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HOW VIJAY TENDULKAR COMMUNICATES?

A STUDY ON THE PLAY “*SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION*”

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With the twentieth century growing faster, it is time to review the major Indian writers writing in native languages-Tendulkar, Sarkar and others, whose ideas are presented through forceful English translations and have forced people to think over it.

Silence! The Court is in Session (originally, Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe) (1967) is a primal work in Vijay Tendulkar's literary career. The play has been translated by Priya Adarkar seemingly in an accurate manner and is the part of the selection Vijay Tendulkar: Five Plays (Oxford). For the last few decades Vijay Tendulkar continues to be the most celebrated playwright of not only Marathi but Indian theatre. Beginning his career as a dramatist, he has in his credit twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one-act plays and eleven children's dramas. His celebrated works other than *Silence!* are *Kamala*, *Sakharam_Binder* and many more.

The play opens with protagonist Miss Leela Benare entering to a village hall along with a local man, Samant. The play gradually reveals that *The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association*, an amateur theatre group, has come to a village to present a play about a mock trial. To pass the time of the drowsy afternoon and also to show Samant, who is going to enact the role of the fourth witness, the proceedings of the court, the group decides to act a new mock-trail

other than the one to be staged. The first act includes the entrance of the other characters on the stage and their preparations for the mock-trial.

The Second Act reveals the mystery of Ms. Benare's illicit relationship with Prof. Damle through her mock-trial where Sukhatme plays the role of both the accused and the opponent lawyer. The Third Act discloses the inner evils in the characters of those who attack Benare that lead to her destruction.

Tendulkar presents this mock-trial concept to represent the subjugation of the women that is always present in our society. Ms. Benare is attacked for no fault of her own and as it hints to her personal tragedy, she collapses; but the impact of her free self-declaration haunts the readers throughout. Her monologue at the end is reminiscent of Nora Helmer's declaration of independence in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*; however it lacks the final vigour of protest.

All the characters in the play other than Ms. Benare, like Ponkshe –the science student, Sukhatme –the lawyer, Karnik –the theatre actor, Balu Rokde and Mr. and Mrs, Kashikar seem to be presenting the patriarchal forces of society that cut the wax-wings of Ms. Benare and pathetically subjugates her. Though Samant seems to be quite a non-chauvinistic character at the initial stage eventually he is also transformed into a male chauvinist. The characters of the play, who supposedly come from a cross-section of middle-class society are pathetically handicapped with their own limitations. Moreover, they attack Benare more severely because she attains a greater level of self-confidence and mental clarity that they wish to have but cannot attain. The relationship between Balu Rokde and Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar also indicates a master-slave relationship in a hegemonic power –bound society.

Leela Benare is a character full of vivacity who possesses a spontaneous “*joie de vivre*”, as Arundhati Banerjee calls it in the introduction to *Vijay Tendulkar: Five Plays*, is transformed into a skeleton facing the brutal societal pressure till the end of the play. She can be parallelized with the character of *Alka* in Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*, who ignores the social norms and dictates, only to be accused as a ‘bad’ woman by the orthodox society.

Feminist concerns are central to the play. The play represents Ms. Benare as a lively self-assertive woman silenced by the social norms. She is suspected of having an illicit relationship with Prof. Damle who remains absent throughout the play. Society cannot tolerate this unmarried

expectant woman. She has been treated as 'a canker on the body of society'. (*Silence!*, Act three). All the members condemn her as an evil influence but not even once is Prof. Damle condemned for being responsible for Benare's condition and just because she is a woman. Benare's private life is nakedly exposed and undergoes a thorough postmortem throughout the play. Mrs. Kashikar is also presented as a perpetrator of patriarchy in the play. She is constantly dominated by her husband and is made to act as having a happy conjugal life while she does not actually have it.

The voice of self-assertion and individuality is shown through Benare's own words, "...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." (*Silence!* Act one) endows Benare with the identity of a "new woman" emerging against the coercive attacks of patriarchy. The women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergo a series of sufferings and torture as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. As Simone de Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* (1949): "One is not born, but becomes a woman." Society as a whole manipulates this very process of 'becoming'. The word 'Silence' in the title has different levels of significance too. Literally, it means the judge's order for maintaining silence in the court-room but metaphorically it implies legally silencing the weaker sex's plea for justice. Regarding Tendulkar's interest in gender issues N.S Dharan comments in his book *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, "...though not a self-acknowledged feminist [Tendulkar] treats his women characters with understanding and compassion, while pitting them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious." In *Silence!*, he presents the futile struggle of a woman in the male-dominated society of post-independence India. He exposes the hypocrisy of the male-chauvinists and attacks the sham moral standards of the so-called civilized society.

The violence in Tendulkar's play mainly is a violence related to fierce psychosis. The latent sadism of the characters leads towards the trauma that prevails over Ms. Benare's character and silences her. Tendulkar declares a clear revolt against the established values of a fundamentally patriarchal society, through subverting and mocking the whole system of law by the presentation of the mock-law court.

As far as the technical aspects of the play are concerned Tendulkar seems to have adapted the naturalistic tradition, but the integration of the play within a play often blurs the margins of reality and illusion. The characters constantly move back and forward from make-believe to

reality and thus it almost achieves a "*Pirandellesque effect*". Tendulkar uses various kinds of symbols to express the vulnerability of Ms. Benare. The door-bolt hurting Benare's figure and her locking herself into the room represents the closure of her moral self inside the social trap. Tendulkar often takes the help of poems to express Benare's condition. The poem by Marathi poet Mrs. Shirish Pai perfectly expresses Benare's vulnerability and Tendulkar himself acclaims that the character of Ms. Benare came to him through the poem itself. The stage direction also provides a cue that enables the readers to get into the atmosphere of the play. The props jumbled up on stage including "*worn out portraits of national leaders...*" represents the jumbled-up lives of the characters. The use of actor acting in more than one role also indicated the fragmented selves of modern man.

Even till today there is no real appraisal of playwrights like Karnad, Tendulkar or Dattani. They seem to belong to a marginalized section of modern dramatists writing in English. But there must be detailed analysis of their plays, histories of performances, stage acceptability etc. to calculate their consequential effect upon contemporary audience.