

## SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS OF MIRA NAIR'S FILM – KAMASUTRA: A TALE OF LOVE

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### *Abstract*

*Love and love making is natural to all human beings. Yet it is considered as a taboo to discuss about the modes of love making in the families. In traditional Indian social set up it has been considered as a forbidden topic. Even falling in love in bachelorhood is deemed as a stigma at the white sheet of parental dignity and honor. Depiction of such themes in Indian films is just forbidden. But Mira Nair has been bold enough to take up this theme in her film Kamasutra. The film conveys the idea that chaste love is above all filthy thoughts. It cannot be confined to seeking erotic physical pleasures. Infact there is a yawning gap between love and sex. This research paper tries to study the depiction of this forbidden topic. Efforts have been made to discuss the thematic and cinematic aspects of film making.*

**Keywords:** *Love, Taboo, Erotic, Forbidden, Kamasutra.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Mira Nair is known as a bold film maker who does not step back in taking up forbidden topics in her films. That is precisely why she invites criticism from the people who belong to traditional school of thought. But one must confess that her depiction of forbidden issues is never vulgar. Even though this film is based on depicting the physical pleasures of life and revolves round the theme of sexual appetency and prostitution, yet it is far from being erotic. Kamasutra is a film that depicts love and ways and means of doing it in different ways. Love is in the air and, alpha and omega of life. Rasa Devi teaches lessons of love to women to make them courtesans whose only essence and purpose of life is to satisfy the physical desires of men folk. They are duty bound to the sexual yearnings of men. Cutting across the societal boundaries men belonging to different strata of society yearn for physical pleasures of life. She teaches them different positions of sexual intercourse and how to seduce their lovers and masters. Kamasutra also depicts women as an object for men.

### **THEME**

The main theme of the film is sexual appetency. King Raj Singh has an unsatiated sex appetite for women. Another theme in the film is prostitution. Male protagonists treat women as an object for their enjoyment and think they can purchase them whenever they need for their sexual design. Jai Kumar, a sculptor, too, has sexual desires for women. He sleeps with Maya though he initially hesitates to accept her love signals and wants to remain independent. Some scenes of brothel underline the miserable condition of women in that era. Women are regarded nothing but sex dolls. Schandfreude is another theme of the movie. Tara feels pleasure and joy to harass Maya in every possible way. She has low emotional intensity towards Maya though they both are born and brought

up together. She adopts devil-may-care approach towards her. Humiliation is another theme that is depicted in the film. Raj Singh always humiliates Tara for not being a perfect wife. He treats Tara as a sex object and at the same time humiliates her during sexual intercourse. He also humiliates Tara's brother for being a humpback and goes to the extent of calling him a gay.

### PLOT

The film is about two friends Tara (Sarita Chaudhary) and Maya (Indira Varma) who dwell in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Plot is based on the short story 'Utran' written by Wajida Tabasum. Tara is a princess and Maya is the child of a servant. Maya always feels bad as she has to wear the old clothes of Tara. Tara gets married to King Raj Singh (Naveen Andrews) but Maya sleeps with her husband before their marriage. She tells Tara that now she has to live with her second-hand husband. But soon Tara's brother Biki (Khalid Tyabji), the king comes to know about this. He tells the entire incident to his mother. He reveals the illicit relation of Maya with Raj and publically declares Maya as a whore. As a consequence Maya is thrown out of Tara's Palace. She meets Jay Kumar (Ramon Tikaram), a sculptor when she is wandering here and there out of the Palace. Jay Kumar takes Maya along with him to meet Rasa Devi (Rekha) so as to have stay arrangements in her home. Maya proposes Jay Kumar but he denies her proposal by saying that he cannot accept her as it affects his work. After the rejection, Rasa Devi teaches her lessons on Kamasutra to become a courtesan. Maya learns tricks of Kamasutra from Rasa Devi. She also tells her the difference between true love and sexual desires. Later on Maya promises Tara to teach how to seduce her husband and requests her to save Jay Kumar from King Raj Singh and reunite with her childhood friend. Maya then teaches Tara how to seduce the King. Tara promises to help Maya so that she can meet Jay Kumar. King Raj Singh insults Biki, his brother-in-law (King and brother of Tara) when he visits his Palace by calling him a humpback. Biki gets furious and sends a message to Shah, the enemy of Raj Singh to join hands with him for the welfare of the subjects of Raj Singh. Meanwhile Shah sends a message to Raj Singh in a box along with the half chopped head of Wajeer and enters his palace with his troops. Now Raj Singh asks Tara to help and comfort him. On the other side Jay has to lose his life and he is throttled by an elephant. It is a punishment for him to love Maya

### CODE, SIGNS & SYMBOLS

The film beautifully depicts palace, rocks, sand, waterfalls, vessels, calligraphy and flowers to give film an ancient and majestic outlook. Tara spitting at the face of Maya in front of Raj Singh during their wedding symbolizes jealousy and anger. Jay Kumar touching Maya with flowers shows his love for her. Difference between the clothes of Tara and Maya symbolizes their status and dignity. Parrot in a cage symbolizes the plight of Tara in the palace. Lamp and lightning in the King's Palace symbolizes grace and beauty of courtesans. Daggers, swords, spears etc. all are signs of war and destruction and at the same time necessary to maintain the dignity and valor of the King. Jay symbolizes passion for his work whereas Raj Singh symbolizes pleasure and power for unproductive work. Different postures of sexual intercourse symbolize different ways of having pleasure. The ways of love making are different by different characters. Maya and Tara have their distinct styles of love making. Riding on elephant is a symbol of strength and power of King Raj Singh. Having camels, horses and cresset are signs of affluent life style. On the other side grazing of goat, sheep, cows and buffalos, houses made up of mud and worshipping tree in a village symbolizes a normal and poor life. Peacock wings, narghile, plate full of dry fruits, betel nut, army, umbrella, huge handmade fans, long red color flags all are symbols of richness and luxurious life. Hammer is a sign of construction. Jay

Kumar builds various statues for Raj Singh depicting different act of Kamasutra with hammer and nails.

### **CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Cinematography of the film is done by Declan Quinn. He uses various camera shots to arouse the emotions of the characters on the screen. In the conversation between Tara and Maya he uses close-up shot and long shot. Pan and low angle camera is used when Maya is running on the roof of the palace to watch Rasa Devi to see how she teaches lessons of love to Tara. Close Up shot depicts how Rasa Devi teaches Tara pleasure of love by touching her toes and feet. Wide shot, full shot and medium shots depict the marriage ceremony of Tara and Raj. Some extreme close up shots are used when Tara and Maya are dancing specially to show 'eyes', 'finger' and 'toes' movements, to show the statues of different sex postures sculpted by Jai Kumar, to depict intimate scenes between Jai and Maya and those of Raj and Maya etc. Zoom in and Close-Up is used when Tara departs from her family after marriage. Eye level shot is used when Maya says to Tara that she has to use something belongs to herself which she has used first. When Maya leaves the home, he uses zoom-in and over the shoulder shot jointly to depict her sadness and loudness of the children running towards her. Over-the-shoulder is shot also used when Tara and Maya talk in a brothel about Raj Singh. Full-shot depicting Maya in white pearl attire is used when Raj Singh says Jay Kumar to carve her statue on the wall of his Palace roof. Over all there is not much variety of shots but the shots depict different moods of the film amicably and successfully.

### **MESSAGE**

The film conveys the message that love making is an art. It is much more than seeking physical pleasures. Various postures may provide variety in love making but true love has nothing to do with absurdities. Chaste love is above all these filthy thoughts. It cannot be confined to seeking erotic physical pleasures. Infact there is a yawning gap between love and sex. Kamasutra is about love making, it has nothing to do with ways and means of sex. The film gives a message that rejection, jealousy, humiliation can make a man selfish and a volatile person can do anything harmful to others. Film gives a message that everyone must be treated equally because discrimination on any ground may harm others to a large extent. Film depicts that men folk are more interested in physical side of love and give importance to postures of love making whole women yearn for mental satisfaction. Men are pleasure seekers and women are interested in attaining and providing highest quality of chaste love. Failures in love making or erotic pleasures may lead to humiliation, jealousy and hostility. The flames of jealousy in turn, reduce everything to the raves and burn the innermost qualities of the person.

### **CONCLUSION**

The above discussion stands as witness that Mira Nair has succeeded in depicting the physical side of love making without any vulgarity. It may have been a taboo to discuss these feelings in the family but one must confess that love making is an art. Even falling in love needs chaste feelings. Love is chaste. It is never vulgar. Those who consider it as a means of seeking and satiating sexual pleasures are awfully wrong. They do not know the concept of love. The film underlines the fact that love making is a fundamental human need that cannot be suppressed for long. Unsatiated desires lead to depression. To sum up it can be said that the cinematography of this film based on bold theme is just fantastic and goes on to suggest that wonderful films can be made on forbidden themes.

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