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**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

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**Prof. K.N. Shelke**

Head, Department of English,  
Barns College of Arts, Science and Commerce, New Panvel, India

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-:Contact:-

**Prof. K.N. Shelke**

Flat No. 01,  
Nirman Sagar Coop. Housing Society,  
Thana Naka, Panvel, Navi Mumbai. (MS), India. 410206. [knshelke@yahoo.in](mailto:knshelke@yahoo.in)

Cell: +91-7588058508

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**Treatment of Women Characters in Vijay Tendulkar's***Encounter in Umbugland and Kamala***Mrs. Deepti Mujumdar***Head, Department of English, Patkar-Varde College, Mumbai, (Maharashtra) India***Ms. Shaguftaa Seher Rehmaan***U.G. Student, Department of English, Patkar-Varde College, Mumbai, (Maharashtra) India***Abstract**

The present paper aims at critically analyzing the portrayal of women characters by Vijay Tendulkar. "If...the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow", says Gayatri Spivak. This we find reflected in the women characters of Tendulkar. However, we find that these characters make some effort to change their position though they do not prove to be revolutionary. Vijaya and Sarita from *Encounter in Umbugland* and *Kamala* respectively, are a case in the point.

**Key words:** *Vijay Tendulkar, Drama, Indian, Feminism, Encounter in Umbugland, Kamala.*

Vijay Tendulkar, one of the greatest, most versatile and most influential dramatists of India, is generally known as the 'angry young man' of Marathi theatre. The credit for this goes to the rebellious nature of his plays against the orthodox, snobbish Indian society. He is one such writer who defied traditions and violated taboos throughout his dramatic career. The bitter experiences of human life form the basis of most of his plays, which seem to have a truthful reflection of pain, conflict and contradictions in them.

Tendulkar treats his women characters with great comprehension and sympathy. He explores and exhibits their lives in such a way that they seem realistic and alive. His women characters reveal his intensive treatment of themes like social conscience and complex human relationships. Most of his women characters are both oppressed and courageous at the same time. The

problems and the trauma of women expressed in Tendulkar's plays are something that have been faced by women in the past and are still being faced by the women in the current Indian society. Even today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in spite of all the modern – woman notions, a woman is thought of as nothing but a puppet in the hands of man, who is supposed to do as he says. She may be highly educated and intelligent but all that is never valued. Her role is limited to that of a "child – bearing machine" and she is expected to do all household chores, rear the children and "serve" her husband. She is still considered to be the weaker sex, 'the other'. The status of men and women has been constructed around a series of dichotomous categories: self and the other, public and private, work and home, rational and emotional, culture and nature, autonomy and dependence. The first of each pair is associated with man and

positively valued while the second is associated with woman and negatively valued. These categories are mutually opposite. The women are traditionally denied an entry to the 'male' fields and anyone who dares to break through or challenge the male authority is pulled down ruthlessly.

The most interesting part about Tendulkar's women characters is that in spite of belonging to different social strata, their plight is the same. They go through the same ill-treatment and oppression in this male – dominated society. Tendulkar in his plays highlights their trauma, their innermost feelings and fantasies and their search for identity in their lives and in the society.

Jasbir Jain, a noted critic says that the relationship between women and social structures is far more intricate and more deeply embedded in society than any other. Education, marriage, family, morality, linguistic constructs, custom, law are all important elements of self-construction. According to her, Feminist theory has several different theoretical approaches and positions but whether it is social-economic, psychological or literary, its two primary concerns are power and freedom. Both have been traditionally denied to women, placing them on the margins. It is these margins which are being redefined or shifted through a shift to post-feminism in literary aesthetics. Vijay Tendulkar, through his plays displays such a feminist vision in his portrayal of women characters.

*Encounter in Umbugland* is a political allegory with a humanistic touch. The royalist regime of Dambadwip (Umbugland)

depicted in the play, is similar to that of the political condition of India in the late sixties and early seventies. Princess Vijaya, the protagonist of the play, is perhaps a parallel of the then Prime Minister of India - Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who had faced similar circumstances in her life. What proves this, is the chorus which repeatedly questions, "After Vichitravirya, who?" which is similar to the disputed question in Indian politics during the 1960's – "After Nehru, who?" There was chaos in the Indian politics, and finally the superior Congress leaders decided that they would make Indira, the next Prime minister. They thought that since she doesn't really know much about politics, they can manipulate her, and exert their authority over the country through her. However, Indira turned out to be a very able politician and exercised her control over the entire cabinet. Same is the case with Princess Vijaya. The five senior most members of the cabinet - Pishtakeshi, Karkashirsha, Aranyaketu, Bhagadanta and Vratyasom are all eyeing the throne after King Vichitravirya's death. Unable to come to a proper decision about who the next ruler would be, they choose to place Vijaya onto the throne. They think she is a child and that too a girl. So, it will be easy for them to exercise their control over the kingdom through her. Vratyasom says – "She (Vijaya)'ll be the rule, we'll be the rulers! An excellent plan till we agree on a firm decision!"

Tendulkar beautifully expresses the game of politics and human craving for power in this political satire. The characters in the play are full of realism and are easy to connect with, because such characters are the ones we find

in our everyday lives. We have the pretentious – social – worker kind of politician in Aranyaketu, the diplomatic but alert politician with that constant smile on his face in Bhagadanta, the openly shameless politician in Vratyasom, the shameless – but – doesn't – show it politician in Pishtakeshi and in Karkashirsha we have the politician who pretends that politics is sacred for him and he loves to serve the country. Then we have Princess Vijaya, as just a regular girl, who doesn't get enough attention and love from her self-obsessed father, and thus, grows up lonely, longing for freedom. Her palace seems like a jail to her. "If I had wings, I would have left them (the place precincts) ages ago - gone so far away, I wouldn't know how to return!" she says. Her mother is no more and her father is least bothered about her, so she finds her best friend, mother and her father in Prannarayan, the eunuch, who is an attendant of the Queen's chamber. Then there is Prannarayan, who is of the "third sex". He had been castrated as a boy but he is neither embarrassed nor sad about it. Over the years, he has accepted the truth and learnt to live with it. He is one of those people who can turn their weaknesses into their strengths and thinks it is to his advantage that he is a eunuch; as he can understand both men and women, and their respective points of view. His life now revolves completely around serving the Queen Vijaya, wholeheartedly. He knows that she is innocent, and people around her will take advantage of her, that is why he stands by her at every step, guiding her and showing her the right path. There is a lot of

mutual understanding and affection between them.

Princess Vijaya, the only daughter of the King of Umbugland, is introduced to us as a rebellious, dissatisfied, young princess, who keeps dreaming and has her own wild fantasies. Before her coronation, she is an innocent, freedom – loving girl, who has no big goals to achieve in life. She is simple and unambitious, and very childlike at heart. She is least interested in serious things like politics or business and still likes to play childish games. This is proved by her unwillingness to go and ceremoniously greet her father on his coronation anniversary. She doesn't show much excitement, even when she is crowned as the Queen. In fact, before her coronation, she asks the legs of the throne to be cut off and shortened because it is too tall for her to sit on. This leaves her cabinet in shock.

Since she's a woman, her advisers, who crown her the Queen, try to control her and exert their authority over the kingdom, through her. They tell her what to do and what not to do. They bring papers to her and ask her to sign them. They never respect any of her decisions. In fact, they expect her to blindly obey them and do as they say, even though she is the Queen.

The central plot of the story is about how Vijaya turns the tables on her advisers and refuses to play the pawn in their hands. As the play progresses, the audience witness the drastic change and development of her character – from a rash and politically inexperienced princess to an intelligent queen, who understands the entire game and then beats her enemies at it. In the initial



stages of her rule, Vijaya is visibly uncomfortable and nervous at every step. She had never really focused on the rules and etiquettes of the court, so she isn't very familiar with them. This is exactly the reason why she wants Prannarayan to be with her at every step as he's the only one whose presence can make her feel at home. She keeps getting conscious all the time. She asks Prannarayan questions like "Is this the proper way of sitting?", "How should I walk?" she just doesn't understand why Kings and Queens have to behave in such a ceremonious manner, and so she cannot come to terms with it. But as the play progresses, we see a drastic change in her character. She is no longer the petrified princess; she becomes a mature and sensible queen. She is now well versed with the manners of the court and can also take major decisions for her kingdom, independently. She makes her own rules and refuses to follow the ones laid down centuries ago.

She is not just political, but also has an intensely human side to her nature, which is revealed through her visit to the shantytown area of the Kadamba tribe, where she gets down from her car and personally greets the people, the commoners. Her softness is also seen through her relationship with Prannarayan, the eunuch. He is the only one she is comfortable around and shares her deepest secrets with. He also understands her really well. Being a eunuch, Prannarayan can think from both the feminine as well as the masculine points of view. He understands Vijaya's feminine concerns and also understands the chauvinism of her advisers. His belonging to the "third sex" is perhaps what makes Vijaya so comfortable

around him. He is a wise, philosophical person, through the eyes of whom the dramatist reveals the central theme of the play, gender power struggle. Also, it is through Prannarayan's eyes and views that the audience understands the dirtiness involved in politics and human beings' constant fight for power.

Through this play, Tendulkar clearly brings out the stereotypes in the heavily male – dominated Indian society. Women are not expected to be a part of fields like sports, politics etc. where they have a chance of standing against men and winning. Even in this play, the gender discrimination is clearly seen – King Vichitravirya, even if he makes stupid decisions, gives boring speeches, does nothing worthwhile, is still respected at least on his face. All the cabinet members nod their heads and agree with his stupidity, only to satisfy his ego. But when Vijaya makes smart decisions, runs the kingdom efficiently and gives equal importance to humanity as to politics, she is criticized by the cabinet. She never gets their true support; in fact they try to dominate her in every way, only because she is a woman. Thus, in this play, Tendulkar cleverly manages to expose the narrow – mindedness and insecurity of the men and their outward pretense to be strong and powerful, in the male – dominated patriarchal Indian society.

*Kamala*, again like *Encounter in Umbugland* revolves around the lives of people from the upper class society and has gender power struggle as the central theme. There are 3 major women characters in *Kamala* – Sarita the protagonist, Kamala, the titular protagonist and the girl whom Sarita's husband Jaisingh buys from the flesh market

and then there is Kamalabai, who is Sarita's maidservant and her only companion in both pleasure and pain. She is from Sarita's hometown and is a silent spectator of her master's treatment towards her mistress most of the time. She is a typical maid servant – obedient but blatant. She is very close to Sarita and understands her completely and is also very free with her. She has a sharp tongue but there is still a lot of kindness in her. She lives in Sarita and Jaisingh's house and is treated by Sarita like a part of the family. She is never made to feel like a servant, that is why she gets angry when Kamala calls her a servant. She dislikes Kamala because of her ragged and tattered appearance and her stupidity. Although, all three of them suffer the same male domination by Jaisingh. Kamala is bought from the flesh market, presented at the press conference and then sent off to the women's shelter. Kamalabai, being the maidservant of the house, has to obviously tolerate Jaisingh's temper a lot of times. But the condition of Sarita is worse than both Kamala and Kamalabai. She is used by Jaisingh to show off to the world just like Kamala, she serves him day and night like Kamalabai and in addition to that, she also has to satisfy his sexual desires. In spite of being so well educated and intelligent, she is underestimated and taken for granted by her husband.

*Kamala*, the play, presents a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadhav, whose high ambitions and craving for power, lead him to expose the story of flesh trade being practiced in a small village in Bihar. In order to achieve success in his mission he buys a girl named Kamala from the flesh market,

“for a price even less than bulls and cows”. He brings her back with him, but treats her only like an object – an object which can buy him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his personal life. His only focus is his career and his goal. He never stops to think about Kamala or what she might go through after his exposure. In fact, he thinks he's doing a favour on her by bringing her to his home. He thinks he's giving her too much luxury by just giving her a place to sit on the floor and some food to eat. He even tells his wife Sarita not to bathe her or give her better clothes to wear. He takes her in the press conference before so many people in the same tattered, ragged sari that she is wearing.

Kamala on the other hand, is innocent and naïve. She doesn't even understand what is happening with her. In all her innocence, when she has a conversation with Sarita, the mistress of the house and the wife of Jaisingh Jadhav, she unintentionally makes Sarita realize that she is no better. Kamala, very innocently proposes to her that “The master bought you, he bought me, too. He spent a lot of money on the two of us... We'll keep the master happy... The master will have children. I'll do the hard work, and I'll bring forth the children... You keep accounts... Put on lovely clothes and make merry with the master... Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?” Sarita realises that what Kamala is proposing, she already does all that. She is the slave to her master husband already. This new realization leaves Sarita broken, but wise and hopeful. She decides that one

day change has to come, at any cost, and she won't give up until then.

In spite of the title, Kamala, the character, is not the protagonist of the play. Kamala is the story of Sarita Jaisingh Jadhav, a housewife, who is the real protagonist of the play. Sarita is an intelligent, educated young girl, who has never really been valued by her husband but never realized this fact. Before her conversation with Kamala, she was trying to fit in the "ideal wife" stereotype throughout. She unquestioningly served her husband, and never found anything wrong with the way he treated her. Even if the thought came in her mind, she might have probably shooed it away, like every other normal Indian girl, thinking that as a wife it was her duty to endure all that, and keep her husband satisfied in every way. When Sarita happens to have that conversation with Kamala, realization suddenly dawns upon her, as though she was in deep sleep and someone had shaken her violently to wake her up. She realizes the fact that no matter how much she does for her husband, to him she is nothing but a "lovely bonded laborer". She is his "trophy – wife" to show off at parties, his secretary to take his calls at home, his cook and manager of his house in his absence, and when he comes back home, she is his sex slave. Sarita realizes her condition is no better than Kamala, perhaps, worse than her. She is a mere pawn in Jaisingh's game of chess, just like Kamala is. Sarita is initially stunned by this realization, but eventually she gets composed and is determined to bring about a change. She knows she is not going to live a life like that anymore.

Sarita encounters Jaisingh and refuses him what he asks for. The following dialogue shows her state of mind: "I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. 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 gets people to call him a sworn enemy of tyranny. But he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes, and doesn't think anything of it—nothing at all. Listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got for free – not just free –the slave's father shelled out the money –a big sum. Ask him what he did with it"

Vijay Tendulkar, through *Kamala*, clearly brings out the effects of the patriarchal system in India, and the position of women in it. In the male dominated Indian society, a woman is many times nothing more than merely a slave, in all forms. She is either bought literally, or is married to, but she remains a slave and nothing beyond it. The condition of a housewife is nothing better compared to a slave girl bought from the market. Both of them are just bound to serve their master – the man. Their thoughts, their desires, their wishes, little things that give them joy and sorrow, just do not make any difference to the man. It's as if these things are none of his concern. Just as the slave is not supposed to have any feelings and blindly obey his master, so is the woman in the patriarchal Indian society.

Male Chauvinism is seen at its best in the play. There is of course Jaisingh Jadhav,

who buys a woman from the flesh market and carries her to the press conference in a ragged and tattered condition to show her off as a “live – proof” of his sting operation. There she is presented in front of so many men, who ask her lewd questions and make a laughing stock out of her. Also, Jaisingh at his own home dominates over his wife and tries to establish control over her. She literally slaves for him day and night, and she is treated no better than an object to be used and shown off to the world. Then there is Kaka sahib, who confesses to having treated his own wife, the way Jaisingh treats Sarita. When Sarita shares her plight with him, he tells her that it is her duty to do so as Jaisingh is her husband.

The end of the play is very intricately carved. Sarita realizes her condition and bursts out. She is taken aback and stunned. She realizes her own importance and significance and decides that she will not tolerate it anymore. Meanwhile, Jaisingh loses his job. His exposing of the flesh market which Kamala is bought from, lands him in trouble as a lot of powerful politicians are involved in the scandal as well. They are scared their truth will come out in public; hence they force the editor to fire Jaisingh. Jaisingh is shaken, angry and highly disappointed by this incident. Sarita now decides to stay back with her husband as he needs her at the moment. She decides to focus on the demand of the situation and act accordingly. There is immediate inaction on her part, but considering her upbringing as a traditional Indian girl, it is difficult to break marriage vows for a woman. Tendulkar does not strip away the feminine from Sarita in lieu of being independent.

The play ends on a hopeful note, with determination on Sarita’s face.

Vijay Tendulkar, in both *Kamala* and *Encounter*, has taken up women as the major protagonists – the protagonist of *Kamala* being Sarita and for *Encounter*, Princess Vijaya; and both the plays have “male domination and gender power struggle” as the central theme. Both Vijaya and Sarita, though placed in different plays and different situations, have a lot of common characteristic features. For instance, both of them, in the initial stages of the plays, long for freedom, but since they know they have no choice, they have given up and accepted their lives the way they are. They know that there are authoritative figures controlling them, and these figures are their own family members whom they cannot go against. In the case of Sarita, it is her husband Jaisingh, and for Princess Vijaya, it is her father King Vichitravirya.

As the plays progress, visible development is seen in their characters. It is as if they undergo some kind of reformation. Instead of escaping from their problems, they decide to face them. Instead of running away towards freedom, they decide to stay back and bring about a change. In the second half of the plays, the protagonists are no longer the same oppressed, powerless women. A sense of determination has arisen in them.

Both of them are strong-headed, they will not accept what they feel is not right and will even stand against the majority for their morals and principles. They are wise and intelligent women with a soft and human side, they belong to the upper class of the society, and they change due to their

interaction with the catalysts- Prannarayan and Kamala respectively, both of them belonging to the most insignificant of the lower class people in the society.

Both Sarita and Vijaya are fighter women who survive in the male dominated society. They refuse to be suppressed, commanded and slaved. They refuse to play puppets in the hands of the men around them. They raise their voices and protest against what is wrong and unjust. They are fearless of the

consequences that may arise after the bold steps that they have taken. That is probably the reason why, by the end of the plays, they somehow, in some way or the other, sustain and win.

Tendulkar's plays thus, are a satire on the modernism of today's society and the position of women in such a society. He offers no solutions as such, only this that women must awaken to their rights and claim their rightful position under the sun.

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**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

**Dhanashree Publications**

Flat No. 01, Nirman Sagar Coop. Housing Society, Thana Naka,  
Panvel. PIN - 410206. Cell: 07588058508