



WOMAN OF ARTIST IN TAMASHA IN REFERENCE TO AGAINST ALL ODDS

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ABSTRACT

Kishor Kale's 'Kolhatyache Pore' (1994), a Marathi autobiography translated as 'Against All Odds' (2000) by Sandhya Pande from Marathi into English. It is an account of Tamasha dancer and their helpless condition in Kolhati Community and so called dominant Hindu people. Kolhati family lived on the money earned by the women of their regular practice of dancing and singing in Tamasha party. The women were not given any part of her earning in return. The women were forced to gratify the sexual hunger of the men of dominant class after the performance of a Tamasha at night. These women were treated as a commodity. They were considered as an ignorable part of the community. The man who held the girl of Kolhati as a keep can be terminated their association mostly during their pregnancy or oldness. Such a terminated woman had gone through miserable life. The parents also did not accept these women in their house. Because these women engaged with the person were against the willing of their parents. It is supposed that the engagement of women with any person was loss of earning source of parents in Kolhati community. Actually, these women were loyal to their art of dancing in Tamasha. Yet, they entertained the people through their art of dancing. But the view of the people towards these women are as a prostitute. On one hand the Tamasha dancer tried to survive the art of dancing through their dance in Tamasha party, but they were treated as a prostitute. On the other hand the heroine in Hindi film dance with different heroes and they are awarded and popularized. Thus an injustice with these women of Kolhati community is not only done by their society but also the so called dominant Hindu people.

Key Words: *Tamasha Dancer, Tamasha party, domination, woman as a commodity, injustice with Tamasha dancer*

INTRODUCTION

Kishor Kale's 'Kolhatyache Pore' (1994), a Marathi autobiography translated as 'Against All odds' (2000) by Sandhya Pande from Marathi into English. The memoir narrated the miserable and sorrowful life of tamasha dancer and her illegitimate son in Kolhati community at the hands of their family members and the dominant people in the so called Hindu society.

The *Kolhati* community in Maharashtra was migrated from **Rajasthan**. Basically, they were **acrobats** and **jugglers**. In the course of time this community participated in dancing in Tamasha party. The Tamasha dancer in this community attracted the people by their art of dancing and singing. The traditional performance of tamasha is changed and songs from Hindi films are selected for presentation before the audience. Kolhati women were forced to dance in Tamasha party to attract male attention by their family members.

A ceremony of '**Chira Utarna**' was carried out in Kolhati community with all the trappings of a wedding. The dominant man used to select a girl in kolhati community through auction for her virginity. The person paid maximum amount had the right to perform the ceremony called 'Chira Utarna' with a girl. The age differences of the person and the girl were not taken into consideration. The parents of the girl had no objection of such activity. Even they supported their daughter and sister to involve in such illicit relationship with different men.

Sometimes these women were abandoned by her supposed owner. As a result she had to go through miserable life and rejoined a Tamasha party for the force of her father and brother. It was obligatory to her to earn money to survive her family. The male of her family were completely dependent on the money earned by these women. The men of Kolhati community supposed any labour below their dignity and status. R. S. Jain rightly observed the attitude of Kolhati parents and society towards women of Kolhati as,

“Girls born in Kolhati community were treated as a public property for entertainment and sexual appeasement by the male in the society. Their parents looked at them as unfailing source of income.”(Jain 57)

Kolhati family lived on the money earned by the women of their regular practice of dancing and singing in Tamasha party. The women were not given any part of her earning in return. The women could not refuse the proposal of dance in Tamasha party. Because it was obligatory for these women to perform dance and earn money. To break the order of their parents was declared misbehavior on her part. She was frequently punished severally for her denial of the order of their parents. Yet, the women were lodged to gratify the sexual hunger of the men of dominant class after the performance of a tamasha at night. The major part of their earning went to the party owner and whatever remained was claimed by their parents.

Kishor Kale became restless while observing the helpless condition of the woman in Kolhati community. He also felt disgraceful and low on the part of male in Kolhati community. Therefore, he was surprised and blamed to see the relation between parents and their daughters. Kale reacted against such inhuman relation between parents and daughter as

“What kind of relationship was this I wondered? And why, why did nobody oppose it?” (Kale 64)

Birth of a Kolhati girl was supposed as an auspicious occasion in this community. These girls of Kolhati community were recognized as a source of income. On the other hand, the birth of a male child was thought as an inauspicious incident. An unlucky new born male child was ill-treated by their mother as well as the family members. Kishor in the present work is victimized as an illegitimate child and exploited by his parents.

The male member of the family involved in luxurious life on the earning of their daughter and sister. They considered any labour below their dignity and status. They engaged in drinking, gambling, prostitution and consumption on the income source of their daughters and sisters. There was none of its sanctity for their girls and sisters in Kolhati community. Kishor's Grandfather had six daughters. These daughters were not taken care for their education, marriage and livelihood. Even these girls were forced to indulge in illicit activities by the Grandfather. The Kolhati women were harassed and exploited by their family members as well as the dominant people in the society.

Shanta is a dominant character narrated in the present work. She is a collective voice of Tamasha dancer in Kolhati community. There were many Tamasha dancers who had gone through miserable and sorrowful life. Shanta is one of the suppressed voices of the Tamasha dancers. She is the eldest daughter of **Kondiba** kolhati. He laid a devious plan and instead of Shanta, he managed to marry another daughter Shalan with the groom who was selected for Shanta by her grandfather **Krushna** kolhati. The reason behind the devious plan of Kondiba was prefixed. Shanta was pretty whereas Shalan was dark and plain. Kondiba thought as a dancer, Shalan could never have attracted men and money the way Shanta would. Such a selfish purpose of a father in Kolhati community was frequently observed for their wellbeing

Kondiba pulled Shanta out of school when she passed the seventh class and sent her off to learn dancing. Shanta was sent off to **Chandrakalabai's Tamashaparty** to learn dancing and singing. The tamasha group used to travel to villages and town putting up shows. They had not a roof to sleep under. The Tamasha dancers were humiliated by the young men. The tragedy occurred with the Tamasha dancers though they were loyal to their family and owner. The dominant village people looked at them as an object of sexual pleasure. The women were sexually harassed by corrupt people of the village.

Shanta was working in the dance party of Chandrakalabai. Suddenly the dance party broke up and she returned home. Kondiba, father of Shanta became unhappy to see her in home. She explained her troubles and miseries to his father so that he can understand her sorrows and sufferings. She begged him to allow her to go back to school. But he thought her daughter only as a source of earning money. Her father did not understand her tender feelings and dreams. Instead he managed to marry Shanta with **Namdeorao Jagtap** who was the **MLA** from Karmala district. Kondiba's selfish purpose behind keeping Shanta at his home in bargain with Namdeorao Jagtap is clear. He knew that once a man is tired of his mistress, he

would ill-treat her or abandon her, beside, if the girl stayed home, the money would pour into her father's pockets. Thus Shanta was given to Namdeorao Jagtap with all the ceremony of 'Chira Utarna', the Kolhati ritual of selling a virgin girl.

A few months later Shanta got pregnant. Jagtap wanted to take her away to Karmala from Nerla. Jagtap and Shanta belonged to Karmala and Nerla respectively. He asked Shanta to live with him at Karmala. But Kondiba refused the proposal of Jagtap. He remembered that the men who kept Kolhati women as mistresses were usually rich and their family members did not like money being spent on these women either. The supposed mistresses did not claim the property of dead rich fellow. These women were killed or sold off to other men to avoid any claimant to the property of these dominant rich people. So Kondiba was not willing to send Shanta with Jagtap at Karmala. Shanta was pregnant with the contact of Namdeorao Jagtap. Kondiba wanted to abort the child from her womb. He did not want to grow the child in Shanta's womb. He knew that a dancer with a baby did get less importance. The corrupt nature of Kondiba is oftenly observed in the case of her own daughter. He no more thought of her daughter as a human being rather treated her like an animal. Shanta had to dance even in her pregnancy. A struggle of Shanta is narrated by Kishor as:

So, Shanta continued to dance through her pregnancy. She toiled all night and traveled from place to place in bumpy bullock carts until she was eight months pregnant, when her ninth month began, she returned to Nerla, where I was born. (Kale 17)

Tamasha dancer had no time to look after their children. Shanta was singing and dancing on stage throughout the night. She had no time to feed her own children. A Tamasha dancer had to struggle a lot with her small child in Kolhati community. They were often ill-treated by the villagers, drunken spectators. They frequently hurled and abused. These women were threatened and molested wherever they went. Sometime they were hidden in fear of molestation and humiliation by the dominant people of the village.

Shanta was disgusted with the performances in Tamasha party. So she begged Kondiba to allow her to enter their house instead of going back to Tamasha party. Kondiba ignored the request of Shanta and beat her. Yet he decided that his younger daughter Susheela should also be trained to dance in tamasha. Once again Shanta and Susheela, an aunt of Kishor were forced to join *Andharya's JalsaParty*. They reached Dharur and **Shanta** met **Dharurkar**. Dharurkar proposed Shanta by offering her much money. As a result Shanta accepted the proposal of Dharurkar and returned home. Dharurkar used to meet Shanta once in a week at Nerla and provided all the money to Kondiba to run his household. Shanta bore a son named **Deepak** from Dharurkar. Unfortunately Dharurkar died soon and once again Shantabai was left alone. The harassment of women in Kolhati community was a common thing observed in the present memoir.

Shanta and Susheela had to leave Nerla and joined **Neelabai's group** for dancing and singing. It was regular with tamasha dancer to join tamasha party after their discontinuation of love affair with their previous owner. They danced first time in a proper theatre at Selu. Due to theatre Jalsa party the women no longer had to travel from place to place. There were contracts between Tamasha party and the theatre owner to perform there for six month or a year. The Tamasha dancers were exploited by the different groups in the society. Theatre owner had to be given half the money earned from the performances by the dancers.

Kondiba as the irresponsible father never thought her daughter to be happy and prosperous. He used her daughter for his bread and butter and luxurious life. He never thought of the settled life for her daughter. **Susheela**, the next daughter of Kondiba was stable and happy. She lived a dignified life with **Sopanrao Golegaonkar**. Her settled life was also disturbed. Both Shanta and Susheela lost every hope for settled and secure life. Actually there were no any options before them to break the dancing. They were popular due to their devotion in Tamasha party. There were many offers to them

Shanta was always loyal to the person whom she supposed as a husband. But she had got bad experiences with the every new person. The accepted person as a husband used to visit Shanta for a few days and later she was discarded like a worn-out piece of clothing. Shanta was disgusted with the persons who claimed of her security. So she believed again in regular practice of dancing and singing in Tamasha party:

“Come here if you appreciate my art's, she said to all of them. But if you want to stop me from singing and dancing, then please stay away.”(29)

The Tamasha dancers were subjugated and victimized by their parents as well as the dominant people of the society. The women of Kolhati were treated brutally in the hands of their father and brother. The parents never bothered about the future of their daughter and sister. The present work narrated the helpless and pathetic condition of Tamasha dancer in Kolhati community. These women never thought of their peaceful and settled life with their husbands. They were far away from their happy and prosperous life in the Kolhati community. These women were earning for their parents prosperity and happiness. Sometimes these women were offered money and sold by the dominant people and engaged with them. In the course of time these women were abandoned with different reasons.

Here the Tamasha dancers were misused not only by their parents but also the dominant rich people. The rich people satisfied their sexual hunger with these dancers by persuading with the charming talk and left them in worst condition. These people were equally responsible for the tragedy of Tamasha dancers. It is rightly stated:

In many cases, these Dalit women had to satisfy the lust of several landlords in their life-time and therefore they could not name the real fathers of their children. They had no economic security and led miserable. Ironically, the society looked down upon them as prostitutes. (Kumar 186)

Krushnarao Wadkar was continuously persisting on **Shanta**. He even threatened to poison himself if she didn't agree to live with him. Meanwhile, the life of Shanta had been made miserable by her father Kondiba. At last Shanta believed in Krushnarao Wadkar and handed over her life to him. Shanta was twice abandoned by her respective owners Namdeorao Jagtap and Dharurkar previously. She was frequently victimized by her owners and also her father Kondiba. Now she was firm to live with Krushnarao Wadkar as a loyal wife. The tamasha dancers were always loyal to her proposed husbands. Once they were engaged with somebody as a wife then they never looked at others. Shanta as a tamasha dancer accepted Krushnarao Wadkar as husband with love and devotion. She was now a wife and intended to remain completely loyal to her man. Apart from Kolhati women, a devotional wife would be rarely found in other cultured society.

Shanta began her new life with Krushnarao Wadkar joyfully. She did not allow Kishor with her at Sonpeth. Yet, she was taken away from her own son. Here the son and the mother are separated from each other. Shanta lived her life full of miseries and sorrows. She lost her every kind of happiness. She didn't want to exploit her life here after. So she preferred to live with Krushnarao Wadkar as a wife at any cost. She realized her miserable life in Tamasha party. Now she did not want to exploit her life. Susheela Maushi came to know the condition of Kishor and Deepak, the son of Shanta at Nerla. As a mother she could not bear the sorrow of Deepak and Kishor who were taken away from Shanta. She commented on the miserable and helpless condition of Kolhati dancer without their children:

“Has a woman no right to her own life? Is the only aim of our lives to provide a livelihood for our fathers and brothers? It is a sin to be born a beautiful woman in a Kolhati family’, she decided.” (Kale 43-44)

The women in Kolhati community were dishonored and tortured in their every sphere of life. Actually she contributed in the welfare of every partner. She gave every support to the men who came into her life. Shanta was one of the representatives of Tamasha dancers who faced every kind of challenges. There were several Kolhati women exploited and subjugated wherever they went. Shanta came to the decision to jump into the river to end her life in her state of trouble and despair.

To be born beautiful in Kolhati community was worst on the part of women. These women were gone through unjust and unlawful life. The life of Tamasha dancer was in critical condition in their every sphere of life. **Nili** was a friend of Baby, an aunt of Kishor. She was madly in love with the young college boy named **Mukesh**. But Nili's aunt did not allow them

to meet because Mukesh had no money. Nili's aunt forced her to accept her Chira owner who was rich. He was about forty-five years old. Nili was pretty and young and only seventeen. Now Nili refused to talk to Mukesh, but he still used to come to see her. At last Nili wrote a letter and made him to accept a good girl who would be a care taker of him. These kolhati dancers had no right to choose their own life partners and settle their life with them. Nili as a Tamasha dancer stated her own feeling against the society which had created barrier in her life:

"We are dancing girls, she wrote, we belong to everybody. We have no right to fall in love with any one man. If we do, then we must kill that love, otherwise our society won't let us live." (Kale 57)

Kishor was in **XII** class in **Ambajogai**. Ramba was an aunt of Kishor who came to Ambejogai with her Jalsa party. Kishor did not want to reveal his relation with Ramba. He felt low to identify his relation with Ramba whenever he interacted with her. Rambha Mausi replied Kishor thoughtfully:

Arey, before a tamasha dancer knows why her chest must be covered by the pallu, somebody has filled her breasts with milk under the guise of Chira. Isn't that an insult? For two rupees we are expected to sit on man's slap –isn't that an insult? Don't forget the few rupees we get for allowing a man to hold and press our hand is what pays for the food in our house. Only a rare one like you gets educated. And even you feel ashamed of us. Isn't that an insult to us?" (Kale 152)

Yet, she attacked the tendency of modern man. She advocated that Kolhati dancer were devotional to their art. She was completely loyal to her duty. But these Tamasha dancers who followed their traditional art of dancing in the form of Jalsa party were severely blamed and humiliated. It is also criticized on the profession of dancing which is ultimately converted into the practice of prostitution. They danced only for their bread and butter. On the other hand the heroines in modern theatre exposed their body were awarded and praised. Such contrast in situation is observed in the conversation of Rambha Maushi with Kishor as:

Kisrya, kolhati women only dance and dancing is our business and our art. But these days all kinds of women indulge in blatant prostitution under the guise of dancing. If our pallu slips even a few inches off our chest, it causes a commotion. But heroines in movies dance with bodies exposed, with a different hero each time and it is called art. They go to Delhi and win award for it. It is all a joke played on us by shameless people. (Kale 152)

Susheela Mausi revealed a cruel life of women in tamasha party. The Tamasha dancer lost her every hope and settlement of life in the profession of Tamasha party. Susheela Maushi

had finally realised that her brothers and fathers were only interested in the money she earned, not in her welfare. Now she was inclined to live like her elder sister Shanta who was living with Krushnarao Wadkar as a loyal wife. She expressed her feeling to Kishor: "I don't want anything; I just want to live like your mother" (168)

Once **Baby**, an aunt of Kishor was in the state of deep distress because her son was ill with high fever. But it was time for the show to begin, so she tied her ghungroos round her ankle and went on to the stage. The party had forty five minutes to put up their show and for every minute of the time, Baby ran up and down the stage collecting money. She was giddy, her ghungroos bit into her skin as the pad of cloth under them had slipped and made it bleed, but she danced as if possessed. She danced in such critical condition to take her son to the hospital. Hambirrao Patil helped Baby Maushi to take her child to hospital. She was impressed with Hambirrao Patil and intended to live with him. By the way she was fed up with tamasha and dancing. She also preferred to live a dignified life as a wife of Hambirrao Patil. So she said,

"Even if I go hungry I don't mind, but I want to live a life of some dignity" (171)

The woman narrated in the present work prefers to live married and settled life with their children and husband. They also want to live dignified life with new partner. But it was illusion for them. They had to go through torture and humiliation with their new partner. They were also not supported by their parents in their helpless condition. There is only torture and subjugation in the life of Tamasha dancer in Kolhati Community.

Shobha, another aunt of Kishor, was a beautiful dancer in Kolhati community. She was participated in tamasha party at Parali. She was self-asserted and independent minded. She interacted with the person she liked, whether he paid or not. She also refused to send money to her parents regularly. The parents were furious with her nature and scolded her many times. Shobha fell in love with a person whom she liked very much. She didn't bother whether her lover paid her or not. The narrator presented the helpless condition of Kolhati women as

***"To fall in love is the worst crime a kolhati woman can commit because falling in love means breaking bonds with the parents, taking an independent course of action. Kolhati parents cannot allow their earning daughter leave them for any other man. Because she is their source of income."* (Kale 172-73)**

The parents of Kolhati women did not allow their women to live with any other men. It was loss of money in the departure of their women. Thus the women of this community were misused purposefully.

Jiji was also the woman of Kolhati community. She was exploited by her brother from beginning to end. Once, Kishor came to know almost the critical condition of Jiji Nerla. So he visited at Nerla to take Jiji to admit her in a Bombay hospital. But Jiji refused to go with Kishor. She was completely influenced by the thoughts of her brother. Kishor narrated the helpless condition of every Tamasha dancers who was influenced by their brother and father. They were not ready to come out from their state of slavery lodged by their parents. Kishor Kale realized the mentality of Tamasha dancer and tried to come out them from their world of frustration and sorrow.

The Tamasha dancer were treated as a commodity in Kolhati Community. They were considered as an ignorable part of the society. The man who held the girl of Kolhati as a keep can be terminated their association mostly during their pregnancy or oldness. Such a terminated woman had gone through miserable life. These women did not have any hope for better life. The parents also did not accept these women in their house. Because these women engaged with the person were against the willing of their parents. It is supposed that the engagement of women with any person was loss of earning source of parents in Kolhati community. Thus these women lost their youth, beauty, hope and relatives from their life.

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