Chapter-III
THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN *GHASHI RAM KOTWAL* AND *KAMALA*
CHAPTER THREE

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The objectification of woman involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female, and her reduction to an instrument of sexual pleasure in the mind of another person, generally assumed to be a man. Women have often been valued mainly for their physical attributes, and their intelligence and competence are not acknowledged by society. Since the dawn of time, women have been perceived as objects meant to serve the supposed ‘superior’ sex—Man. While these beliefs are gradually being erased from the memory plane of the modernized society, but in some cultures such assumptions are still, more or less, constitute a way of life. While women are free-willed members of society, but their free will comes to the second place when compared to the ideals and urges of the patriarchal society that we live in. Images of women are forever synonymous with the idea of ‘sex’ due to new emphasis on the female body in advertisement campaigns, thought up mostly by males. Our culture trains woman in such a way that her role is not to be a human being but to be a mirror to reflect back to man his ideal and fantasy. It seems that woman is at the receiving end of the emotional stick representing the insecurities from her husband. She is not sure of her own choices, so she needs someone else to instruct her and to take control. This is an example of women, in most cases, putting themselves in a situation which involves them being objectified. They are not considered as intelligent human beings with emotions and feelings. Woman is the ‘Other’ in all cultures, not only to man—-who should
logically be the ‘Other’ in regard to woman---but to woman herself, who has accepted her objectification and plays the role of Other as defined by man.

Women are objectified to always be seen as the ‘Other’ in society, never the equal. Philosophized about in *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, the females in society, be it in a relationship or not, are always referred to as the opposite sex. Marriage is an institution which adds to this notion; women simply are not women once they are under wedlock—they are now seen as wives. It is quite uncommon to find a married woman who still has her maiden name, for most women take upon surnames of their husbands---almost a form of labeling, putting his stamp of ownership upon his new bride. While the husband may love his wife and treat her with equality, she is still seen, by him and society, as his wife---his significant other. When he introduces her to people, he will most likely always announce her to be ‘his’ wife; once and a while he may even announce her as his ‘lovely’ or ‘beautiful’ wife---only adding to the objectification factor. A well known wedding tradition is having the husband carry the wife across the threshold of their new home---an act which is said to symbolize the bride’s unwillingness to capitulate her virginity; again, man identifies sexual act with woman. A woman who is presented passively, and who demonstrates no other attributes aside from her physical or sexual being, that is objectification. Women portrayed as commodities or inanimate objects do not have feelings and can be treated in any way by the persons owning them.

In the twentieth century, especially in the post-war period, the position of women all over the world seems to be improved with the multifarious social, economic, educational and legal measures in the
background, but in the countries like India where patriarchal system continues to operate in one way or the other, empowerment of women in practical terms seems to be an almost far cry, especially in the families of middle layer of society—the so-called upholder of the conventional morality. The changes in almost every walk of life seem to have no effects on male mentality, which still remains the same. In spite of all these developments that the civilization has witnessed, the being which is responsible for the growth of the civilization itself, is in a state of utter disregard. What has been proving the stumbling block in realization of true freedom and true identity of women in India is not the paucity of means and money, but it is the mentality, largely nurtured and governed by the patriarchal system, which denies the equal status to women. In practice, women are deprived of the same position and power in matters of matrimony and individuality as enjoyed by their counterparts in the developed countries of the Western world.

In our country, man-woman relationships, especially in the middle stratum of society, are more or less governed by the outmoded and clichéd patriarchal order. It is not only often assumed but also claimed that the provision of universal education and various cultural changes have substantially improved the position of women in India, but the reality is otherwise. The educated woman is still largely relied on man for important decisions and functions of her life; still she is considered to be no more than a wooden block without wishes and desires. Woman is chiefly shaped for satiating male’s carnal desire and bearing and rearing children. In a male-dominated society where paradigms of traditional behaviour to be followed by women are strongly entrenched and where male-dominated thinking processes/
phallocentrism abound, women are marginalized, oppressed subjugated and treated unjustly.

A patriarchal social set-up based on oppression, not on mutual cooperation, is largely anti-woman. Power-structures within patriarchal societies have determined gender stereotypes. Chastity, devotion, fidelity, patience, tolerance and other such attributes have been sought from woman down the ages. But under the egalitarian and democratic socio-economic and political order, gender relations should be on equal footings, and should have an equal access to resources and equal opportunities to exercise control over issues affecting their destinies. Power-relations in feministic terms are to achieve the power to 'negotiate on equal terms' with men in order to influence equally the establishment of acceptable norms for decision-making in all spheres of life. But even in modern times, the position of Indian woman is still relegated almost to the status of non-persona despite a host of social measures have been provisioned in our constitution to ameliorate her position.

A close study of Tendulkar’s plays reveals the fact that almost all the women characters at the receiving end of male persecution emerge as marginalized ones, and hence they have no gender equity, no chance and choice for self-development and very little control over decisions affecting their lives. Almost all the plays of Tendulkar are set in the contemporary Indian social milieu, except Ghashiram Kotwal. Though this play is set in the eighteenth century, it deals with the themes which transcend all climes and times. In the dramatic world of the playwright, a majority of women characters have been portrayed as undergoing harrowing pains and privations at the hands of males under the patriarchal social order. Leela Benare in Silence! The Court is in
Session!, Lalita Gauri in Ghashiram Kotwal, Rama in Vultures, Champa in Sakharam Binder, Sarita in Kamala and Jyoti in Kanyadaan are striking examples of the women who undergo traumatic experiences of life in one way or the other.

The play, Ghashiram Kotwal is almost often considered as a historical play, as it deals with the socio-political situation of the eighteenth century Peshwa regime. Most of the critical studies on this play deal with either use of politics in power-game or deteriorating socio-moral conditions of the times. None of the critics has looked at this play from feminist perspective. In the words of Shanta Gokhale, “Ghashiram Kotwal is a political comment about the creation, by political parties in power, of monsters for temporary gains, leading to inequity, brutality and ultimate destruction.”¹ Veena Noble Dass is of the view that the play acts as “an indictment of any tyrannical order, whose morality has been subverted by a position of authority held without any adequate justification.”² Smita Mishra. observes that Tendulkar, in Ghashiram Kotwal, has used “female sexuality to represent the loss and destruction caused by the struggle for power.”³ Though critic has made a good attempt to study the play along the feminist lines, she has failed to project the real cause of women’s sufferings. Brati Biswas’s observes that In Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar exposes “the power politics of marginalization and subjugation on the basis of caste, class and gender.”⁴ It is obvious the critic has studied the play from Marxian point of view. Though the background of the play is historical, it is not history as such but an aesthetic production of history. Tendulkar himself observes:

This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place.
Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere.\(^5\)

The play significantly deals with history with some indispensable distortions so as to make it an artistic creation. Though the play, Ghashiram Kotwal is “musical based on a historical incident, the theme has a universal and timeless quality.”\(^6\) The play, set in a historical frame of context, deals with the life of courtly class and urban middle class in the eighteenth century. However, the playwright makes the play rise above the status of a historical play by raising questions of the politics of power so relevant to the contemporary Indian society and by challenging contemporary values. That is why the play “indicates a particular social situation which is neither old nor new. It is beyond time and space.”\(^7\) The most prominent aspect of the all time relevance of the play is its disturbing capacity to expose the bestiality in human nature. Man has always been proud of his civilization and culture. Thousands of years of human civilization make us believe that ultimately man has risen above the level of animal instincts and has differentiated himself from the rest of the living world, acquiring a position of superiority. It is presumed that the human values such as compassion, fraternity, kindness, love, sacrifice and service have totally nullified the inhuman animal instincts of man. Artists and predominantly writers have nurtured this supposition through their artistic creations in a way that we begin to look at these assumptions as realities.

In this play, Lalita Gauri, a delicate young girl, is not only sandwiched between two males---one is the power-hungry father, Ghashiram, and the other is power-drunk and luscious ruler, Nana Phadanvis. The father uses his “innocent daughter”\(^8\) to gain power to
avenge his humiliation at the hands of Brahmans of Poona. Sandhya Saxena rightly observes: "To earn the repute and terror of the Kotwal he turns a perfidious father, surrendering his innocent daughter to the malignant Nana---a deed worse than that signed by Faustus." On the other hand, the king wields political powers to have the girl in his bedroom to satiate his perverted lust. The play suggests "how gender and power are inevitably linked together in a society driven by the need to dominate and control others." For them, Gauri is merely a commodity to be bargained and bartered to satisfy their perverted nature and selfish ends. In the game of power, both the males are so drunk, so egocentric, so insensitive, so biased and so morally bankrupt that they do not even think once before outraging her chastity, crushing her will and effacing her individuality. The marginalized position of the girl is reflected in the way she is given a little space in the form of dialogue in the course of the play. In a historical play, it is always the male character who dominates the action and the female character has a restricted role to play. In this play, Gauri hardly gets a chance to speak just about two-and-half sentences on the stage. But the way she undergoes untold miseries and is, then, murdered with a baby in her womb leaves an indelible impression on our mind. In a patriarchal order, woman is considered more a commodity to be bought and sold and less a human being to be appreciated and acknowledged for her human attributes.

In the patriarchal social order, man thinks that it is his birth right to treat woman and her sexuality the way he likes. In this play, the father does not display any hesitation and inhibition while mortgaging the chastity of his only daughter for the satisfaction of his political ambition. He literally puts "the child of his heart for sale" (p.381) to provide food for the old politician's lechery. Nana is totally besotted with Gauri,
forgetting his age, status and shame: “lust knows no age, no shame” (p.382). For Nana, the man of “wealth and power,” (p.368) woman is an object of sexual gratification only. When Gauri “runs like a frightened deer” (p.378) and escapes from Nana’s rapist paws, he is terribly dismayed and says that the “prey” has fled. His reaction vividly reflects his erotic mood and lusty temperament: “Erect Young! Tender! We’ve so many, handled so many, but none like that one. None her equal....What a bosom! Buds just blossoming. We’ll squeeze them like this!” (pp.379-80). The way Nana looks at Gauri indicates that for the man of power woman is merely an object of sexual gratification. Ashok Kumar Sharma keeps the opinion that the play deals with twin themes of “sex and violence.”

In a patriarchal system, males almost always keep hypocritical character and nature in every quarter of life in respect of women. In this play, Nana, the ruler, can be cited as an excellent example of male hypocrisy. His two-faced character is reflected in the contrast between his public and private self. On the one hand, he calls Gauri daughter, but on the other, he desperately tries to make her food of his degraded lust. When the girl runs away, he asks her father: “Can we find her? How beautifully formed! What a lovely figure!...Ah! Ho, Ho!” (p.379). Nana’s obsession with power and sex is revealed on the stage when Gauri succeeds in escaping his lusty paws. Nana tells Ghashiram: Our grandeur’s gone, if she’s not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan” (p.380). The way he looks at her and thinks about indicates that she is no more than a “thing” (p.379) for him.

The play exposes the nexus between power and sexuality. Power in all forms and degrees is used to exploit woman both psychologically
and sexually. Ghashiram exercises his power as father and male to bargain the chastity of his naïve daughter, and Nana wields his authority as the ruler and male to exploit the vulnerable position of Gauri. The way both the males come closer to strike a desecrating deal makes it clear that they are insensitive to the position of the tender girl. Nana says to Ghashiram: “Bastard. You’ve got me in a narrow pass” and Ghashiram answers: “Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter” (p.384). In this context, the observation of Vinod Bala is pertinent: “Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization.”¹² The father here exercises total control over Gauri till Nana takes over as her lord and master. Gauri does not express her feelings when she is handed over by her father to a man old enough to be her father “to be used sexually for his own satisfaction and sense of power.”¹³ Going a bit further, B. Wadikar observes that the play, Ghashiram Kotwal, exposes “the close nexus between sexuality and power.”¹⁴

The patriarchal system continues to operate by manipulating and misusing religious rituals and myths. Moreover, religion seems to help patriarchy preserve its status quo. In Ghashiram Kotwal, the playwright uses religious rituals and images to expose the hideous face of man’s hypocrisy, hollowness and moral bankruptcy. In the temple of Ganpati, during the puja ceremony, Nana is extremely infatuated with the young girl, Gauri. On the one hand, on the stage we view the worship ceremony of Ganesha going on and nothing is audible to the audience amidst the sound of musical instruments like drum and sehnai. On the other hand, Nana holding a flower in his hand is sitting on a high seat. He does not pay any attention to the “kirtan” which goes on unabated. He is in a “lavani” state of mind and looks “unblinkingly at a pretty girl” (p.377). Smitten with the bodily charm of the girl he is trying to pounce
on her. Salivating with lust, he asks her to come to him, but she protests. The dialogue between Nana and Gauri reveals how the former interprets the image of Ganesha to have his ways:

Nana: (voice of lust) Child, what do you want? All your dreams, this Nana will fulfil. (He puts a hand on her shoulder. She pulls back.) Oh, don’t be shy. This is our house. This is a private hall. No one will see. No one in Poona today has the audacity to watch the great Nana Phadnavis!

Girl: He will see.

Nana: He will see? Who?

Girl: (points to Ganpati) He.

Nana: That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganpati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won’t say anything about that!

Nana considers Ganesha just an idol and nothing else. (p. 378)

When the girl is reluctant and averse to his amorous advances, he tries to convince her by citing the example of Ganpati having two wives. In his opinion, gods can be easily bribed and hence asks Sutradhar to “do a special puja. Pray to the Gods. Make a deal with the Gods”(p.378).

It is conspicuously clear that man uses religion to preserve his audacity and authority. The men sitting at the helm of affairs use it as device to do away with their indirections. In this play, as the curtain rises, a chorus of twelve Brahmans is seen on the stage invoking Lord Ganesha to bless the play. Ganesha is the remover of all obstacles and traditionally all religious ceremonies, all serious compositions in writing are begun by pious Hindus with an invocation of Ganesha. In the very beginning of the performance, the Sutradhar stops a Brahman going
furtively to Bavannakhani, the red-light area of Poona. There is much humour and the discomfiture of a Brahman is evident in the way he moves and speaks. The Sutradhar asking incisive questions cleverly pins them into admitting their destination. The Sutradhar sardonically comments: “The street. Bavannakhani became for a while the garden of Krishna” (p.367). The juxtaposition of holy city of Mathura with the notorious red-light area where the Bahamans’ frequent visits reveal that the religious class has strayed from the right path. The ‘lavani’ highlights the sensuous, passionate element. It also provides the contradiction in the social values and norms. The juxtaposition of the ‘lavani’ with ‘abhanga’ serves to bring out the contradiction in the social values and norms. Through this juxtaposition the playwright “wants to emphasize the complexity between religion and sex.”

The temper of the play is established right at the beginning when a whole lot of sacrilegious juxtaposition is made in kirtan mode to expose the deviation set in amongst the Brahmans of Poona. As per the caste system devised by Manu, the true vocation of Brahmans is scholarship and thereby this group has to involve itself in the spiritual enhancement of people. However, by virtue of their proximity to the seat of power Brahmans assume tremendous authority and dominance in the society. Power invariably corrupts. Thus the dominate group, invested with power by authority, loses its moorings and instead of spiritual upliftment of self and others, it dabbles the material pleasure and sensuality. The red-light area of Bavannakhani acts as a symbol for this shift in attitude.

The dubious nexus between power and sexuality is distinctly reflected in the character of the ruler who, of course, has supreme and total rights over whatever he surveys and rules. In the patriarchal system, males manipulate power in their own way to have realized their
selfish and immoral ends by crushing feminine sensibility and sensitivity. In this context, V.N. Rai comments that Ghashiram Kotwal presents “a picture of the ruthless suppression of feminine consciousness”\(^\text{16}\) at the hands of males. The way Ghashiram and Nana manipulate their powers signifies that both are patriarchal to the core of their hearts, not only in speech but also in action. Wadikar rightly remarks that the play depicts “hypocritical and double standard mentality of the white collar middle class and the position of women in society.”\(^\text{17}\) By and large, both the males are held guilty of marginalizing and sacrificing the only female character in the play. The way the playwright exposes religious hypocrisy and hollowness indicates that religion is no longer the upholder of human and ethical values; rather it has become a tool in the hands of people who are irreligious to the core, and they use it the way it suits them.

In patriarchy, the institution of marriage is used as an instrument to systematize the total subjugation and marginalization of woman. As a vital organ of family, the institution of marriage helps sustain the patriarchal order where women in the name of marriage are relegated to a subordinate and subservient position in the marital matters in particular and familial affairs in general. Ostensibly, marriage is proclaimed to be the holiest of holy institutions in our society, but the way it is looked at or used by males indicates that it is a tool for them to further their interests by sustaining the order where they can often go scot-free with their indiscretions and indirections. It amounts to a license in their hands to ply their unseemly traffic of sexual perversion and polygamy. In the patriarchal order as ours, marriage is sermonized as safeguard to avoid dissipation of biological energy and to perpetuate an authentic reproductive function of the family, but the garb of marriage
hides man's selfish, exploitative and oppressive proclivities. It is reflective in the way woman in India is married to an old man, lame man and a sick man who are also supposedly a godsend for a young and pretty girl if she happens to be from a poor socio-economic background. In this play, Nana has several wives of different ages but still is going to marry a fourteen year-old girl. The Sutardhar reports:

Let's go to the wedding.
The Peshwa's chief minister
Still young enough to marry!...
He's got six wives.
Look—that's not enough!
So he's got a new one. (p.401)

The crafty and unscrupulous men manipulate religion to dominate women in the name of sanctity and social security. They have no qualms in using religion too for their own evil purposes. In this play, religious subversion takes place when Nana uses religion for manipulation. Nana, the epitome of evil, in a confrontation scene later with Ghashiram blames God for everything: "He is the doer - the God up there - I am only an agent" (p.380). When Ghashiram accuses him of killing Gauri, Nana calls himself holy man: "Are you mad, you fool! Ghashya, child. These hands have never killed even an insect....In these hands is only the flute of Lord Krishna which made the Gopis forget hunger and thrust" (p.405). To justify his hideous act Nana becomes philosophical about the temporality and illusionary nature of this life while cooling down Ghashiram's anger over Gauri's murder:

It is misapprehension to think she is here. It is illusion. The body will burn. It is misapprehension to think that she is no longer here. Death is without meaning Ghasya. Life too is without meaning. No one belongs to any one. No one is anyone's
daughter. No one is any one's father. In the end one belongs to one self. Life is like a dance of four day's dream. One must do one's duty. (p.405)

The play dramatizes how two males—Ghashiram and Nana—join hands to use and abuse the innocent girl, Gauri. The way her voice is muffled, her choice is disregarded, her chastity is outraged and her individuality is encroached upon by the duo establishes the fact that women in a male-dominated society is acted upon rather than acting. The playwright has projected Gauri as a sacrificial pawn in the power-game being played by her father and the ruler. Ghashiram's conduct in bargaining his daughter's chastity for the fulfilment of his ambition reveals his "inhuman opportunism" and "total lack of paternal sentiment and sensitivity." Nana uses both his stately power and wealth in satisfying his perverted sexuality. Obviously, they are neither ashamed nor afraid of religion, law, traditions and other societal and legal injunctions against the injustice to women. B. Wadikar observes that "women become scapegoat of men's lust and violence." In the patriarchal scheme of things, women do not have a voice and choice but yield to man's inherent tendencies of oppression and suppression. In Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar explores "the possibilities of power game. Using a historical incident, he exposes such vicious tendencies of human nature as excessive sexual desire, violence, and lust for power." The patriarchal mindset is protected and preserved with the help of the constituents of patriarchy such as power, religion, marriage, family, law and morality. These segments of patriarchy are still operative and contributing to the process of marginalization of women at the hands of men in the dramatic world of the playwright in particular and Indian society in general. The playwright highlights the vulnerable condition of middle-class Indian women in the second half of twentieth century.
Religion and religious institutions are used as a safeguard by the crafty people, the so-called custodians of such institutions, to hide their misdeeds. The hypocritical character of the priestly class is brought out in the attribution of sacredness to their immoral acts. This reflects the height of irreverence towards religious institutions, which are built or rebuilt to uphold their right to superiority, but are transformed into centres of exploitation of the needy. B. Wadikar observes that the human wall acts as “a symbol of secrecy that conceals the various faces of human beings: their hypocrisy, doubt, double standards and tendencies to violence and oppression.” In fact, Tendulkar seems to suggest that the operation of religiosity and sexuality serves as devices of power. It is this disregard of the established institutions which, although as a result of Nana’s insatiable desire for sex, symbolizes the decadent human values of modern society. The idol, a substitute for an invisible god, is worshipped by human beings and is believed to generate awe and fear among the wrong doers and keeps men on the path of rectitude. But when, man, out of selfishness, plays god himself, this cult of idol-worship loses all its significance and becomes a desire in the hands of the vested interests to perpetuate exploitation. The Brahmans use “religion as a cover to hide their misdeeds.”

In this play, Brahmans—the so-called upholders of religious spirit and moral principles—are projected as hypocritical characters with double role—public as well as private. In the public role, they pose to be vedantic scholars, vaidyas, logician, astrologers and linguists hailing from the various sacred places such as Tanjore, Rameshwari, Kumbhakonam, Banaras and Poona, but in the private life, they are hypocrite and hollow to the core. They visit the red-light area under the cover of darkness to keep the profession of prostitution going on. On the
surface level, they seem to glorify the god of “Shiva Ganaraya,” (p.364) but in reality they relegate these gods to the background in order to perpetuate their ungodly ends through deceit, hypocrisy and dishonesty. The play simultaneously is “very postmodern and near brutal in ripping off the mask off rotting, ugly face of urban Indian society which sustains on a double set of contradictory standards, one set for the showing and another set for actually implementing.”23 The Sutradhar ironically calls them “priestly Brahman,” “Godly Brahman” and “honoured Brahman” (p.364). Tendulkar through the comments of the Sutradhar not only exposes the hypocritical and hideous face of the so-called custodians and protectors of religion and morality in a patriarchal order, but also strikes very hard at the root of the unjust social order which arbitrarily muffles the voice of the weak and women leaving, no option to give an outlet to their miseries and agonies.

In this play, the playwright not only exposes the male hypocrisy, especially of priestly class in a patriarchal order but also ridicules them. He makes them stand on the stage in the form of a chorus, but their faces are not revealed to the audience, as they turn “back towards audience” (p.367). Moreover, there is the sacrilegious denigration of the myth of Krishna Lila by a blatant identification of the street with the garden of Krishna: “The street of Bavanna became for a while/ The garden of Krishana” (p.367) with their presence. And for them the place is “like Mathura” (p.367). They are so much engrossed in sensual and sexual pleasures that they have little time for their wives. But on the other hand, their wives at home “sentenced to solitary confinement” (p.367) are secretly visited by “Sardar Maratha landowner” to victimize them. This is how the psychologically disturbed wives are victimized by the institution of prostitution. Woman has no choice of her own in the
patriarchal society and the situation is same whether she is Gulabi or Gauri or the newly wed bride or the old wives of Nana. We find an ironic juxtaposition of the chanting of Radhakrishna with the adulterous conduct of Brahman woman. “The institutionalized sexuality and the institutionalized religiosity are brought into a holy alliance in the reiterated image of Bavannakhani, the red-light district, turned into the pleasure garden of Krishna.” At Bavannakhani, the observance of “no protocol” (p.371) by these people suggests that they are more or less alike in the system that subjugates and exploits women. The gender bias is there in this seemingly cynical play, where lives are snuffed out and violence is all pervasive, and there seems no centre of goodness and no scope for redemptive values. It seems that the playwright emphasizes the total decimation of the one-half of the ‘silent’ society, the female section—utterly powerless to even articulate their grievances, but the way he exposes the predicament of woman and social malaise suggests that he is a humanist and emphasizes the need of a true religion to protect woman from the recurrent abuse and exploitation at the hands of males in the unjust social system.

In Indian society, women outside wedlock are considered to be violators of the societal norms, and her sexuality is not only suspected but also abused. In our country, an unmarried woman is considered as pariah, but the same woman is exploited by perverted males in myriad ways. In Ghashiram Kotwal, still another paradigm of patriarchy’s inherent ills finds reflection in the way Gulabi, the nautch girl of Bavannakhani, the red-light area of Poona, is treated by the so-called sacred people, Brahmans of Poona. She is also a special favourite of Nana. He presents her a golden bracelet on her enacting of a Shringar Rasa Lavani on Rangapanchami. Nana gets married for the seventh time
but his visits to Gulabi continue. Nana with insatiable desires for sex and with his numerous wives parodies lord Krishna. The filthy squalor is compared with spirituality to highlight the moral depravity of Poona. She also becomes favourite of Brahmans of Poona who visit her in the red-light area under the pretext of attending a religious ceremony. She is exploited by these people, though she is doing all this for the sake of her livelihood. The real, but hidden hideous face of Brahmans finds an exposition through the commentary of the Sutradhar:

Night comes
Poona Brahmans go
To Bavannakhani
They go to the cemetery
They go to the kirtan
They go to the temple---as they have done every day.
The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani. (pp.366-67)

He ridicules the Brahmans who secretly visit Bavannakhani making all kinds of excuses. In a patriarchal set-up, such women as Gulabi thrive because they exist only to please men.

The play looked at from a feminist perspective makes, undoubtedly, clear that many men in Indian society are not only indifferent to gender-sensitivities, but also unconscious of how much violence is inflicted on women. They have no choice and voice of their own and exist merely as sex symbols in a male-dominated society and the situation is the same whether she is Gualbi or Gauri or the newly-wed wife of Nana. Brati Biswas rightly says: “Women in Ghashiram Kotwal literally and figuratively occupy a marginal space.”25 Women have always been slaves to their male-counterparts irrespective of class, creed, background and time. In the words of Gayle Greene and Kopeplia Kahn:
Women are the gifts which men exchange between each other... they are gifts, not givers. They have no significant power or influence within a system, which is controlled by men and their works to their benefits. Men, not women, have the power to determine the values of women in the exchange and the meanings associated with them.26

Tendulkar comes out more scathing in the portrayal of the marginalization or objectification of the weaker sex. In this play, Gauri is denied both choice and voice even in the matters of her personal concerns. There simply could not be any scope of equality for women in the social system where they are traditionally considered commodities. Nana abandons Gauri when she becomes pregnant, as now she is of no use to him. Nana goes scot-free, but Gauri faces the worst consequences on account of his lust and degeneration. Her existence is finally annihilated from this earth in the form of death, where she is deprived even of the proper last rites. “It is a satire on society which shields the powerful and the corrupt and punishes the helpless and the innocent.”27

At the hands of Nana the subjugation of woman does not stop here, it continues as usual. He prepares himself for the next triumph over weaker sex. Nothing changes in the lot of women. Life takes a complete circle and the play concludes where it begins—a song juxtaposing the godliness and the profanity. Now Gulabi comes in dancing. Nana’s wives come dancing. Nana joins dancing. The crowd dances:

All together. Ganpati dances the Ganpatii dance.
Brahmans of Poona bow and prance
Now sound the drum beat!
Now let the drama beat!
Heaven, hell and earth---complete! Shri Ganarya (p.66)

Nana has an interaction with three women---Gulabi the nautch girl, Gauri, the tender teenager and the newly-wed bride. The way they
draw three lines around Nana helps reveal the space and place of women in Nana’s domain. Gulabi, as a part of establishment, partakes of the same arrogance and violence rampant in the elite society. Gauri starts off as a naive daughter but is pushed into the pleasure-seeking erotica just long enough to suit Nana. She meets a tragic end. The new bride is doomed to join Nana’s other wives and disappear into the dark recesses of Nana’s bright palace. There are six more, elder to her. In the case of revealing Nana’s inner rot, there are three instances where he twists otherwise benign ideas into vicious arguments. There is no real concern for the girl he seduces, and no real devotion to the ritual which he employs as a delaying strategy.

The playwright uses irony, satire, myth and pathos and employs symbols and images in order to bring out the hollowness of the middle-class moralities. V.N. Rai rightly observes that Tendulkar in Ghashiram Kotwal reveals “the inner human weakness for sensuality and selfishness, violence and wickedness.” In the social system like ours, myths and religious images are not only misinterpreted but also manipulated to justify man’s indiscretions and indirections. In the temple in the company of Gauri Nana refers to the idol of Ganpati: “That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won’t say anything” (p.378). This version of Nana implies that if man goes for polygamy, it will not be an irreligious and ungodly act on his part. This view of the idol establishes the fact that even religion is used as shield-cover to hide and protect the amorous and polygamous nature of man.

The playwright uses the myth of Ganpati to expose the polygamous face of males under patriarchal order. He shows how
religion and myths support man and prejudice against woman for the same act. Young women are often tempted by man with the help of sugar-coated words if they resist the amorous advances of man. In an attempt to seduce Gauri, Nana tells her: “Don’t lose any more time. Youth will not come again; the bloom will not last” (p.378). Under patriarchy, woman is considered to be “prey” and man to be “hunter” (p.379). This is beautifully exemplified through the roles of Gauri and Nana. “In Ghashiram Kotwal, power is defined ‘horizontally’ in terms of individuals against individuals; from humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization....” 29

In this play, Tendulkar has examined the very modern issue of man-woman relationship in a patriarchal society in a historical setting with historically recognizable characters. By contextualizing the narrative in the past and by associating it with a much admired and revered national figure, the playwright has underlined both the dark ambiguity of the cardboard figures of power which the male dominated society holds in high esteem and the dangers of this struggle for power in which gender has always played an important part. Meaning of gender in patriarchy is not just a biological difference, but it is division, oppression, inequity and inferiority for women and thus for all those without access to power. The playwright suggests that the social construction of gender is effectively a useful tool in the hands of the powerful and will lead inevitably to dehumanization of both the powerful and the powerless alike, the Nanas and the Ghashirams as much as the Gauris, and also to the destruction of meaningful human relations and social and moral values.

The position of women is no better in Tendulkar’s next play, Kamala wherein women characters, within or outside the bond of
marriage, are not only marginalized, but also considered as wooden blocks to be bought and bargained. The play raises pertinent questions regarding the institution of marriage and women’s status in a supposedly happy marriage. Sarita, the wife of Jai Singh, though educated is relegated to the background of household affairs, though she is a highly educated woman. There is another woman, Kamala who is bought from a flesh-market in Madhya Pradesh, exhibited at a Press Conference at Delhi where she is asked absurd and vulgar questions. Right from the beginning it becomes distinctly clear that both the women as victims of male persecution have to muffle their voices against their discrimination, humiliation and marginalization in the man-dominated Indian society. Jai Singh, the journalist husband of Sarita, is the initiator of the events responsible for the oppression of women in this play. The play exposes systematic slavery of women in the garb of marriage and family in the male-hegemonic Indian society. Tendulkar uses the play to dwell on the characteristic suffering of the Indian middle-class women perpetuated by selfish, malicious, secretive and hypocritical male chauvinists. The playwright provides a strong critique of the life-denying features of a patriarchal society through the pathetic plight of Kamala and Sarita.

The oft-repeated view that literature holds a mirror up to society, and the play, Kamala literally reflects the harsh realities of the contemporary Indian society. The play is based on an authentic incident when Ashwin Sareen of The Indian Express actually purchased a woman from a flesh market in Madhya Pradesh and stunned the country by presenting her at the Press Conference. The way he carries out the entire operation seems to prove that he is a great votary of the rights of women. He has a wife at home Sarita whom he thinks he treats properly.
It is an entirely different issue as to whether his wife’s desires and wishes are fulfilled or not. The way he treats his wife at home proves that he is a great hypocrite, self-seeking journalist and callous husband. She attends to her husband’s social and domestic needs quite happily. As a typical housewife, she has sacrificed her own desires and wishes. Her husband gets angry if she does not take down his phone messages properly. The world of this highly educated woman is now confined to the four walls of the house and her duties include making sure that Biryani and cauliflower curry are ready for the Sahib; that the fridge is well-stocked with mangoes and beer; that the clothes are washed and ironed; that the buttons are sewed on Sahib’s shirts. She defends her husband strongly when Kaka Saheb ‘the old school’ journalist criticizes Jai Singh for running in search of eyewitness accounts which, according to him, means that this journalism is not about commentary on important issues but mere descriptions of bloodshed smacking its lips over blood-thirty descriptions of arson, loot and murders. Jai Singh proves himself an aggressive master not only of Kamala, but also of his wife Sarita by exposing disvalues of Indian society.

In our society, women are largely represented by men and they are represented by ‘Other.’ It is the position of woman in the society where she has been at the mercy of her husband. Man controls woman as child bearer, and he himself remains the rule-maker and rule-breaker. As Paras Diwan states that “the rules to be followed by a woman were drafted by a man. And in turn he was not bound by anything to follow any rules and regulations.” As a slave, woman has to survive at the whims and wishes of the male members of society even in the second half of the twentieth century. In patriarchy, power lies in the hands of men; whereas women, deprived of power, are marginalized and
trivialized or made to embody the qualities that are traditionally accepted as being opposed to the male obsession with power.

In the very beginning of the play, it becomes clear that the patriarchal system is still more or less operative in the process of subjugation and subordination of women. Sarita lives in a fashionable and finely built and well decorated house in the posh locality of Neeti Bagh in New Delhi, but the façade of shining and sweetness hides darkness and dreariness of a female life in a modern city. However, the house is shared by both Sarita and Jai Singh, but in response to telephone calls from the outside world is said that “This is Jai Singh Jadhav’s house.”^31 It is evident that the orthodox tradition of Hindu Law regards “women as inherently incompetent to hold property.”^32 Through the character of Sarita, the playwright gives an authentic description of position of an educated woman in the modernized Indian society where education has failed to ameliorate her position; rather it has made her merely a sophisticated slave.

In this society, even an educated woman is compelled to comply with the outdated and stereotyped familial customs, ethical mores and traditional norms. She is expected to be submissive, meek, docile and caring wife. If she deviates from the socially prescribed role and ethically approved norms, she has to face the social ire in myriad forms like apathy, disgust, disgrace, dehumanization, violence, expulsion, etc., and, whereas male, the supposed protector and saviour of females, goes scot-free even though he commits the same mistake. In Tendulkar’s plays, the females are forced to come up to the expectations of the societal ethos, whereas males come out as oppressors and exploiters of women. Sarita is not allowed to attend telephone calls when other male members are present in the house. When her husband is away, she
attends telephone calls; she is rebuked for not asking the name of the caller, though the caller does not tell his or her name. Sarita tells Kakasaheb: “If I say they didn’t tell me their names he gets angry with me for not asking” (p.3) their names.

Women in Indian society, especially in the middle class, are trained or designed to suit the purposes and programmes of man within or without family. Even she is not supposed to see alone the male members well-known or familiar to the family of her in-laws. In response to a particular telephone call, Sarita asks the caller: “Drop in sometime when he’s here” (p.4). She most often does not know where her husband goes and what his plans are. He never tells her about his proposed visits, perhaps thinking that it is not his duty to acquaint his wife with his supposed visits to the towns or the cities. Sarita tells Kaka: “Often, my husband is not at home. And I wouldn’t know where to look for him. I’m used to it.” (p.7). It is evident that the lack of healthy communication between the husband and the wife leads to tension in marital relations, resulting in sexual incompatibility.

Even in the post-colonial period, the colonial mentality continues to operate in almost all the spheres of Indian society. Jai Singh, like a police inspector, interrogates Sarita and then rebukes her as if she were a culprit when he does not get satisfied with her answers. He poses to be a warrior against the exploitation of women, but he himself exploits her. However, she does all the household chores, but her contribution is not only ignored but also remains unpaid or incredulous. It is evident that in familial and societal circles, woman has no identity, no existence, no will, no decision-making discretion and no distinct role. The way Jai Singh treats Sarita indicates that women “have to subsist or survive at
In our society, women have been and still are being subjected to all kinds of physical, emotional and mental tortures at the hands of their male counterparts. They can be called more of objects and less of living beings. Another woman in this play is Kamala whom Jai Singh buys from "an open auction for women of all sorts of age" (p.14) and calls her "Id-ka-Chand" (p.9). She is exhausted and ill, still he does not ask her about food and medicine. Though he purchases her for the sake of cheap journalistic publicity and popularity, he mocks at the price of the woman, saying that "even a bullock costs more than a woman" (p.14). At the flesh market, men "handle the women to inspect them, whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and..."(p.14). The way the women at the flesh market are tested and treated signifies that their position is no better than animals at a cattle fair, or a commodity at a provisional store for public sale. The strange and shocking fact behind "this shameful affair" (p.15) is that such trades are still being plied, especially by men under the protection of the so-called big guns of the society. Even the law of the land does not look at it seriously, considering it a routine affair: "The police, as usual washed their hands of it. The Home Minister put his hands over his ears" (p.15). The play shows "how the state machinery is involved in the heinous of trafficking in women, colludes with the state as an ideological apparatus of power to maintain status quo of unequal relation in society." The law in practice seems to be casual, ineffective and inoperative, as far as the marginalization and commodification of women are concerned. In a cursory reading of the play, Jai Singh seems to be an ardent votary of

the whims and caprices of their counterparts" in the middle-layer of our society.
women issues, but a close reading of the play reveals the fact that he simply sheds crocodile tears by posing to be a crusader against the forces that compel women to lead a degraded life full of traumatic experiences. The way he unearths the sex scandal underlines his aggrandized, exploitative and selfish proclivity.

Jai Singh’s falsehood is reflected in the way he engages Kamala in a deceptively sweet conversation before presenting her to the proposed Press Conference:

Jai Singh: How do you like here, Kamala?
Kamala: Very much Sahib.
Jai Singh: Kamala, this evening we’re going out together.
Kamala: Oh: I’ll see Bombay! They say it’s a very big city. (p.19)

She is so ignorant that she does not know where she is being taken to. He tells her that she is going to take her to a place where “big feasts take place” where “very important people will be coming” (p.20).

It is clear from the way Jai Singh treats Kamala at home that it is not a matter of grave concern for him whether women are sold and bought throughout India. His singularity of purpose behind this “high drama” (p.15) is to satiate his inherent hunting nature. He exploits the situation to the most for his selfish ends. The versions of his friends make it clear that he uses the situation as technique: “The point is how we project Luhardaga----the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case---not in the case itself” (p.15). It implies that they are more interested in the way the whole episode is dramatized through the Press Conference evincing least interest in the precarious plight of the destitute woman. Though Kamala is not “feeling well” (p.19) and reluctant to go, she is almost dragged to the Conference where she is made “a laughing stock” (p.30) amidst the crowd of self-seeking
journalists. Thereat almost all the people shower a volley of vulgar and obscene questions on her, though she does not understand even a word of the queries and questions. Jai Singh represents the success oriented-sophisticated individuals who are ready to sacrifice human values in the pursuit of their vested interests. Jai Singh helps people like Kamala who can not help becoming scapegoat for them. The play delivers a critique on Indian family system where “women are used either as slaves, mental servants, or stepping stone by their male counterparts.”

In a patriarchy, a woman does not have freedom to do anything, on her own, that goes against the lifestyle, tastes, habits and conviction of her husband. As and when she does something that goes against the wishes and whims of her husband, she is likely to invite the inevitable ire of her husband. Sarita tries to help the hapless Kamala with bath and new sari, as the latter is almost in rags, but that seems to go against the plans of her husband. When she dares to disobey his dictates, he bursts out with strict orders: “Do not do anything concerning her without asking me first” (p.18). This is the clear indication of the totalitarian attitude of the males in the system where females are not allowed to act and think freely. It implies that women are expected to follow the whims and wishes; dictates and directions; follies and foibles of her husband. The way Jai Singh dictates Sarita is “jarring greatly” on her, but she often says “nothing” (p.18).

Jai Singh represents the typical Indian husband who has no time to spare for his wife. There are repeated hints in the play that the husband-wife relationship is similar to that of master and slave. Jai Singh exploits Sarita as much as he does Kamala, but in a different way. Sarita, too, is an object that “provides him social companionship, domestic comfort, and physical enjoyment.” Sarita wishes to
rehabilitate Kamala in her family, and is averse to Jai Singh’s plans to exhibit her at the Press Conference to gain popularity, but Jai Singh is not ready to entertain Sarita’s wishes, though genuine and humanistic ones, rather he orders her not to do anything on her own. On the other hand, earlier Kamala was for sale in the flesh market, and now in the hands of Jai Singh there is no change in her status, he puts her at the Press Conference to sell his so-called sting operation. The way his dear and near ones, except Sarita and Kakasaheb, rejoice at his triumph makes it clear that they are least concerned about Kamala’s present predicament and future life. Arundhati Banerjee rightly comments: “He never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after this expose.”

The Journalists like Jai Singh seek to capitalize on it in order to further succeed in their careers without caring, in the least, for the victims of this nefarious trade in a democratic country like India.

In a male-dominated society, whether a woman is educated or uneducated, her position is no better than “lively bonded labour”(p.17). The way Sarita is meted out callous treatment indicates that her position in the house of the so-called votary of democracy and messiah of weaker section is no better than that of slaves or servants in a feudal home. There is no change in Sarita’s life even after moving from the house of father to the house of husband, she is “still a girl from the old Mohite wada” (p.5). In a patriarchal society, women by marriage move from dependence on fathers and male relatives to dependence on their husbands. Sarita is subjected to various injustices and exploitations—physical, emotional and economic. Through the character of Sarita, Tendulkar raises pertinent questions about the efficacy and relevance of (modern) education that has failed to save women from the myriad
injustices and multifarious exploitations even within the family at the hands of their own.

Under the patriarchal system, sexuality is another area where woman is considered as a thing of entertainment for man. Within wedlock, woman’s sexuality is abused, misused and even mutilated sometimes under the shield cover of marriage. Man compels woman to have sex as and when he likes against her choice and desire. It amounts to a licensed rape. This dimension of exploitation is exemplified through the marital relationship between Jai Singh and Sarita. In an inebriated condition, Jai Singh tries to force Sarita to have sexual union, but she in her “heartfelt aversion” (p.32) displays her reluctance. At this Jai Singh showers a volley of questions on Sarita: “You must tell me. I must know. 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.” (p.32). Failed to amuse her, he calls her a “bitch” (p.32). The author of the Arthasastra, Kutilya aka Chankya desired the women to have qualities to “serve a man in the hours of dawn...as a sister during the day...and a perfect mistress to please him sexually when the day turns into night.”

Alike Kamala, Sarita has nowhere to go to find happiness and meaning in life. Only difference between Sarita and Kamala is that the former is fully conscious of her miserable predicament, but does not perceive any viable route to escape from the cramping environment. For her, the house is “so empty” nestle which, she thinks, “devours” her incessantly. In India, marriage is often “a bargain” (p.34). But with the arrival of Kamala and the way she undergoes shocking experiences awakens Sarita. Now she gathers courage to defy his authoritarian stance. It is evident in the way Sarita argues with Jai Singh when he tries to take away Kamala to the orphanage:
Sarita. You’re taking her to the orphanage, aren’t you? How can it be nicer than here?

Jai Singh: I’m telling her that so she will be better.

Sarita. You’re deceiving her! (p.41)

But as for the decisions in the house, the ultimate authority is vested in the person of husband. Still she has no right to take independent decisions even in the matters of her individual concerns. Jai Singh tells Sarita: “It’s I who take decision in this house, and no one else” (p.42). He poses to be champion of equality and liberty, particularly in respect of women, and his male chauvinism remains dormant as long as his power is not challenged. He goes away with Kamala, leaving behind Sarita “like a statue watching all this. She’s stationary still, but looks quite forlorn” (p.42). In fact, Sarita is “a pawn in his game of chess” (p.43).

Jai Singh fails to understand how he makes Kamala a specimen in his experiment. Moreover, he treats Sarita as any male chauvinist does. The shocking realization dawns on her when Kamala innocently asks her: “How much did he buy you for?” (p.34). She understands Kamala and requests Jai Singh to let her stay with them. He talks about equality and liberty and his male chauvinism remains dormant as long as his power is not challenged. Sarita feels enraged at this and proposes to hold a press conference to expose the hypocrisy of her husband. Sarita tells Kakasaheb:

I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi, Jaisingh Jadhav. I am going to say: this man is a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He doesn’t take a slave as a human being – just a useful object – one which 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 free – not just free – the slave’s father shelled out the money – a big sum. Ask him what he did with it. (p. 46)

Again when Jai Singh asks her to accompany him to a party, she flatly refuses, saying: “Slave doesn’t have rights—they must only slave away. Dance to their master’s whims” (p.46). Her next pronouncement would make any feminist feel proud:

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 one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can. . . .Those who do manly things should be equal to men. Those who don’t, are women . . . Isn’t being Prime Minister of India a manly thing? And is not it an effeminate thing to grovel at the Prime Minister’s feet? (p.47)

On the other hand, Kamala may have been brainwashed by traditional patriarchal ideology but it is she who is the agent provocateur and who brings about a change in Sarita’s thinking. Her fate at the hands of Jai Singh and her final dumping in Nari Ashram make Sarita realize her own precarious position in this marriage. She becomes conscious of being just a ‘disposable object’ in Jai Singh’s life and her being a slave. She confesses to Kaka Saheb, “Kamala woke me up. With a shock Kamala shocked me everything, because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no nights at all in this house because I am a slave, slave don’t have any right” (p.36). When Kaka Saheb tells her to accept the bitter truth as this has always been so, she retorts: “Why, why can’t men limp behind? Why aren’t the women ever masters? Why can’t a woman at least ask to live her life the same way as a man?” (p.47). Unfortunately, Jai Singh is thrown out of his job as he has hurt vested
interests at the back of the flesh market and Sarita’s planned rebellion is postponed to a future date. Sophisticated exploitation is to continue on the part of the male at least in this household for some more time.

Jai Singh’s indifference to Kamala’s feelings is only slightly more pronounced than his feelings towards his wife, Sarita. If he expects Kamala to appear at the Press Conference in her soiled and torn clothes to suit his purpose, he expects Sarita to submit to his desire for sex whether she wants or not. Sarita meekly accepts her subordinate position in the house, willingly following every institution to the last detail. It is only when she sees Jai Singh’s commodification of Kamala, she realizes that there is no essential difference between Kamala and herself, but whatever resentment or desire for an alternate future that she feels gets weighed down to two gestures—giving an identical sari to Kamala and expressing the pious hope that some day things might change. It is interesting to note that uncle Kakasaheb who first sympathizes with Sarita and is critical of Jai Singh ends up telling her that men are like that, and her place is beside her husband. In a subversive way, he is ensuing the continuance of the status quo, and Sarita agrees. It is a surprising fact that whether it is an act of self-sacrifice or a mere product of social conditioning. It is by controlling the system of distribution of wealth that men confine woman to a lower position.

The playwright ridicules the drawbacks of the so-called civilized, modern success-orientated society, where the youths are shown pursuing their goals at the cost of human values. It is through the husband-wife relationship Tendulkar attacks “the institution of marriage.” Both the female characters in the play Sarita and Kamala symbolize “exploitation of women—of former, within the wall of the house, and the latter, outside them.” Jain’s remarks about Jai Singh and Sarita throw light on
Jai Singh’s exploitative nature: “Hi Bhabhiji, I mean, an English “hi” to him, and a marathi ‘hai’ (alas) to you. This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you....Shame on you! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns maker slave of wife”(p.17). Through the character of Jai Singh, the playwright exhibits selfishness and hypocrisy of the modern young generation, and brings out the oppressive nature of contemporary society. Sarita too, it seems, does not change her decision. Whatever she does is a temporary adjustment in order to help Jai Singh in his hour of need. Sarita tells Kakasaheb: “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....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”(p.52). There is a definite development of the character of Sarita from a docile wife to a self-opinionated and self-esteemed lady.

As far as the male mentality is concerned, there is a change of degree, not of kind. In a patriarchal society, men almost always have double-roles---public as well as private. In the public role, he poses to be highly honest and humanist, whereas in the private one, he comes out with real self---hideous and hedonistic. In the beginning, Sarita, oblivious of his real nature, keeps an unflinching faith in his integrity. He is an embodiment of falsehood, hypocrisy and hollowness. Alike an educated and sensible woman, Sarita feels everything that pinches her, but fails to raise her voice against the male hegemony.

Tendulkar through the characters of Sarita and Kamala presents the realistic picture of the middle-class Indian women within or without family respectively. He reveals the fact that women even in a democratic and modernized country like India are slaves or subservient to men in one way or the other; covertly or overtly; directly or indirectly,
consciously or unconsciously. In this play, Sarita stands for the women who know that they are being misused and abused, but they dare not raise their voice against the social order that justifies not only their subservient position but also their exploitation at the hands of the male counterparts. Kamala represents the women who unconsciously surrender to the evil forces. In Tendulkar's plays, women in general fall prey to men who are "hunters by habit" (p.16) not by necessity. Man has hunting instincts, and he has been hunting woman since the times immemorial under the unjust social system of patriarchy.

In this play, almost all the male characters, except one, exploit or try to exploit the vulnerable position of Kamala. Mr. Jain, one of the neighbours of Jai Singh, comes to the latter's house in an inebriated condition with view to abuse Kamala, not to sympathize with her. He asks Jai Singh: "Look here. What did I have at Iyer's? Drinks? What's the usual effect of drink? If you let them accumulate----What happens? (p.17). Jai Singh exploits her position in the name of social cause and commitment. Jai Singh tells Kakasaheb: "There's commitment behind it, there's a social purpose. So what if you don't recognize it? What I'm doing----what we are doing----there's great need today for somebody to do just that. In the moral rot that's set in---in this country, someone's got to uphold moral principles, moral norms, moral values" (p.24). But in reality, he himself uses Kamala as instrument to exploit the situation, projecting as custodian and upholder of morality. Jai Singh tells Jain: "All is fair in love and..." (p.27). The way the journalists ask her questions and the kind of questions they ask speaks volumes of tormenting experiences of Kamala. There was one question "If there is free sex among you, what do you do with the illegitimate children?" (p.29). Another man asked: "You must be having free sex too. How
many men have you slept with?” (p.29). And they were “not ashamed to
ask such questions” (p.29). But the playwright seems to term it nothing
more than a mockery of the profession of journalism. Jain tells
Kakasaheb: “The photographers were falling over each other to get the
right angles. One of them asked her to move her veil and show her face.
One even tried to get her pose hand-in-hand with Jai Singh” (p.28). In
fact, it was a fun at the “expense” (p.30) of that poor woman. They
cross-examine her in such a way as if she were a culprit in the court of
law. For them it was not “a serious situation,” rather it was a “funny”
(p.30) one. Everyone at Jai Singh’s house terms this “terrific tamasha”
(p.27) a grand success and congratulates him for carrying out the
mission successfully, but except Kakasaheb and Sarita, no one is
concerned about the way Kamala is humiliated and tortured, and nobody
is least perturbed about her present plight and future life. At the Press
Conference the way she is interrogated and treated establishes the fact
that both the buyer and seller of Kamala are the chips of the same block.

Jai Singh intends to send Kamala to an orphanage after the
Conference as he knows that buying a woman is a criminal offence. The
so-called liberal-minded Jai Singh’s male-chauvinism as well as his
treatment of Kamala points to women’s position in modern India where
women are just objects for some men—as disposable as a tissue paper---
to be used and thrown---for men like Jai Singh. The hypocritical male
wants the best of both the worlds—an educated wife good for social
companionship in the party circles and good for sexual companionship
as and when wanted and of course a home where everything is male-
centric. His food, his clothes, his phone calls and appointments, his
orders, his wishes are of paramount importance. The play exposes
slavery of women in the male-dominated Indian society. The modern
youth is ready to “sacrifice human values in the name of humanity.” For him Kamala is not a human being, but “a marketable commodity” that can bring him reputation in his professional career and promotion in job. Thus the real life incident of the flesh market exhibits the violence practised and enjoyed by the present-day generation, particularly the careerist young ones.

Women are viewed as weak, fragile and, therefore, need to be protected and guarded. This myopic attitude has been the chief impediment in the development of her personality and talent. Tendulkar exposes the trait of chauvinism inherent in the modern Indian male, who poses to be liberal-minded, though in reality, he harshly treats both Kamala and Sarita, considering them as lifeless creatures. Kamala’s entry into the house opens the eyes of Sarita to the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the meaninglessness and triviality of her own existence. The playwright provides an entirely novel point of view that women are still mere slaves to their male owners in Indian society even in the second half of the twentieth century. The playwright, through the female characters, portrays the subjugated and suppressed position of women in Indian society. Jai Singh fails to understand how he makes Kamala specimen in his experiment. He treats his wife in the same way as any male chauvinist does. She does not realize that she is also a slave in the house. Her shocking realization dawns on her when Kamala innocently asks her, “How much did he buy you for?” (p.34). She understands Kamala and requests Jai Singh to let her stay with him. The male chauvinist in him wakes up and says to her, “It’s I who takes decisions in this house, no one else” (p. 42).

The playwright uses the technique of character-contrast to reveal the weak position of woman in India. In this play, Kaka Saheb is pitted
against Jai Singh: the former is critical of the latter’s style of journalism, while the latter calls it committed journalism with a social purpose. Kaka Saheb keeps the view that it is crass commercialism and sensational journalism. His is the voice of reason and balance. He has a great affection for Sarita and is an instrumental in making Sarita conscious of her plight. Shivaji Rao Mohite or Kaka Saheb runs a newspaper. Sympathetic to Kamala and fearless of Jai Singh’s annoyed reactions to his probing questions, Kaka Saheb tells Sarita: “Kamala is just a pawn in his game of chess” to which Sarita responds, “Not just, Kamala, Kaka Saheb (trying to control her misery), me too .... Me too” (p.43). It is to Kaka Saheb that Sarita admits her frustrations in her married life.

...I was asleep. I was unconscious even when I was awake. Kamala woke me up. With a shock. Kamala showed me everything. Because of her I suddenly saw things clearly I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of slave. I’ve no rights at all in this house. Because I’m a slave. Slaves do not have rights....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 party, they must go. When he says lie on the bed—they (She is twisted in pain). (p.46)

This prompts Kaka Saheb to say that if anybody hears her, they will think of Jai Singh as a “slave-driver” (p.46). To which Sarita replies that it is so in her opinion. In a long dialogue, Kaka Saheb tries to convince Sarita that men are like that, they have big egos and women have to accept this heart-breaking truth and if the married life is to continue successfully, women have to accept to play second fiddle. This is a patriarchal canon, take it or leave it, Kaka Saheb admits: “I too was just like this. Don’t go by what I seem to be today. I gave your aunt a lot of
trouble. As if it was my right. I didn’t care what she felt at all. I was confident she would follow, even if she was limping. And she did follow, the poor thing” (p.47). The playwright’s creation of Kaka’s character as representative of the older generation informs us of the practice of female subjugation and exploitation. His comments reveal the fact that women in the past also remained neglected and marginalized in the marital concerns and familial affairs. But the difference is that Kaka regrets the practice, but Jai Singh, the representative of modern generation, seems to be in no mood to regret his mistakes and bossy demeanour in relation to both the women in the play.

These are patriarchal sentiments no doubt but such is the bitter truth according to Kaka Saheb. At the end of the play, Kaka Saheb tells Sarita that even men have their failures and frustrations, like Jai Singh being sacked unceremoniously. Despite the fact that she becomes aware of her husband’s selfishness and hypocrisy, she provides him with the emotional support he needs so badly when he loses his job. But the play ends on an optimistic note that she will revolt one day against the injustice done to her husband. On Sarita’s emancipation from her husband’s bondage, N.S. Dharan comments: “Kamala is a gyno-centric play in the sense that it is built on the metamorphosis of Sarita emerging from being a docile wife to an assertive, mature woman in the end.” 

Despite the fact that Kamala presents a critique of the male-dominated society, it indirectly illustrates another important aspect of society that women themselves are responsible for their exploitation. Sarita becomes conscious of the hypocritical nature of Jai Singh, but still she provides him with emotional support when he is dismissed from his job. Both these women lack the guts and the courage to rebel against
injustice. Therefore, they cannot help being a scapegoat in the company of their male counterparts.

The preceding discussion reveals the fact that Indian women's position within or without family is no better than that of a slave even in the modernized world. She is not only ignored but also exploited in myriad ways. In the patriarchal order, her will is crushed, her individuality is effaced, her sexuality is misused, abused and even mutilated. Still the man-dominated world expects her to be docile, submissive and caring wife; she is not allowed to mix up with males both known and unknown to her family. On the other hand, man poses to be her protector and benevolent, but he himself harms her in many ways. She wants to raise her voice against the discrimination and injustice done to her, but fails to gather courage. So to speak, she has to muffle her genuine voice.
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