

RESEARCH ARTICLE



SUBJUGATION OF WOMAN IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S 'SILENCE ! THE COURT IS IN SESSION'

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is undeniably a great Indian playwright and is known for his multifaceted creative genius. Though his forte is the vernacular Marathi, but the versions of his plays in English have mesmerized and stunned the audience at large. His main strength emerges from his adherence to typically Indian, especially Hindu problems which are deeply rooted in the Indian socio-cultural ethos.

'Silence ! The court is in Session', is one of the well acclaimed plays of Vijay Tendulkar. The play explores the tale of Miss. Benare's illicit relation with Prof. Damle. Tendulkar exposes the condition of women of the middle class family in Indian context. He exhibits how women in our society are victimized, suffered, tortured and exploited. The purpose of this research paper is to study the subjugation of woman in 'Silence ! The court is in session'.

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Vijay Tendulkar is one of the prominent Indian playwrights. He has powerfully articulated the socio-political situations in his plays. He emerged as a rebel against the established values of a fundamentally orthodox society with the production of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session) in 1967. The play was originally written in Marathi and later translated into English by Priya Adarkar. In it, Tendulkar has depicted the plight of a young woman who is betrayed by the male-dominated society. A traditional male-dominated society cannot relinquish its paralysed values and customs. The society does not want the change to come. It is a bitter satire against the social ills and an attempt to criticize the follies that prevail in our society. The purpose of this research paper is to study the

subjugation of woman in *Silence! The court is in session*.

In the play, 'Silence! The court is in session' with three acts Tendulkar introduces a theatre group called 'The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association'. In it we find a group of teachers who were planning to stage a play in a village. It so turned out that one of the members of the cast did not show up. A local stagehand was asked to replace him. A rehearsal was arranged and a mock trial was staged to make him understand the court procedure. A mock charge of infanticide was leveled against Miss. Benare one of the members of the cast. Then the pretend play or game suddenly turned into a grim charge and it emerged from the witness that Miss. Benare did kill an illegitimate child by Prof. Damle, the missing member of the cast. Miss. Benare is

cross examined in the court with full mockery by the male vultures around her. Witness after witness, charge upon charge is heaped upon her and in this way her private life is exposed.

Tendulkar in this play portrays how a young woman is made a victim to conventions and shameful hypocrisy of the middle-class male dominated society. Miss. Leela Benare, the heroine of the play is an educated woman of about 34 years. She is a school teacher by profession. She loves life and is full of spirits. She feels that her life is her own and no one has got the right to interfere with it – “My life is my own. I haven’t sold it to anyone for a job.” Miss. Benare has gone through a very difficult phase in her life. She exposes the hypocrisy of some men who uprooted her plant of life. She tells how she was deflowered by her own maternal uncle at the age of fourteen :

“Why, I was hardly fourteen! I didn’t even know what sin was – I swear by my mother, I didn’t! I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful, lovely dreams openly. Like anyone else! But all of them my mother too – were against it. And my brave man turned tail and ran.”

After this traumatic experience, she wanted to suicide but she didn’t. She searched for an identity of her own in an entirely adverse society where men have little love for women; where men are hungry for the bodily pleasures of women. In spite of her previous error, once again she falls in love with Prof. Damle, whom she worships as a God. But he too takes the offering of her body and turns his back to her. This dissertation and humiliation is unbearable to a forsaken woman. In the court, Miss. Benare’s crimes of infanticide and illegitimate motherhood is established by the prosecution as crime against society. The mock trial holds a mirror to our social response to moral values. Sex is a private affair in one’s life, but there are certain social and moral values attached to it. Pre-marital or post marital sexual relations are condemned in Indian society. The social rules in practice are more strict for women than for men. Tendulkar throws light on the hypocrisy of the society that excuses men and women for the same offence. Benare’s maternal uncle no where appears as an accused of committing incest with her. Similarly Prof. Damle is merely a witness in the trial

of the case. Where as Benare is an accused of the society of law. We also see that the real enemy of a suffering woman in society is not only the social taboos, customs, rites and male chauvinism, but also the indifferent and cold treatment of a woman towards a woman. Benare’s mother turns a deaf ear to her while Mrs. Kashikar, one of the members of the play executes physical violence to drag her to the dock. She has damaging views against her and does not hesitate to say that these young unmarried girls get everything without marrying. She shows her doubt, how can Benare remain unmarried till the age of thirty-four?”

It is interesting to note here that Mrs. Kashikar represents here a traditional housewife who has nothing to do with the progressive and modern attitude of a young girl in the modern scientific world. She thinks that her whole life is the family in which she is brought up and for which happiness she had to lead a future life. But on the other hand, Benare represents a progressive and educative life. She wants to come out of the clutches of a patriarchal domination. The character of Ms. Benare reminds us of the different characters depicted by the women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De in their works. These writers also exposed the sufferings of the women at the hands of the male dominating society. Except the protagonist of the play, almost all the other characters are suffering from sadism and inferiority complex. Sukhatme is a flop lawyer, Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar has no issues, they are childless. Ponshe is an interfailed scientist. So far as Karnik is concerned, he is failed actor. The same is the case with Rokde too, who failed to gain an independent existence. In other words, they have no identity of their own. Somehow or the other they live in a city by organizing a theatre group dedicated to the ideals and norms of society.

In ‘Silence! The court is in session’ Vijay Tendulkar chooses a term of the judicial register as the title of his play to make a powerful command on society with a heavy patriarchal bias that makes justice impossible. A judicial court is supposed to be a seat of justice, seriousness and decorum. Throughout this play, Tendulkar also makes a review of the present day court procedures, and

points out the problem of the degradation of the court. The role of the judge in this play is itself – ironic. A judge is generally free from prejudice and whimsical uttering. But here the case is just otherwise. The judgement itself seems more absurd. Mr. Kashikar says to Benare :

“The crime you have committed are most terrible. There is no forgiveness for them ... no momento of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.”

Benare breaks down during the mock-trial because the story of the character in the play she is performing a the mock-trial is identical to her own. She is psychologically harassed but still starves to search for her existence. She has a great patience to suffer. She is the embodiment of innocence and compassion. Though she is victimized at every step, she has done harm to none. If she did harm to anybody, it is her own self. The plight and plunder of a helpless woman has been best expressed in the play.

Most of the Tendulkar’s plays have had their origin in his own personal experience. He has always been controversial because he has always been contemporary in his concerns, both social, political and theatrical. All his plays deal with the oppression of the weak by the powerful. He treats his female characters with understanding and compassion. He exhibits how women in our society are victimized, suffered, tortured and exploited. He clearly states that in many areas of the country, the rights of women are infringed, women are exploited emotionally, socially and physically. ‘Silence! The court is in session’, is a naturalistic play. It makes a cross section of a middle class society fraught with frustrations, repressed desires, spiteful attitude, and lust for life.

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