in buying her from the market, her master has not shown any particular favour, but proposes to use her situation to his benefit.

Kamala believes that all women in her master's house have been purchased and questions the servant about her worth in the market. She thinks Jaisingh is rich and influential because there are more than two women in his house. Kamala realizes that Sarita and the servant in the house obey Jaisingh's orders without any hesitation. Jaisingh tells Sarita that Kamala would be sent to a women's home after the press conference because it is illegal to purchase a woman just as it is a crime to sell a woman. Sarita understands that Kamala cannot stay with her in the house because Jaisingh does not prefer her. He does not have sympathy for the woman, but regards her as his weapon to defeat a few powerful men and make money out of the profit he would get after the conference.

Jaisingh once lived in the shed outside a house in Karol Bagh in contrast to his present house with servants at Neeti Bagh locality. This means he

has been making business out of his profession. Kakasaheb tells him to play the game of generating news right. Kakasaheb understands Jaisingh's ulterior motive of presenting Kamala at the press gathering. "Mercenary journalism" (I. 456) refers to making profit out of news and increase profit. He makes the point clear that Jaisingh's attitude to creating news is not motivated by a just cause. He tries to instill in Jaisingh, the need to be scrupulous when it comes to matters that involve justice through the media. Kakasaheb tells Jaisingh that anybody could hire young reporters to bring in news regarding gambling, illicit liquor-brewing, red-light houses, bribery, corruption, rape and murder. When one adds spice to the matter, news is created about exploitation, intrigues and exposures. This way, it would lead to greater publicity for the media, more circulation, generating advertising and providing more income. A journalist who is scrupulous would wait for something really good to happen. Journalism should incorporate the true feelings of the general public. Media reporting is being reduced to mere information gathering without giving importance to the content of the news and the way it has to be presented.

Jaisingh forces Kamala to attend the press conference. She is neither allowed to bathe nor use decent clothes. Jaisingh intends to present her the way she has been bought from the market. Even when Sarita pleads with him to give her decent clothes to wear, he remains adamant. Jaisingh makes it clear that he is committed to the society. He is against the powerful who are exploiting the poor. He believes in upholding moral values and principles.

Kakasaheb is not convinced and he explains to Jaisingh that a true journalist is one who creates awareness among the poor about their true condition in their language. A press conference in English would reach the ears of a few educated and unscrupulous people and not the ordinary *junta*. Without their support, the press conference would be a failure. Kakasaheb makes him aware that no programme in service of the society would be a success without the involvement of the public that is ignorant of the language of the educated. The citizens of the county must be addressed in the local language. Jaisingh remains unmoved and decides to proceed with his plans.

At the press conference, Kamala is asked indecent questions. Just as women are physically abused in the flesh market, Kamala is verbally abused. She is asked questions on the number of men she would have entertained in bed and the money she would have made out of such illicit relationships. Jaisingh remained with her throughout, not preventing the press from asking such questions. In fact, he gives her confidence to sit throughout the session, even though she feels uncomfortable with the questions. Kakasaheb is disgusted with the way the press has made Kamala the laughing stock of the gathering. Kakasaheb points out that Jaisingh has "sold a woman- the poor and illiterate

woman -by doing so” (II. 431). He justifies that Jaisingh has been crueler to her in allowing her to face the press, without providing any moral support.

Jaisingh’s attitude at the press meeting is evidence that he gives more importance to the meeting than the condition of Kamala, who silently suffers the ordeal at the press conference. Jaisingh wants to prove his mettle as a journalist and show the power of the media in exposing the wrong-doers. In the process, he fails to understand the feelings of a poor woman as Kamala who is his only a bait to trap the criminals.

Kakasaheb’s remarks on Jaisingh’s unscrupulous methods of journalism hurt his manhood. Jaisingh refuses to have dinner and in order to satisfy his ego, he implores Sarita to have sex. When she refuses, he abuses her by calling her a bitch. Jaisingh treats Sarita as his domestic help who has to abide by his dictates. He cannot accept refusal. Sarita has to satisfy his needs. Her role is restricted to an object of pleasure; one that has to provide him comfort when he requires. Sarita’s position in the house and Jaisingh’s attitude to women in society is succinct from this incident.

The discussion between Sarita and Kamala later that night reveals that Kamala’s experience has made Sarita realize the injustice being meted out to her. Kamala’s innocent queries regarding the amount of money Jaisingh would have spent on purchasing her, Kamala’s acceptance of her fate as the servant of the master, her insistence on staying in the house with Sarita, serving Jaisingh, providing him pleasures, begetting his children and working hard for the family help Sarita realize that her position in the house is the same as Kamala’s. While Kamala can be purchased and sold from one person to the other, Sarita is made prisoner in her house by Jaisingh. Later, Jaisingh asks Sarita to make preparations for Kamala’s stay in the Women’s Home, aggravates the tense situation because Jaisingh’s treatment of Kamala and Sarita become apparent. Both of them are used by Jaisingh to claim his superior status in the society.

Jaisingh’s insistence that Kamala be sent away is to protect himself from the clutches of the police that considers the buying and selling of women a criminal offence. The state authorities that are supposed to protect the citizens of the society are involved in the crime, as in the case of the Bihar Police that has not taken initiatives to curb such practices. Jaisingh takes Kamala with him disregarding Sarita’s requests. Kakasaheb says: “Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess” (II. 532). To this, Sarita replies: “Not just Kamala,...Me too...me too(II. 534). Jaisingh disregards his wife’s interests at every instance. Sarita refuses to play according to his whims. She fights for her will in the house. She derides his command over her and considers her freedom more significant than his success. She refuses to dress up for parties and formal gatherings because she is being paraded like a doll. She asserts that it is her will

that she would not attend parties. Jaisingh cannot accept Sarita's defiance but he attends the party without her. For the first time in their relationship of ten years, Sarita has shown the courage to defy him.

Jaisingh has made a slave out of Kamala, one who has to obey him under any circumstances. It is true that he is a self-made man. Yet, his male ego wouldn't let him lead a healthy relationship with Sarita. He does not grant Sarita the rights that are due to her. She is more a slave than a wife, according to Sarita. The question she asks Kakasaheb is pertinent in this context: "If a man becomes great, why doesn't he stay a great man? Why does he become a master? (II. 658). The master-servant relationship in marriage creates the feeling that men are supposed to rule over women, who are fit to be controlled.

Sarita intends to say that men maintain unequal power relations in marriage or in other relationships. Their status as bread-winners of the family or the persons who earn for the family earns them higher status in comparison to women. Sarita believes that men should learn to remain great and not create tension in relationships because women could also rise to the position. Kakasaheb mentions: "Because he's like that. That's why he's a man. And that's why there is manhood in the world....I gave your aunt a lot of trouble. As if it was my right. I didn't care what she felt at all" (II. 697). Kakasaheb asserts that manhood demands that the woman adjust to its dictates. This is true of all the people in the society, irrespective of class, social status and economic power.

Sarita, unable to accept Kakasaheb replies: "What a man does is manhood. Even if he washes people's dishes, that's manhood" (II. 704). Sarita argues that the concept of manhood should be changed because there are there are women who do what a man does. She asks: "Isn't being Prime Minister of India a manly thing? And isn't it an effeminate thing to grovel at the Prime Minister's feet?" (II. 712). Sarita contends that women are equally capable as men. The society is not ready to accept gender equality and maintains a parochial stance on the right to equality of women. Their argument ends when the news arrives that Jaisingh has lost his job because of pressure from "very big people" (II. 732) who are involved in the flesh racket.

Jaisingh cannot accept the fact that he has lost his job. He gets upset when on hearing the news. He resorts to drinks and lies motionless. Sarita sits beside him to console him. Jaisingh is trapped because of the influence of power and money of other men. They control his life and make him realize their position and it is wrong that he has tried to interfere in their matters. There is the gradual transformation in his masculinity that changes from the dominant hegemonic to the subordinated one because the social construction of masculinity involves the play of power among men of different social strata.

Though Jaisingh is educated and has the press behind him, the political leaders and other men who are more influential than him, suppress his motives.

Masculinity manifests itself when there is conflict among men and women in any social bearing. Jaisingh exhibits traditional masculinity that enforces its dictates on other men and women. His treatment of Sarita and Kamala reiterates his stand that he controls his life and is master of the house. He maintains the servant-master relationship with the women. His status is overturned by men of greater power and influence. In their presence, he is subordinated and hence he loses his former power. At this juncture, it would be appropriate to find out how he would behave with his wife. He is reduced to a puppet that has to abide by the decrees of those in higher positions than he is. His subordinate position indicates loss of authority and hence his masculinity is threatened. Sarita asserts that she would not continue to slave behind him. She would not allow anybody rule over her or abuse her. She would not be an object that would be used and thrown away.

When Jaisingh's power is threatened, he has to make allowances for Sarita. He cannot assert his manhood on her because he has failed to maintain his superior and unquestionable authority in the society. Jaisingh's control over matters at home, including his wife and servant, and his professional hold cannot restrict his degraded status in society. The play indicates how a man is forced to adapt to his subordinate position when he is controlled by other men of greater influence. A potent medium as media becomes the site of abuse of power and violence against men and women in divergent ways.

Conclusion

Media is the most influential tool that addresses several pressing issues that plague the society. The deterioration of the society due to unjust social practices is addressed by the media. Awareness on the perpetuation of injustice on men and women should be considered by individuals. The onus for building a society based on the principles laid down by the constitution should be the joint effort of the media as well as the citizens. It could be deciphered that it would be impossible to rid the society of its evils; they could be curbed.

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