

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence the Court is in Session*; Exploration of a Woman's Pain and Predicament

G.Kiran Kumar Reddy

Asst professor in English (Humanities and Science) Brindavan Institute of Technology and Science, Kurnool (AP), India

Abstract

It is not exaggeration to say that with the production of Tendulkar's *Silence! The court is in Session* new era has begun in Marathi theatre. The play raises many unsettling questions about human relationship. Tendulkar here uncovers middle class mentality and violent impulses in the middleclass people. Vijay Tendulkar depicted basic theme of violence and dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties in the life of human beings. He explored and expressed bitter and gruesome truths. The entire play revolves round the idea of a mock trial by the members of the amateur theatre group called 'The Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association'.

KEYWORDS: -pain -violence-predicament-exploitation of women.

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar was one of the celebrated playwrights of the Marathi Theatre gained popularity as a prolific Indian playwright of the post Independence Era. His play *Silent The Court Is In Session!* Created new history in the field of Indian Drama. For more than half a decade he had been highly significant playwright in Maharashtra. Wrote about women's exploitation and women's problems.

The play begins with the troupe entering the room in a village. Leela Benare, a school teacher, member of the troupe who is bold and talkative, enters at the very beginning when other members fall behind. she feels happy with Samanth, a villager, who is new to Benare. . The conversation goes on like this;

Benare : I thought, and go somewhere far, far away with you:
Samanth : [in confusion] with me?
Benare : yes, I like you very much.
Samanth : (terribly shy and embarrassed) tut-tut Ha ha !
I am hardly ...
Benare : You are very nice indeed. And shall I do something?
You are a very pure and good person. I like you

The troupe has come to perform a play that is a trail against president Johnson for producing atomic weapons. They have performed this seven times in Bombay and now they want to perform in the village.

Benare, the protagonist, reveals that she is very good at teaching but because of a bit of slander the management is not happy. She speaks "Life is not meant for any one also it is own life. It must be it is very very important thing, every moment, any bit of it is

precious” These words reveal the intension and desire of a middle class woman for a free life.

The members are Kashikar, a social worker who plays the role of a judge, and his wife Mrs. Kashikar, Balu Rockde whom Kashikars give shelter as they are childless, enacts as witness, Sukatme as barrister, Mr. ponkshi who fails in Inter enacts as a scientist, Karnik as second witness in the mock trial they are going to perform. Prof. Damle has not arrived. This character who doesn't appear on the stage plays a significant role in the play.

Benare speaks about other characters sarcastically, Ponkshi sneers at Rockde, all others jeer at Mrs. & Mr. Kashikar. This clearly shows the middle class mindset of feeding their minds by ridiculing others. When Benare comes out with fresh look after washing her face, the mock trial starts with ponkshi's words :

“ Miss Leela Benare, you have been arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extremely grave nature and brought as prisoner before the bar of this court.”

The judge of mock trial Kashikar asks Benare

” Prisoner Benare, under sec 302 of the IPC you are arrested of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the afore mentioned crime?”

Benare stuns at once with the charge of infanticide and the atmosphere becomes serious. It becomes a real trial and the private life of Benare is indecently exposed. At the very first Benare is bold because she has faced many bitter experiences in real life.

When fourteen, Benare was deceived by her maternal uncle whom she loved and dreamed to marry. He turned away not giving any importance to her love. She attempted suicide. She again worships Prof Damle for his genius and he uses her body and turns away escaping from his responsibilities.

Even though she faced bitter experience, she commits the same mistake again with Damle whose intelligence attracts him.. This is still the real picture happening always around us. This is human nature to face failure again and again in getting love.

In spite of these things, charges against Benare are baseless. Kashikar puts the charge of infanticide under sec 302 of IPC .Sukatame's words as reaction reflect male domination. he says “she runs after men too much.” the witness. Karnik is persuaded to say that Rockde has seen Benare in a close situation and Rockde says that he saw Damle in Prof.Damle's room in the hostel. He emphasizes the responsibilities of a woman but the words reveal inner psyche of him about women. He refers to the words of Manu that women are not fit for freedom. This is narrow minded opinions of men that a woman should be responsible at the same time she should not be free. She should be under the control of men. They recite proverbs to speak about the greatness of mother hood but they behave rudely with Benare whom they consider that she has become pregnant with Prof Damle. This is portrayed by Tendulkar in an exquisite manner. Ambiguity can be observed here. Speaking about Tendulkar's insights into human condition Nishikant D. Mirajkar says:

Vijay Tendulkar has remained the representative of the contemporary modern drama, not only in Marathi, but also on pan - Indian level, for a long span of last thirty seven years. The fact that majority of his plays became the most controversial, mostly from ex-dramatic point of view, and have almost churned the public opinions, inviting violent responses and reactions, does not dilute this statement; but on the contrary, strengthens it. Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the lost quarter century, to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing particularly on those of middle class. He has been vocalizing different human relations and the tensions implied therein, through his plays, which depict the tragic consequences of confrontations of egos in these relations¹.

Benare recollecting her bitter past and says about the present predicament

“Life is so and so. Life is such and such life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself.

Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug.

Life is drudgery. Life is something that’s nothing or nothing that’s something”(p.33)

She was firm at the beginning but cannot maintain the same spirit when she faces atrocity. Everyone including Samant, the new villager attempts to make her in the court by their own sadistic imagination. Samant the next witness in the mock trial as reply to Sukatme’s questions says that Benare has been refused by Damle to accept her pregnancy. Benare says “It’s a lie, complete lie you are all deliberately upon me, you have plotted against me.”

Even Mrs. Kashikar, being a woman doesn’t help her. More over when Benare unable to bear the words, tries to go out but the bolts struck and she is rudely dragged by Mrs. Kashikar. It proves the old proverb ‘a woman is an enemy to another woman’.

The members atrociously blame Benare for her pregnancy out of marriage. They blame her freedom also. These clearly show when a woman wants to be free, no man can bear and even a woman who doesn’t have freedom doesn’t bear. Her life has become a heavy burden to herself:

“My life was a burden to me..... But when you can’t lose it, you realize the value of it. You realize the value of living. You see what happiness means. How new, how wonderful every moment is! Even you seem new to yourself. (p.72)

When she understands the reality of life, she gives bitter truth even though its bitter to her:

life is no straightforward thing. People can be so cruel. Even your flesh and blood don't want to understand you. Only one thing in life is all-important the body! You may deny it, but it is true. Emotion is something people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. It was burning through me (p.73).

Sukatme readily explains how she has compelled Rockde to marry her. Kashikar, the judge tells that she has crossed the customs and she is a stain to motherhood so she deserves no mercy. His cruel verdict that she must destroy the fetus in her womb. Benare unable-tolerate the pain and cries "No No I won't let you do it, I won't let it happen. I won't let it happen" (P 119). She collapses with sobs. There silence reigns. Elizabeth Cady rightly remarked:

Thus far women have been mere echoes of men. Our laws and constitutions, our creeds and codes, and customs of social life are all of masculine origin. The true woman is yet a dream of future.²

The playwright boldly uncovers the hypocrisy, complexities of human behaviour, urge for violence, inferiority, utilizing the opportunity to satisfy, the urge for violence, urban middle class mentality and also plight and suffering of a woman in the male dominated society. Speaking about Tendulkar, Gowri RamNaryan says:

with his exposure to Marathi theatre from childhood,
and journalistic background, Vijay Tendulkar turned
contemporary socio political situations into explosive drama 3

The playwright portrays two women characters; one is Benare another one Mrs. Kashikar. Mrs. Kashikar doesn't do anything with modern thoughts but she doesn't accept the Benare's life style even though she herself is not happy with the traditional way of behaviour of her husband. When Benare tries to go out Mrs. Kashikar rudely drags her to the witness box. This is a beautiful portrayal of the mindset of women. He reveals that when a woman is in predicament another woman does help her, moreover, she gives some more trouble or adds some more grief.

After resistance, Benare collapses and suffers silently. The pain of a woman is pleasure for some other people. This brutal behaviour reflects that, it may be the conclusion of the playwright, women repeatedly face the failure, yet remains with great patience and doesn't harm anyone.

Tendulkar unfolds the actual middle class activities of life, way of behaviour, way of living, way of thinking, way of giving and solving problems, way of creating problems themselves, way of acting, way of responding, way of co-operating to hurt someone, way of getting satisfaction, way of understanding others, way of harming others, way of exhibiting false pride etc. In one sentence the play mirrors middleclass morality and mannerisms. Vijay Tendulkar succeeded in constructing the plot and creating characters and achieved amazing success. . Hard hitting reality in his plays makes the people think

seriously. His depiction of his characters is outstanding and with that ability he has a special place in the history of Indian Drama. Chandrasekhar Barve rightly says:

The depiction of life in Tendulkar's plays has an invisible but solid foundation in his philosophy of life. His philosophy includes man, his body and soul, his ego, his associations, the futility in the relations between men, the resultant sense of loneliness, the ideas of sin and virtue, the uncertainty of all these; in short the individual identity of man and his social existence, the harmony and disharmony between the two- these form the essence of Tendulkar's thinking. Tendulkar's plays don't appear to carry the burden of intellectual speculation. And at (perhaps because of this very reason), they remain beyond the shallow, hollow and the cheap, telling us silently, something original, beyond words. Considering all this it can be observed that Tendulkar's plays tend towards existentialism.⁴

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