

EXPLORATION OF MALE GAZE, VOYEURISM AND SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMAN IN KAMALA BY VIJAY TENDULKAR AND LIGHTS OUT BY MANJULAPADMANABHAN

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Abstract

Paraphilias are predominantly male sexuality disorders and sexual urges that are considered deviant with respect to cultural norms. The common paraphilias include exhibitionism, pedophilia, voyeurism and fetishism. The paraphilia that is present in the current analysis is Voyeurism. This psychological disorder is clubbed with the concept of sexual objectification. Woman is the most common victim of objectification as well as voyeuristic tendencies. Therefore both the concepts are treated through the lens of feminist theory. The comparison of both the plays brings out the crucial issue of objectification of women and both the chosen texts are full with the references to voyeuristic traits in the subjects. In Lights Out all the male characters act as voyeurs as they are engaged in watching a heinous act of gang rape from the window of their apartment but none of them tries to help the suffering woman. The crime serves them an interesting subject to be discussed about. They use religion, concept of prostitution and different forms of violence to give a particular definition to the crime. Kamala is based on a real life incident of purchasing a woman from flesh market by a journalist to present her in a press conference. In the play Jai Singh Jadav uses Kamala, the purchased woman as a perfect news item to expose the evil of flesh markets prevailing in Indian society. Kamala is treated as an object to be seen in the press conference because Jai Singh does not allow her to change her torn sari. The comparison has been done by using the grounds of literary theory of feminism.

Key Words: Paraphilia, Voyeurism, Sexual Objectification, Media.

Introduction

Paraphilias are sexual impulse disorders and sexual urges that are considered deviant with respect to cultural norms. In clinical terms, paraphilia is defined as:

Recurrent intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors that occur over a period of at least 6 months generally involving 1) nonhuman objects 2) the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one's partners or 3) children or other nonconsenting persons (Criterion A). Such behaviours sexual urges or fantasies cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social occupational or other important areas of functioning. (Criterion B) (Med J 122)

Paraphilias produce clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of psychosocial functioning. The common paraphilias include exhibitionism that is exposure of genitals to a stranger, pedophilia that is sexual activity with a prepubescent child, generally 13 years of age or younger voyeurism that is observing others' sexual activities and fetishism that is use of inert objects, such as female undergarments.

The paraphilia that is present in the current analysis is Voyeurism as both the chosen texts are full with the references to voyeuristic traits in the subjects. The most extreme behavioural manifestations of voyeurism are clinically regarded as abnormal sexual behaviour. American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, 1994) offers the following psychiatric diagnostic criteria for paraphiliac voyeurism:

- A. Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours involving the act of observing an unsuspecting person who is naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity.
- B. The person has acted on these sexual urges, or the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty. (Mäntymäki 4)

This psychological disorder is clubbed in the present analysis with the concept of sexual objectification. Woman is the most common victim of objectification as well as voyeuristic tendencies. Therefore both the concepts are treated through the lens of feminist theory. Sexual objectification is a very familiar concept in feminist theory. Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person as an instrument of sexual pleasure. Objectification more broadly means treating a person as a commodity or an object, without regard to their personality or dignity. It is common to hear that it is used to criticise advertisements, films and other obscene representations. Generally it is considered as a pejorative term connoting a way of speaking, thinking and acting that is morally and socially

objectionable. The portrayal of women is dehumanized as a tool for sexual pleasure. Being treated as objects, women are considered as meant for male pleasure and in their absence they should feel their lack. Men, in this sense are complete beings while in its opposite women are incomplete in themselves. In such sexual objectification of women, her personality and dignity is completely ignored. She merely reduces to an object or instrument of sexual pleasure. The concept of the sexual objectification especially the objectification of woman is an important idea to be discussed in feminist theory as well as psychoanalysis theory. The objectification of women concerns with the act of reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of a tool for the fulfillment of lust. Her intellect, abilities are of no worth in this sense. Feminist theory criticizes the idea of associating woman with body and man with mind. It criticizes the deep rooted stereotype that men are rationale beings while women are irrational beings. Women are characterized in terms of their body and bodily functions.

Sexual objectification takes place in sex oriented depiction of women in ads and media. Women are portrayed as weak or subjugated through pornography. Men brazenly evaluate and judge women sexually and aesthetically with their gaze pre-occupied with voyeuristic inclinations in public spaces and events like beauty contests etc. In 1975, Laura Mulvey with her groundbreaking essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* introduced the key concept of male gaze. The representation of women as an object has invaded in visual culture to a large extent. This essay uncovers the voyeuristic and fetishistic responses of male viewers to the images of women. She criticizes in her essay the Hollywood films because they make use of voyeurism and exhibitionism as boosting factors to sexual desires. Female characters function as erotic objects both for characters within the story and for the viewers. She takes psychoanalysis as frame and within this frame she interprets unusual sexual behaviours that a person adopts in order to give vent to his sexual desires. Male gaze and sexual objectification are directly comparable with each other because both theories have their roots in the theory of feminism. Feminists observe that sexual objectification is an important discursive issue and an important aspect of patriarchal order in which women are not enjoying equality. Through psychoanalysis Mulvey aims to reinforce the pre-existing patterns of passivity of female sex and fear of castration. Woman, who lacks penis, is the symbol of castrated being. Through objectification men try to gain control over her.

Traditionally the concept of voyeurism referred to the sexual interest in or practice of spying on people who are naked or engaged in sexual activity. The Psychoanalytic tradition has recognized such kind of behaviour as a source of contentment or gratification. Freud used the term Scopophilia with regard to pleasure in looking. In present days voyeurism is somewhat delinked from sexuality. In the context of media use, Calvert defines voyeurism as "the consumption of revealing images of and information about other's apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and disclosure, through the mass media and Internet." (qtd. in Mäntymäki 3)

Media stimulates the desire to look by integrating structure of voyeurism into the story. Voyeuristic visual pleasure is produced by looking at another object or a person as our object. Mulvey analysed Scopophilia as a structure that acts with the help of activity and passivity. The activity is performed by male characters and passivity becomes the characteristic of female characters. Mulvey criticises media for turning voyeurism into a male prerogative. Male characters are portrayed in such manner that they direct their gaze towards female characters. The spectators begin to identify themselves with the male look. She discusses three levels of cinematic gaze: camera, viewer and character. They all objectify the female character. In this condition looking becomes a source of pleasure and in its reverse form; pleasure also lies in being looked at. "Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin ups to striptease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire". (Mulvey 9)

Grieta Vandermassen in her scholarly article *Woman as Erotic Object: A Darwin Inquiry into the Male Gaze* rejects the psychological underpinnings associated with the male gaze. Her research has proved that human mind is the product of evolution. From this perspective it is clear that human disposition, emotions and cognitions are adaptations. Using this evolutionary lens, the existence of male gaze and relative absence of female gaze evolved the fundamental sexual psychologies. Why are males usually willing to mate with any female and why females are the choosiest sex? The answer that Grieta finds in Darwinian Theory is Parental Investment. Parental Investment is the amount of time and energy that parents invest in offspring. A male only needs to do one act that is copulation, but the female invests quite a long time in the form of gestation and lactation. Men think about sex more often. Polygamy is the most suitable instance of this. Men look at female body as mere collection of female body parts. In cinema and film making, by using the technique of montage male directors particularly focus on female sexuality, by 'cutting up' female body. To some extent representing women as sexual objects might be about control as well. Grieta further says:

As men typically evolved to seek sexual access to fertile women, and as a woman's body provides powerful and observable cues to her reproductive capacity, the visual nature of men's sexuality need not surprise us. Of course men are not aware that their experience of sexual attraction has an evolutionary rationale. They do not have to know why smooth skin and firm breasts appeal more to them than wrinkles and other signs of old age to typically find the first characteristics more attractive than the latter. (Vandermassen 6)

Underpinning this taste, however, are psychological adaptations. The existence of the male gaze is perfectly predictable from an evolutionary perspective. No castration anxiety is needed to explain it, nor need it signify contempt of women, although, of course it may do so in individual instances. This does not mean, however, that patriarchal and other cultural

influences do not affect the development and expression of evolved male and female psychosexual dispositions.

Masculine ideology is a term that can be associated with man's sexual power, but to some extent it can be associated with men's beliefs about women and their sexual bodies. How men are expected to behave and respond are core aspects of masculine ideology. But because of masculine traits or their role in society that they have internalized from their culture they don't behave accordingly. In the dominant culture the conception of masculinity focuses on toughness, anti-femininity, sexual virility etc. However, men don't live in isolation; their beliefs about masculinity are likely to influence not only their behaviour, but also with their interactions with the key women in their lives. The argument here is that because traditional masculine ideology focuses on the power of male sex drive, on men as sexual agents and initiators and on women as sexual objects. The male characters of both the chosen texts *Lights Out* and *Kamala* are the epitome of such masculine ideology. Jai Singh Jadav and Kakasaheb in *Kamala* represent that very masculine ideology. Jai Singh Jadav purchases the woman from flesh market and uses her as an object in the press conference that can bag name and fame for him. In *Lights Out* all the male characters have been imparted with such ideology. Mohan is the principal voyeur who has paid a special visit to watch the gang rape. Bhasker and Surinder accompany Mohan during the incident. They all are busy in their worthless discussion and they portray the victim woman according to their own views. They use religion, concept of prostitution and different forms of violence to give a particular definition to the crime that is happening outside of the building.

Male Gaze, Voyeurism and Sexual Objectification in the Select Texts

The beginning of the play *Lights Out* introduces us with the problem at the center of the action but in a very vague manner. Leela tries her best to persuade her husband to call the police or to register an FIR against the crime that is regularly taking place outside the building. But Bhasker adopts very callous attitude towards her words. As it seems from his behaviour that there is no impact upon him of Leela's words:

Bhasker: Wait! First they'd ask us, 'what is the complaint'? And
we'd have to say—

Leela: That we're frightened! That we're badly disturbed!

Bhasker: No, that's not enough, don't you see? If the police had to
worry about things like that they'd be psychiatrists, not policemen.

(7)

The couple tries hard to pretend in front of their guest Mohan that they don't know about crime, but he is already acquainted with it. There is no purpose mentioned for the arrival of guest and their initial talk makes us clear that he has come to explore the very incident that they were expecting to take place in a very short time. Following conversation is the evident:

Mohan (clears his throat): Well! So – when does it begin!

Leela (shrinks): Wh – what?

Bhasker (expressionless): Around dinner time.

Leela (eyes starting from her head): You – you *told* him?

Bhasker (smoothly): Darling, I had to – after all he's bound to notice, when it starts – (14)

Their further conversation brings out the psyche of Mohan as a voyeur. Keeping himself unveiled throughout the play he enjoys the heinous act of gang rape. Voyeurism is the most common paraphilia in men. The play proves this fact because all the male characters are interested in watching what is happening outside, but such tendency is missing in female characters. Here is an example:

Leela: But then – why did he come! (turning to MOHAN) why did you come, knowing something horrible would happen!

Mohan: Oh – but I insisted!

Bhasker: He wanted to see it –

Leela – You *wanted* to see it!

Mohan (unrepentant): Sure! Why not?

Leela (She's not amused): But why! Why see such awful things, unless you must!

Mohan: Well, I was – curious. (15)

The crime is termed as 'exhibitionism' by Bhasker. Exhibitionism is one type of the Paraphilia. It is actually the exposure of one's genitals or sexual organs to strangers. The exhibitionist might fantasize that observer will become sexually aroused. As in the beginning of the paper it is mentioned that the males suffer from paraphiliac disorders and females are victimized by these affected persons. The male characters did not adopt humanistic attitude towards the victim but find the victim as an object which is being used by others and is meant to be used. This is the very reason why they don't let themselves indulge into the act of rescuing the victim or to take some initiative to stop this crime from being taken place. Instead of comprehending their responsibilities to help the suffering woman they prefer to watch it through the window of the apartment. They enjoy the pleasure through the way the goons rape the woman. Therefore, it becomes clear that for them the suffering woman is no more than an object that is being used by the goons to fulfill their lust and simultaneously she acts as an enthralling subject to be discussed upon.

The third scene of the play is completely devoted to the crime. The introductory passage indicates that the subjects are having their supper and all the curtains and windows have been drawn shut in order to resist from the unusual sounds. But still there is suggestion of unmistakable sounds of a woman screaming for help. The sounds are so determined and words like 'let me go', 'help me' are quite distinct. The intensity of screaming is growing

gradually. Leela is the first person who gets acquainted with the sound. Mohan is still adamant to watch it and calls it a “case of sociological concern! A duty!” (30) The time when Naina, Bhasker and Mohan move ahead to the window to watch it, Mohan is the only person who gets engrossed in watching it. His state has been depicted in the italics by the author, “*Mohan remains at the window mesmerized*”. (35)

Apparently this statement suggests that he is in a state of experiencing sexual pleasure from such awful thing. So suggestions of voyeurism are discernible from his temperament. Mohan “mildly exhilarated” (36) turns to Bhasker to precede the negotiation. Earlier they were trying to describe the incident by giving it a religious colour as religion is the most common tool that is used to disguise the extreme nature of any crime. Be it a terrorist activity or murder or even a rape, the cloak of religion can conceal everything in it. The constructionist approach of religion can impart meaning to meaningless phenomenon. Mohan finds a point that if no one is going to help the victim that could be “a religious ceremony! Sacred rites!” (25) Leela wonders over the disgusting sort of religion. Naina too wonders over the psyche of Mohan and refutes to consider it a religious act. All we can conclude from these statements that Mohan uses false excuses to view the incident to experience pleasure secretly. The way he delineates the minuteness of crime by giving it religious colour proves the fact that he is subjected to voyeurism.

In the act of exorcism it is believed that demon possesses a woman and in order to take it out from her body the woman is beaten and the demon comes out from the lower orifice. Here is piece of their conversation revealing the whole fact:

Bhasker: and now ...they're holding her legs apart-

Mohan: one man each leg, spread wide apart...

They both watch in silence, for a few moments, as a fresh bout of screaming starts.

Bhasker: Hmmm. Well, you know, illiterate people believe that

when a demon possesses a woman, it is always via—the—uh
lower orifice— (37)

Therefore the male subjects can be termed as voyeurs in the play. A sharp distinction can be traced between the psyche of a female and male by analysing the whole event. Throughout the play all the female characters yell for victim to be helped and they have clear idea about the crime that it's an act of rape. But all the male characters refute this argument given by them. They deviate from one track to another. They try to put the incident in terms of religion and then they call the victim a whore. Instead of feeling sympathetic for victim they start analysing the whole incident. The female characters seem to identify themselves with the victim as the brutality happening on a female body creates fear in the whole womanhood. But male characters are abstained from this mentality.

Coming to the second text *Kamala*, it does not employ voyeurism apparently. But the press conference scene lets us to analyse it in the light of voyeurism. Voyeurism cannot be

restricted to the sense that someone experiencing sexual pleasure by watching other people indulged in intercourse. *Collins Cobuild* defines voyeurism in the following words:

If you describe someone's behaviour as voyeurism, you disapprove of them because you think they enjoy watching other people's suffering or problems.

Thus, in the play Jai Singh Jadav and other reporters take advantage of the poor condition of the purchased woman who is bound to remain silent and let the reporters just like bidders of flesh market to use her as a source of sensation. Thus, the way the purchased woman Kamala is presented in the press conference and the treatment she is given there is an epitome of what we call the objectification of woman. The key purpose of press conference was to bring out the evil of flesh market system still prevailing in Indian social system but ironically, the purchased woman got the same treatment from the reporters presented in the press conference like the customers who came to purchase women in flesh markets. The practice of sexual politics structures woman's being in society as inferior to man. According to Catherine MacKinnon in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*:

Men treat women as whom they see women as being. Pornography constructs who that is. Men's power over women means that the way men see women defines who women can be, Pornography is that way. (197)

Both Jai Singh Jadav and Jain exhibit the trait of voyeurism in them. Though Jain, comments upon indecency of Jai Singh, but he also targets Kamala by calling her a sensational girl and a heroine. It is important to mention here the position of Kamala at the time she is brought to the house of Jai Singh "A village woman draped in a dirty white sari, her face hidden behind it. She carries a bundle in the crook of her" (7).

The statement makes clear the destitute condition of Kamala. Kamala knowing about her pitiable condition refuses Jai Singh to accompany in press conference. But Jai Singh forces her to visit press conference by befooling her. He calls the press conference a grand reception where people will pay their greetings to her and she will be given a special chair to be seated upon. Kamala asks for a sari from Jai Singh's wife Sarita, but Jai Singh doesn't allow her to give sari to her. He doesn't even let her take a bath. Sarita argues over this statement and says she is a woman and he should take care of the modesty of woman. Instead of considering the fact, Jai Singh roars in fury and scolds Sarita:

JAI SINGH [his voice rising]. I know, I know! You don't have to tell me, understand? I have a very good idea of all that. I want her to look just as she is at the Press Conference. It's very important. (22)

The beginning of Act II indicates that the press conference has come about. Jain with his sarcastic tone taunts Jai Singh and calls him "sala", "rascal" and "maharascal." (27) The description of press conference proves a *tamasha* in actual sense as Jain calls it. None of the reporters, he says that had inkling when he presented madam Kamala. He himself calls the present day journalism a sensational journalism and that sensation is rendered by using

woman as sex object. Jain's tone is pregnant with sheer satire and reality of the press conference. Photographers were looking for the perfect angel to capture her. On one hand, he is comparing Kamala with the contemporary heroines and on the other hand he calls her an illiterate woman who knows nothing except doing what she is commanded. She smiled when she was ordered to smile; she stood up when asked to. Many of the reporters were trying to stare at her through their glasses half filled with liquor. Here is the picture of press conference traced by author and interpreted by Jain:

Bhabhiji, this fellow's heroine knocked Shabana and Smita right out of the game today. Where she is by the way? Seems to have gone inside. What a specimen you found! *Bhabhiji*, she swallowed half the conference just by coming in and sitting down! The photographers were falling over each other to get the right angels. One of them asked her to move her veil and show her face. One even tried to get her to pose hand-in-hand with Jai Singh...(28)

Kamala was asked about her profession as prostitute shamelessly like how many men she slept with? Other questions asked by the reporters present there were so annoying that one cannot help criticizing present day journalism for focusing on sex oriented matter only. They asked her about free sex and if it occurs among them then what they will do with their illegitimate children? Others by asking her about social and economic exploitation of their tribe try to prove her quite an irrational being. The whole description of press conference depicts Kamala as a dehumanized being. Dehumanization often attacks on target's individuality and prevents him/her from showing rationality and basic dispositional qualities. Jai Singh takes pleasure while revealing all these, but Kakasaheb and Sarita both condemn Jai Singh for whatever he has done in the press conference. He calls the shameless questions that were asked from Kamala quite sober and straight forward. "The poverty, sexual harassment and exploitation of Kamala are used as a material by Jai Singh for the sensational journalism. Kamala remains only a mute and silent object, devoid of any independent individual will. Kamala is the representative of the community of oppressed while Sarita feels the bonds of emotional identification." (Agarwal 37) On one hand Jai Singh declares the press conference convincing and successful and on the other hand his comments for Kamala are so derogatory that one cannot resist hating Jai Singh. Jai Singh not even for single moment credits Kamala for his success. He mocks over her and compares her with cannibals.

Andrea Dworkin's masterpiece *Pornography Men Possessing Women* touches the crucial issue regarding woman's status as chattel property in the section "Objects". Andrea at the very beginning of this section puts forward that chattel property is perceived and valued as commodity. She depicts that in the areas of sex and reproduction, chattel status of women is preserved by law and in practice. A married woman is obligated to engage in coitus with her husband. He rather than she, controls access to her body. Thus the commodification of women becomes clear from the above description. She traces a brief history of woman being

raped in USA since from 1973. The right over female body and decisions like abortion are always dominated by male consent. She states:

With this formidable history and ongoing reality of women as sexual property, it is not surprising that men conspicuously view themselves as authentic persons and the others clustered around them, especially their sexual intimates, especially women and children, as objects. (103)

Kamala is written in naturalistic mode by the author. The play is supposed to bring forth the minute facts with decisive impact, and through these minute facts one can easily view the panoramic view of society in which what is known as fundamental rights of equality, freedom, code of conduct, justice are mere words written in constitution, but inapplicable on society. This technique has been excellently employed by Tendulkar when Jai Singh recalls the time spent in flesh market. He dehumanizes Kamala by saying that he spent two hundred and fifty rupees to buy her from flesh market and even a bullock costs more than that. Kamala had no customer and was sitting in a corner in the bazaar with her head down and then Jai Singh made his mind to purchase her. In such postmodern era morality is treated in negative degrees and moral ethics are being valorized by several vices. Jai Singh Jadav minutely reveals the facts about flesh market and he depicts, without any hesitation how women are purchased and how they are examined from their breasts, thighs or waist and also they are young or old, healthy or diseased etc. Such a description is too bold to delineate, but in this way the naturalistic mode of drama becomes more intelligible.

The body of the woman and the institutional body of power comes into collision within the social system. Mass media acts as a medium for social reformation, so it should ensure equal rights for women and it should not represent women as a commodity of men. Women are sexually objectified through various advertisements by demonstrating their nude bodies or in sexually provocative attires. In the beauty pageants the voyeuristic gazes of males openly evaluate women on the basis of their poised body. Therefore, the fact has been proved that the male gaze is absolutely a practice practiced by men in order to claim their supreme entity. Passivity is absolutely not an in-built characteristic in female disposition, but the constant controlling power institutions of social system made to look like that. Voyeurism though a sexual disorder, prominent in men yet it some or other way succeeds in vindicating the oppressive social rules to be applied upon women.

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