

The Struggle for Identity against the Perceptions: Patriarchal Society as depicted in Vijay Tendulkar's drama *Silence! The Court is in Session*

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Abstract:

The paper proposes to highlight the condition of women in Indian scenario and will stress on the unequal treatment meted out to them. Even in the twenty first century the condition of women is the same and the society is still reluctant to adopt them as equals. Women are facing harassment and violence everywhere. Rigid customs and unequal social laws of the patriarchal culture and conservative society are the obstacles in their way and hence the cause of their subjugation. Vijay Tendulkar, a dramatist of merit and great craftsmanship depict the condition of women in Indian scenario with great precision and accuracy. The paper will focus on his drama, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, which holds a mirror to the conservative society where a woman is more of a pleasurable thing than a human, where she is an outsider in her own space. The present paper is the reflection of the female struggle for expression both physically and emotionally in a patriarchal Indian society dominated by men.

Key words: women, Harassment, Violence, rigid customs, conservative society, subjugation, patriarchy, Indian society

Let's bring to our minds the great chain of being which we see in history springing up from the womb of renaissance when human beings had gained enough power of reason to understand that sometimes "a cigarette is just a cigarette". Human society had not seen so much cognitive development since the times of Neanderthal man/woman, as it saw since the dawn of renaissance and precisely it could be argued that even the last hundred or so years have been more productive than all human history. But then it would be sheer cynicism if one doesn't take into account that all our achievement is the result of a revolutionary success of thousands of years. In the great chain of being, what we find is that there was a pyramid-like structure showing clearly the position all the creatures had in universe. In the original chain of being, God assumed the top place but since renaissance it has

been man. For it is not that tough to dethrone the transcendental signified. However, if we try to find the place of women in the chain of being, we will see that she was stationed layers down than men with domestic animals. Human society as we know, has always been prejudiced towards “half of humanity”. Given that since the latter half of twentieth century women have regained some of the rights in some corners of the world but even in twenty first century woman is more of a “pleasurable thing” than a human being. Her body still invites the lustful gaze, and she is said to tempt a man by her wiles.

In Indian scenario a very few privileged women have been at the pinnacle but overall she is as vulnerable and prone to inequality as she was when she was supposed to be burnt alive over a pyre. Sarojini Naidu (2007) was greatly concerned about the issues and obstacles that confronted Indian women, ironically when Indians were raising their voice against the British for freedom, she said:

Does one man dare to deprive another of his birth right to God’s pure air which nourishes his body? How then shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? And yet, my friends, man has so dared in the case of Indian women. That is why you men of India are today what you are: because your fathers, in depriving your mothers of that immemorial birth right, have robbed you, their sons, of your just inheritance. Therefore, I charge you; restore to your women their ancient rights... (Iyenger 215)

In December 2012 in Delhi in a moving bus, something of a very heinous nature took place, as indescribable crime perpetrated by men over a woman that conscience of masses was shaken to its roots and people mourned the event for many days. But how much did it change the conservative society of India, for the crime of same magnitude was repeated again and again in same fashion and few days or hours of mourning ended the buck. The women in India fight for individuality, fight for the rights over her body, fight against the injustice and inequality meted out to them. And cultural forms in all its diverse facets have a great responsibility to come forward, to give a voice to the muted eloquence of stammering shadows, form to fragments. And literature could be as handy as motion pictures in beaconing the dark road ahead. Literature has to be “mirror to the nature”. And we could hardly distrust literature which shall have any palpable effect on us.

Coming back from diversion to the main idea of the paper which is at once under scrutiny, both of authors as well as readers or more of latter’s than formers. While going through Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Silence! The*

Court is in Session, one could easily find how he has addressed the issues of struggling Indian women wherein they always find themselves at the point of man's accusing finger. Vijay Tendulkar, a dramatist of merit in vernacular Marathi, when translated in English becomes accessible across the borders and thus the message in his plays, which is very evident, holds a mirror to the conservative society from north to south, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. The most outspoken character in his play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Miss Leela Benare, an unmarried to be mother lets the readers to peep into her traumatic subconscious mind towards the end when in a soliloquy she answers many important questions that Indian society faces today when the old social order and new order comes face to face. As Varun Gulati (2015) in, Tendulkar's *Silence! The court is in Session; Social Criticism and Individual Tragedy*, states that "*Silence! The Court is in Session* is not a propaganda play. It grapples with several problems of the Indian society such as the pretentious institutional social service organizations, and forceful male supremacy in Indian society, in a masterful way". (4).

Miss Benare admits having loved her maternal uncle when youth bloomed at her, "..., I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was. I didn't! I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dreams openly... But all of them- my mother too- were against it, and my brave man turned tail and ran" (*Silence! The Court is in Session* 74). Then again at a mature age after establishing herself as a successful teacher, she fell in love with Prof. Damle, who loved only her body, resulting in her pregnancy and ultimately her exit from the school:

Again I fell in love –as a grown woman. I throw all my heart into it. I thought, this will be different. This love is intelligent. It's love for an unusual intellect. It is not love at all- it is worship. And my intellectual God took the offering and went his way. He didn't want my mind, or my devotion- he didn't care about them! He was not a God. He was a man for him everything was the body, for the body? That's all. (*Silence! The Court is in Session* 73-74)

However, she carries in her body the seed of love. She asks a very blunt question, who decides for a woman who she can love and in which circumstances? Who decides the age of consent for women? Society one might answer, precisely man. Her role is a defined one, "thou shall not love your blood relations, in that way", and no one decides for a girl what "that way" means. A maternal uncle who praises her blooming youth, who

gives her love in a strict family and one might assume why she leaves the sentence unfinished, “only he gave me love...” she shall have to go from place to place, from man to man, seeking love, pure love and she shall be loved for a moment then passed on to others, a leftover.

The questions raised in the drama, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, place us in objective shoes and ask us to pass judgment on Miss Leela Benare. She has sinned, betrayed the pure relationship of motherhood. She talks and laughs much, she shares the company of men, she is guilty of carrying the seed of love, she cannot be a good inspiration thus she must be sacked. Through a farce trail the accusations however stands true and they ask all of us a question. Is Miss Leela Benare guilty of lechery or Prof. Damle guilty of adultery? Should they at first have to be guilty at all? The love they shared, was that an ephemeral feeling or a time being lust? Is then a woman guilty of whichever circumstances she is found with a man- under her or over her? Does she deserve punishment, pity or right over her body? Varun Gulati (2015) in this regard rightly remarks:

In Silence! The Court is in Session, 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 paralyzed values and customs. The society does not like to perceive or receive any social change. Tendulkar presents a treatment of those ugly ways of society in this play. It is a bitter satire against the social ills and an interesting attempt to criticize the follies that prevail in our society. (1-2)

Vijay Tendulkar portrays with sheer brilliance a fact of Indian society where a woman is a space over which are written many questions without any of them being lost. Miss Leela Benare is a saga of millions of women who don't have any say in a phallic society. *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a bitter satire on the unjust male dominated society where a woman is always at the receiving end. This male dominance is clearly visible in the drama throughout as the court allows Prof. Damle to enjoy his married life and doesn't accuse him of ruining the life of a woman. Miss Benare is accused in the court without the presence of Prof. Damle who is equally responsible for the crime. This is the representation of male hierarchy and the condemnation of Indian society against women. Real culprits like Prof. Damle and the maternal uncle are the representatives of this hypocritical society who are beyond the reach of any trail. Veena Dass (1994) in, “Women Characters in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar” writes:

It is important here to note that these charges became verbalized only in the absence of Prof. Damle. If he were present, the typical backbiting attitude of the self-righteous Indian male would not have helped reveal the truth. Miss Benare was thrown into the dock and there she remained trying to joke herself of it, but trapped too murderously by the male vultures around her. Witness after witness charges after charges we heaped upon her. The defense lawyer was so frightened that he only asked for a little mercy on her behalf. Miss Benare who is on the offensive at the beginning found herself trapped at the close of the play. (10)

The only other female character, though submissive, does become a tool to show the subaltern place of women in the Indian society, is Miss Kashikar. No one knows her real name- she is known by her husband's name, she may or may not be sharing any relationship with Rokde but in her relationship with Mr. Kashikar, she is the silent listener of his monologues. She is scolded, silenced by her husband. She represents the "domestic animal" place in chain of being. Her owner, master and giver is Mr. Kashikar. She is no more than a dog, who bow wows as per its master's whims. The outburst of Miss Benare shows on the stage, the other characters froze in time and space. Her confession or her side of the tale goes unheard by the society. She is guilty, prosecuted and hence punished but her side remains in her heart. She carries the burden with her, inside her.

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