

Silence! a tool of subjugation and discrimination in Vijay Tendulkar's Silence! The Court is in Session

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Abstract - Vijay Tendulkar plays are not just women centric ; it magnifies the injustice and revolt against traditional moral of orthodox society. In this play "Silence! The Court Is in Session" Tendulkar not only projects the traditional silent sufferings of a women but also magnifies the pleading of a modern woman for justice and freedom from social norms. In the play "silence" is a symbol of subjugation and a character of the subalterns. Whereas "speech" denotes sublimation and liberation. The rights of women are undermined and harassed physically, mentally and socially. Through the concept of 'mock trial' in the play "Silence! The Court Is In Session" Tendulkar depicts how silence is used as a tool of subjugation and discrimination in a male dominated society. The women character undergoes a series of sufferings and tortures as the victims of the hegemonic power -structure.

Index Terms - Hypocrisy, discrimination, psyche, culture and society, oppression.

Vijay Tendulkar was an eminent playwright in Indian Literature and a naturalistic and a socio-political playwright. One of his play "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" a Marathi play was translated in English as "Silence! The Court Is In Session", by Priya Adarkar. This play has been translated into 16 languages in India and abroad. Like Shakespeare in "Hamlet" Tendulkar has also employed the technique "play within a play". The play takes place in a mock court, which was set for the rehearsal of next day's performance. Through mock trial, he shows how Law is used as an instrument in silencing the voice of women. Tendulkar is a realistic playwright who portrays the society in its way. Each character in his play reveals various human psyche present in the so-called 'culture and society'. Smita Paul comments in her book "The Theatre of Power", "The women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergoes 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".

The word "silence" in the title has different significance, literally it orders to maintain silence in the courtroom it also implies in legal forum as to sublimate the weaker sex in the face of court. As Simone de Beauvoir says in "The Second Sex" (1949) "One is not born a woman , rather becomes a woman" here feminine culture is inculcated in a woman. Tendulkar evidently highlights the hypocrisy of the so-called civilized society. Through the concept of 'mock trial' in his play "Silence! The Court Is in Session" Tendulkar depicts how silence is used as a tool of subjugation and discrimination in a male dominated society which has been structured in such a way that, a breakthrough the norms of the culture is considered to be a crime. When a man is also behind the reason of a cultural offence, he is not accused at any point, then why a woman alone has to suffer in silence? it even more portraits that there is no strict law for the defence of woman even in this Independent India and modern era, no one cares about the injustice.

The protagonist, Miss. Leela Benare was a member of an amateur dramatic troupe based in Bombay known as the Sonar Meti Tenement Progressive Association. The co-acters in the group are the other characters in play "Silence! The Court Is In Session". Samant is a local villager, Sukhatme a lawyer in real life and in the play, Ponshe is a science student, Mr. Kashikar a social worker and Mrs. Kashikar wife of Kashikar, Balu a young man raised by Kashikar as a sort of son. Prof. Damle who does not appear on stage during the show.

Miss Leela Benare the protagonist of the play is a dedicated schoolteacher in her mid-30's. Benare a bold, bright, confident woman and also manipulative at times.

[Benare....] "who are those 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...”(4)

She bubbles out confidence and represents the working class emerging against patriarchy. She pays no attention to the society and its discriminative norms for women, she lives her life the way she desires.

Benare feels better to be with children than the adults. She dedicatedly works for the upliftment of the students. And that dedication makes her popular among the students and earns the jealousy of the management and her colleagues.

[Benare...] *“I'm used to standing while teaching. In class I never sit when teaching. That's how I keep my eyes on the whole class is scared stiff of me! And they adore me, too. My children will do anything for me. For I'd give the last drop of my blood to teach them. That's why people are jealous. Specially the other teachers and the management.”* (4-5)

This jealousy makes her the victim of the mock trial play. The psychological attack is a powerful satire made by Tendulkar on the modern society.

Miss Benare was accused of infanticide. The male characters of the play who represent the male chauvinists of the society prosecute a conspired mock trial on Benare, who is found guilty of infanticide, being a spinster, without a wedlock she has conceived a baby. Her private life was stripped out and publicly dissected. They started questioning about her illicit love affair with Prof. Damle a married man, even though she didn't take it up seriously in the beginning she was brutally attacked and harassed psychologically by the handicapped male chauvinist who has not achieved anything in life so far. Tendulkar highlights on discrimination that prevails in the modern Independent society that excuses men and accuses women for the same offence. Here the equal partner in crime Prof. Damle does not appear on the stage during the mock trial. When the victim herself tried defending, she was legally forced to be silent in the face of court. Here Miss. Benare who is a lively self-assertive woman is silenced by the social norms and also legally silencing the weaker one's plea for justice. Miss Benare asked her troupe members like, Ponshe and Rokde to marry her, and help her to raise her child but their reply was just silence. Out of dejection When Benare took a decision to take poison, again silence was the only reaction to her feeling and emotion. In no way this is a “respect for motherhood”

as most of the men uses it as a façade to hide their ill nature.

Tendulkar portrays silence as a powerful weapon used by the society in subjugation. Benare was molested by her own maternal uncle at the age of 14. Benare's mother came to know about the incest, she turned deaf ear to it. Mrs.Kashikar violently pulled her to the dock when she tried quitting.

[Mrs.Kashikar...]” That's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying. They just want comfort. They couldn't care less about responsibilities. 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)

Here, the subjugation is not only by the male domination, customs and traditions it is also done by one woman to another woman. Again Mrs.Kashikar is also constantly dominated by Mr. Kashikar. For instance, when Mrs. Kashikar was trying to make Samant understand regarding mistakes he silences her. [MR. Kashikar...] “Silence must be observed while the court is in session. Can't shut up at home, cant shut up here...” (77) it is evident that modern society is a patriarchal society.

Tendulkar's “Silence! The Court Is In Session” also shows a tinge of orientalism through Rokde, a young man who was raised by Mr&Mrs.Kashikar a sort of son. He was always demotivated and humiliated by them. Sukhatame's accusation against Benare is also equally damaging : “ her conduct has blackened all social and moral values. The accused is public enemy number one. If such socially destructive tendency is encouraged to flourish, this country and its culture will be totally destroyed “(114-115)

In the end of the mock trial, they unanimously agreed that women must follow the traditional morals of the so called “civilized society” and giving independence to women leads “sinful canker on the body of society” Subha Tiwari in her article “silence! The Court is in Session A strong social commentary” states “the whole responsibility of morally upright behaviour is bulldozed on women. Men are by nature considered to be wilful, wild, childish, innocent and mischievous. Their sins are no sins at all. The society has a very light parental and pampering sort of attitude when it comes to sexual offences of men. In case of women the iron rod gets hot and hotter. No punishment is actually enough for such a woman. There is no respite no shade

and no soothing cushion for a sinning woman. She must be stained and abandoned. Her femininity, her needs, her very existence must be ignored or rather destroyed. She is brutally killed both in physical and psychological senses. This play is about the pathetic position of women in the male dominated Indian world.” This seems to be true on the final verdict on Benare. The rights of women are undermined and harassed physically, mentally and socially. Till the end Benare did not succumb to the situation of being accused and being dismissed from the job, she painfully underwent the social torture, when she is not the only reason for it.

Benare ends up with a monologue: “These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of Twentieth Century. see their face- how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires”. (74) it ends up showing the failure of justice.

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