

VIJAY TENDULKAR AS PRECURSOR OF POSTMODERN FEMINISM [WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KAMLA]

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The postmodern feminism is an extension of the postmodern movement in literature. It arguably started in the early 1980's, later it was termed as postmodern feminism. The Postmodern feminist thoughts challenge and discard various conceptual interpretations and definitions of femininity coined by earlier feminists. As per the modern feminist theory, the social and cultural systems are responsible for the present state of women, i.e. system makes a woman "a woman." The postmodern feminism breaks away from this thinking. It takes the woman as a debatable class. It is complicated by ethnicity, sexuality and other facets of identity. Thus, postmodern feminists deal with a broad range of global and culturally specific issues like female genital mutation in some parts of Africa, rape, specifically in marital relations, incest and prostitution and female infanticide. The postmodern feminist thought is highly individual oriented thought and it gives expression to various specific issues related to a woman in a particular culture and society. Today's woman feels differently. She cannot identify herself to the traditional feminists albeit she broadly agrees to gender equality and end of gender discrimination as the goal of feminism.

Thus, women participate in the postmodern feminist movement strictly on their personal life experiences and it therefore becomes an experience-oriented movement. Feminism in its postmodern colour thus becomes highly flexible, which can accommodate the differing experience based thoughts of women belonging to diverse casts, cultures and religions. It presents life in all its colours. Every woman who confronts an abusive relationship or feels discriminated against in her workplace, or if she wants a recognition and help in starting her own business feels attached to this movement and the movement is open to include the expressions of every woman of this society.

Thus, the movement broadens the scope to include several burning issues related to race, religion, class or gender. While advocating emphatically the human rights for entire femininity, it has been associated with several other social and political movements and the environmental concerns as well. It seeks equality of gender and liberty of individuals. Gender equality is one of the most propounded ideologies of the movement that advocates civil and legal rights to all, irrespective of

gender. This proactive approach securing well-being of women is a fundamental ideological shift, not portraying them as victims, who should always be accorded a preferential treatment.

Vijay Tendulkar happens to be one of the most prolific Indian playwrights, who has enriched the Indian drama and theatre by bringing the varied problems of native life to the fore. Tendulkar successfully gives the readers a clear insight into the lives of his individual characters and evokes empathy for them all, as they seem to be victims of their own trappings. Gender is an important dimension of patterns of the class division, which drew the attention of Tendulkar. In his feminist research on the effects of development on women has clearly revealed that in various parts of the country, the rights of women are infringed and women are exploited emotionally, socially and physically. In an interview, Tendulkar once said that he had not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I was from a middle-class family and had seen the brutal ways of life by keeping his eyes open. His work had come from within as an outcome of his observation of the world in which he lived.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kamala* is a female oriented naturalistic play, which focuses on the changed role of women in society. The play, in a sense is built on the metamorphosis of Sarita, who emerges from being a docile wife to an assertive, mature and strong woman in the end. The characterization of Sarita & Kamala is very convincing.

The same predicament took place with all women in general and Indian women, in particular. Right from the beginning, they were treated as inferior, emotional, physically weak, biologically different and something 'Other'. They were simply used as an object of sexual gratification and considered unfit for independence.

After a long and continuous struggle, they succeeded in gaining their rights. Education enlightened their lives and gave them new insights, but the fact remains that the success of an individual is not determined by his academic achievement alone, but primarily by her self-consciousness, self-awareness, and self-knowledge.

This loss of 'self' is the root cause of one's degradation. When a person realizes the loss of self, he questions himself, protests and rebels against with full might. It is the self-realization that enables a person to fight for his dignity. This confused and pathetic condition of modern educated Indian women is rightly presented through the character of Sarita by Vijay Tendulkar in his play '*Kamala*'.

Sarita, the wife of a journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav was extremely sensitive to her husband's needs. Without any hesitation, she takes notes of all phone calls, gives every satisfaction to her husband, carries out all his instructions and behaves just like a puppet. However, despite being educated and able to live independent life, her doubtless acceptance of male authority turned her into a slave, a

bonded labourer. This indicates her ignorance and lack of self-knowledge. Through Kamala's entry in Jaisingh's life, Sarita realizes that she also does not enjoy any superior place in her husband's life except that of a puppet or a slave. On realizing that Sarita holds no value in her husband's busy and materialistic household, Kamala reveals to Sarita the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the insignificance of her own lifestyle and the futility of her existence. Thus, Sarita takes a re-birth and a new Sarita emerges. Kamala, an uneducated woman, unconsciously lit the flame that enlightened the life of Sarita.

"How much did he buy you for?"¹. This question from Kamla compelled her to think of her own self and she revealed the truth. Though Jaisingh took a handsome dowry in marrying her, she feels like saying, "seven hundred." hundred." Kamala proposes that she will do all housework while Sarita will look after accounts and such "sophisticated" things. She adds that each of them will share their master's bed half a month each. To illustrate, we can quote Kamala's a rather long dialogue with Sarita in this reference.

"Memsahab, if you won't misunderstand, I'll tell you. The master bought you: he bought me too...so, memsahab, both of us must stay here like sisters. We'll keep the master happy...the master will have children. I'll bring them up. You Keep the accounts and run the house...Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?"²

Sarita agrees to this. Somehow, she painfully and shockingly realizes that she too, like Kamala, functions as a mere pawn in Jadhav's game of chess. Kamala to Jadhav is only an object that helps him win instant fame while Sarita is also an object to be paraded as a wife at parties, to enhance his status as a successful journalist. Jadhav is referred to by Kakasaheb and Jain as an irresponsible husband, whose craze for publicity overwhelms him so much that he totally ignores his wife's existence.

She says:

"...I was asleep, I was unconscious even when I was awake. Kamala woke me up... Kamala showed me everything. I saw the man, I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house...slaves don't have rights, do Kakasaheb? ... Dance to their master's whim. Laugh, when he says laugh. Cry, when he says, cry...when he says lie on the bed –they (She's twisted in pain).³

Sarita realized that she was used merely as an object of sexual satisfaction, of social companionship and of domestic comfort. She finds herself treated as a slave. Her self-realization enables her to raise questions against 'male mastery' and develops self-confidence that women can do everything that a man can. She screams out impatiently:

“Why? Why can’t men limp behind? Why aren’t women ever the masters? Why can’t women 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 one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can.”⁴

These questions indicate her changed perspective that encourages her to take her own decisions and hope for the bright future. This self-realization is the basis of postmodern feminist realization in a woman, which very vividly becomes evident in the play. Sarita’s realization comes at an individual level by her own suppressed condition in marriage, but her character spreads this spark of realization in every woman and an individual’s experience becomes a common fact for every woman in the society. These particular traits make Sarita the postmodern feminist. She says:

“...But a day will come, when I will stop being a slave. I’ll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I will do what I wish and no one will rule over me...”⁵

The postmodern feminist literature earnestly invokes sensibilities of the society we live in today. It is capable of generating vehement turbulence in the minds and hearts of all, which coerces them to answer these questions honestly. Today, after twenty- two years, Kamala still keeps raising her voice against the violence- violence against women.

REFERENCES:

1. *FIVE PLAYS*, Vijay Tendulkar, (Oxford University Press, Delhi), p. 34
2. *Ibid.*, p. 35
3. *Ibid.*, p. 46
4. *Ibid.*, p. 47
5. *Ibid.*, p.52