

Gender Dysphoria and Victimization of Women in

Vijay Tendulkar's

Silence! The Court is in Session

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar has effectively described contemporary social problems against women in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Contemporary educated women are rebuffed their individuality and freedom in India. If a woman commits mistake, the patriarchal society tries to portray that woman as a characterless and considered them as a contaminated object in the society. In crime, women are exploited, harassed, abused and victimized by male dominated society. Woman has to play her stereotypical role as a mother, daughter and wife mere than she is nothing in this society. If she tries to lead her individual life with her own wishes she will be accused and charged for her struggles. Patriarchal society condemns the chastity of a woman if she stands out from the usual women. This paper deals with oscillation of woman and struggles of educated women.

Key words: victim become offenders, male domination, mock trial, social inequality

The major themes of contemporary Indian drama is the depiction of marginalization, caste system, gender discrimination, male domination, oppression of women, poverty and hunger. The social criticism, corruption, oppression, gender discrimination can be found in dramas of earlier times, but they do not appear in

a pronounced manner with different techniques in the works of the contemporary dramatists. Nowadays Indian plays focus current scenario of social issues and the problems of everyday life.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) also exhibits the concurrent social issues and the problems in his plays. He is also a movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator primarily in Marathi. He has written twenty seven full length plays. Most of his plays are translated and performed in many Indian languages. Tendulkar is basically famous for his plays *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Constable Ghasiram* and *Sakharam the Binder*. *Silence! The Court is in Session* received the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya award. For his writing, he gets inspiration from real-life incidents or social problems. As his plays focus on the real life problems, he is considered as a social critic. Smita Paul writes about Tendulkar's plays thus:

The women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergo a series of sufferings and tortures as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. In the male - dominated theatre-world they are constantly being 'other-ed'. In *Silence! The Court is in Session* the focal point of interest lies in the struggle between women like Benare and her antagonists headed by the orthodox Kashikar and his associates. (34).

This drama revolves around the character Miss. Leela Benare. She is an educated woman and a teacher by profession. She is one of the members in Sonar Moti Tenement Association in Bombay. It stages dramas often for the insight of the people. In this drama this association moves to a village to amuse people. During the rehearsal, initially the members of the troop want to enact a mock trial of President Johnson who has produced atomic weapons. But finally they plan to stage new mock trial. For this purpose, they use Leela Benare as a scapegoat. The whole troop with no second opinion decides to accuse Benare in mock trial. The co-actors interweave her personal life incidents and accuse her as an immoral woman. She is charged under section 302, crime of infanticide. Her troop members try to accuse her as a sole responsibility for her pregnancy before marriage. She is confused and shocked about everything. It is a mock trial but her troop members used her personal life issues.

Throughout the trial Benare is condemned for her situation but Mr. Damle, the one responsible for her condition does not feel ashamed for his own mistake. Mr. Damle is married and father of five children is

unquestionable for his mistake in this society. He loves for her sex not for her love and concern, so he impregnates Benare and deserts her. This mock trial ends with the judgment of infanticide which Benare could not accept even as a mock judgment. In this drama, Benare in her childhood had a love relationship with her maternal uncle. She accepts this accusation and tries to explain that her mother never accepted her love affair and also her uncle denied to marry her. Her uncle praises her and misleads her to a social crime of incest. She admits thus:

It's true, I did commit a sin. I was in love with my mother's brother... But in our strict house, in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. He praised my bloom every day. He gave me love . . . if he was your uncle, it was a sin! Why, I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was . . . I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dream openly. . . I swear by my mother. . . my brave man turned tail and ran. (117)

But the court remain shows silence for all her objections. Next she had relationship with Prof. Damle, but it shattered after her pregnancy, he betrayed her. She confesses that "It isn't love at all... it is worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered my body on the altar of my worship. And intellectual God took her offering... and took his way" (118). She further adds pathetically that "He wasn't God. He was a man for whom everything was of the body, for the body that's all" (118). Though it is evident that Benare worshiped her love. Even after undergoing the betrayal she stands firm only for the child she carries, not minding the criticism. Her search for a man is not for herself but for the sake of her child unborn. The mock trial ends with cruel judgment of infanticide. As a mother of her unborn child, Benare cries but none comes forward to console her. This judgment confirms that the legal system is always inactive for women. The law acts lethargically for the mistakes of men in this male chauvinistic society.

While speaking with Samant, she thinks about the investigation of school management which is to be conducted on the next day. She is a good teacher but they are going to throw her out from their school for her trait. She explains to Samant thus:

But what can they do to me? What can they do? However hard they try, what can they do? They're holding an enquiry, if you please! But my teaching's prefect. I've put my whole life into it – I've worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slander, what can they do to me? Throw me out? Let them! I haven't hurt anyone. Anyone at all! If I've hurt anybody, it's been myself. But is that any kind of reason for throwing me out? Who are these people to say what I can or can't do? My life is my own – I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those -- no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life! I'll decide" [Unconsciously, her hand is on her stomach. She suddenly stops.] (58)

These words of Benare remind the term “new women”. It is her own life, she has the authority to do whatever she wants to do in her life. The school management decides to dismiss her because she gets pregnant before her marriage. In 1990s women don't have rights to do anything. Women were separated in their own house and treated as secondary citizens. They are isolated, suppressed, tortured within the four walls. Their wishes, dreams and goals are locked within the walls of tradition. Those women have no identity in this society. Even their names are changed after their marriage for the sake of their husband's wish. But now women get freedom and a will power to do whatever they want to do. But still they are avoided and suppressed by patriarchal society. Benare works as a teacher. Her drama troop used her as a set property in this drama. They all accused her for being pregnant before marriage. This shows even educated women are also suppressed in this male chauvinistic society. Jasbir Jain's comments thus:

Motherhood subjugates the female body and is primarily an asexual relationship without power. The whole burden of tradition is thrown upon Benare and women like her. She is the sufferer, not the males. She is accused of not being the perfect woman, who has the superhuman ability to ignore the self, like Sita. (87)

Her troop members hypocritically trap her into a worst situation. They strongly point out that, if Benare is left unpunished, illicit love will flourish and all sacred values will dissolve into dust. Kashikar is also one of

the accusers of Benare. He often quotes old Sanskrit slogans to show his concern for values of the past. But there is no love between him and his wife which has resulted in their childlessness. Kashikar says that he heard the Chairman of Education Society giving instructions to dismiss Benare from her teacher's post for running after men and becoming pregnant without getting married. She explains that she was running after men for her unborn child's welfare not for sex. But people at court became deaf and dumb to her explanations. Others praised her motherhood but tried to destroy Benare's infant in the womb. In his judgment Mr. Kashikar declares, "No memento 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" (119). Benare refuses boldly to allow it and cries, "I won't let it happen" (119). At last his heartless judgment lead Benare to commit suicide. Kashikar's wife says thus:

Mrs. Kashikar: That's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying. They just want comfort. They couldn't care less about responsibility! ... It's the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That's how promiscuity has spread throughout our society. (99-100)

Mrs. Kashikar who follows her husband like a shadow is unable to think independently. Unlike Benare she readily accepted man-made social codes and tortures of patriarchy. She accepts all the traits of man-made society and used it as a shield for her inability to bear any children. Because childlessness is a torment in an Indian society. If she does not give birth to a baby she will be considered as an untouchable person. She may be neglected by this society. Her husband may marry any other women to get a child. This makes her to accept her fate and being a supportive wife to her husband. Now a days independent women earn money than men only because of their talent. But some women like Mrs. Kashikar did not like these women earning. "Women are not born but made" these words came true. If young woman like Benare want to fight against social evils, old woman like Mrs. Kashikar blame them for breaking the social evils. Benare and Mrs. Kashikar are two contrast characters in this play. Benare tries to break the social barriers against women. Mrs. Kashikar supports male dominated society for her own safety. Both these women fall prey to the male chauvinistic society.

Rokde says that he saw Benare in Damle's room one late evening. Benare argues that it is wrong to miscomprehend the mere fact of her sitting with a man. She has sat with the 65 year old Principal several times. It is foolish to argue that she was having an affair with him. Vexed, Benare says that she has sat with more than twenty five men. It is stupid to suspect a man and a woman who merely happen to sit side by side. Sukhatme argues that her own statement is a solid proof of her promiscuous contact with innumerable men. So this incident shows how a women being a victim in male dominated society. As a teacher she sits beside her school Principal. There is nothing wrong in it. But male dominated society projected it in wrong way. The Principal was not accused for sitting next to Benare. Her troop members try to show her as a characterless and strumpet like women. She was abused and betrayed by two men in her life. Both her uncle and Mr. Damle are unquestionable in this society for their crimes. Sukhatme says thus; "No allowance must be made because the accused is a woman. Woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. Nastriswatantryamarhati. 'Woman is not fit for independence'" (115).

Throughout the play one can see dysphoria of Benare. In beginning of the play she get disturbed by the enquiry of her school management. Often she touched her stomach and felt sad. This shows her disturbed state of mind. In the mock trial, her troop used her real life incidents to make her terrific. They accused her again and again. This made her shock and trap into an unimaginable situation. This led to her death. The play shows how women in our society are victimized, tortured and exploited. The play portrays the tragedy of an individual victimized by male dominated society. The female protagonist becomes prey of sadism of his male counterparts.

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