



SUPPRESSING FEMALE VOICE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is a versatile Indian playwright. He has crossed the regional boundaries and created literature with global significance. He is a typical modern author who has thrown light on the contemporary political, social and cultural issues pervading the orthodox Indian society. He has put forth several problems pertaining to the middle-class Marathi families. The power and violence enforced by the patriarchy is thoroughly depicted in his plays. He travelled far and wide around India and noticed the political, judicial, socio-cultural and personal violence against women. It is reflected in his plays. Usually his lead characters are women who are victimized by such institutions. Silence! The Court is in Session is a play in this vein. It becomes the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as a protagonist and victim. The central figure, Miss. Benare is the prey of the socio-cultural norms of the orthodox Indian society. Everyone is jealous of the financially independent, new woman. They abused her of immorality. All the dominant males along with the narrow-minded Mrs. Kashikar join their forces together to subjugate her. In the process of humiliating her, their own weaknesses are also exposed. The monologue portrays the suppression of Ms. Benare which makes her rebellious. Mrs. Kashikar is also taunted for her impotency.

Keywords – suppression, patriarchy, victim, infanticide

INTRODUCTION

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1Page

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (ICDBVIHCIM 2018) 6-7 OCTOBER 2018

SPECIAL ISSUE –OCT 2018 www.puneresearch.com/times (MS) INDIA

(IMPACT FACTOR 3.18) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL



The plot of *Silence! The Court is in Session* is that of a play within a play. The action takes place in a hall near a village. The characters are introduced from their routine talk and general gossip among them. The performance of the mock-court is scheduled at evening. So they wanted to kill time. They decide to do so by holding mock-trial. The mock-court holds the mock-trial of Miss Benare. She is deliberately targeted as she breaks the social norms. Her refusal to accept the conventional institute of matrimony is the cause behind her victimization. She is a young, bold, independent and self-esteemed modern woman who is without any guardianship of husband. So she seems charming due to her liberated life-style. On the other hand, Mrs. Kashikar is a typical, orthodox and narrow-minded Indian woman. She stands for the bourgeois morality. She shows her complete dedication towards her husband, Mr. Kashikar. He also makes fuss to protect her from the ridiculous comments of the other characters. But in reality, he is a dominant husband. He is very rude and looks down on his wife. She receives many inhuman comments as she is childless. According to the patriarchy, it considered a great failure of a married woman if she could not become a mother. A childless woman does not have a respectable position in the family and in the society. She is held responsible for her infertility. The total blame is thrown on the wife, while the husband is considered flawless. She is not free to express her feelings, thoughts or opinions. If she tries to do so, her voice is suppressed by the common belief that women are ignorant. They are considered as fools or outspoken. Whenever Mrs. Kashikar tries to say something, Mr. Kashikar pays no heed. He never thinks about suggestions to be worth noticing. He frequently uses insulting language and threatens her. She is just a toy in the hands of her dominant husband. She tries to target Miss Benare along with the other male members. She establishes herself as an agent of patriarchy by helping them to torture Benare. She derives sadistic pleasure in this act. She, herself is impotent and blames Benare for infanticide.

Benare is an educated woman of about 34 years. She is a school teacher by profession. She loves life and is full of spirits. She is proud of her performance as a teacher. She wants to live her life on her own terms, as an individual. She feels that no one has got right to interfere in it. In the beginning of the play, she tries to overpower the other characters. She criticizes them in one way or the other. Unfortunately, they are locked up in a room and get an opportunity to take revenge on her. They charge her with infanticide. The wooden dock is placed around her. Thus, she is trapped by the so-called enlighten people.

Tendulkar has shown the powerlessness of all the persecutors of Benare. Each of them grabs an opportunity to expose one another. The group of educated, sophisticated, city dwellers is correctly chosen by the author. Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar are ridiculed by the group for their absurd gesture of mutual devotion and childlessness. Balu Rokade is given shelter by



Kashikars as they are childless. They fed, clothed and educated him. But everyone jeers at him for his total dependence on the Kashikars. Sukhatme is called 'a lawyer without a brief' by Benare. Ponkshe has actually failed in his Inter Science Exams, but professes to be an expert on scientific affairs. Karnik shows more grasp of 'intimate theatre'. Samant is a mild-mannered and friendly young man of that village. He is a rustic, unsophisticated person, an outsider who is woven in the mock-trial unknowingly. Prof. Damle who in abstentia plays a significant role of the exploiter, is the only evidence on Benare's side.

The character of Benare is of a typical free thinker. But the society would not bear such persons, especially, a female with open and free behavior. She is accused of infanticide by all. They call her a seducer who has tried to lure the males to marry her. She challenges or even threatens the patriarchal order. But when all the others join forces against her, she is unable to defend herself. In the beginning, she takes it as a game and supports their claims and queries. Slowly, she realizes that it is hunting. All the wild animals in human form are ready to prey her. Her sole fight is only a losing battle. Still she strives to make her innocence clear. But everyone is ready to leap and bite her. She is powerless in front of the strong social, legal and moral force. She is just a puppet in the hands of her destiny as she points out in her monologue at the end of the play. She is blamed as a woman without any social, cultural or moral responsibility. She would lose her job as she is pregnant before marriage. Her sin might corrupt the innocent, tiny trots that she teaches.

The only chance she gets to defend her case is just before the punishment is pronounced. In her final speech, she stresses on her right to lead her life according to her own wishes. Social norms have always chained her desires. When she was young, she fell in love with her maternal uncle. No one accepted it and so she had to bury it in her heart. Everyone blamed her and the man ran. She couldn't bear it and tried to commit suicide, but she didn't die. Again, she fell in love as a mature woman. This time, her love was not just attraction like her girlish dream of a fourteen year old female. It was rather an intellectual love for a witty fellow whom she worshipped. But he was not a God, but only a human who wanted to enjoy her body. He didn't care for her mind or devotion. He only took advantage of her position as a single, unsupported lady. His selfish aim was to gratify his sexual hunger. The body is the most hateful, despising, yet lovable and desirable. It has provided heavenly experience with a little bud....a dancing life, the pleasure of becoming a mother. She wanted to safeguard it. But the people around her are not ready to accept it as it is a result of illicit love. Everyone attacks her as a morally degraded lady. She is not considered as a human being having dreams and desires of her own. They passed the sentence to kill the infant inside her womb. That child would be considered as illegitimate. S/he may not get the name and love of its father. Leela Benare wished to lead a simple life of a common woman having loving and



caring husband along with the baby. But as she has not entered in the marriage institution, her becoming pregnant is a sin. In Indian culture, a maiden who is pregnant is considered as a fallen woman. It is further revealed that she is carrying the child of Prof. Damle. Karnik discloses her youthful love affair with her maternal uncle. She tried to commit suicide, but failed. After the detection of her pregnancy through Prof. Damle, she attempted to get married with anyone to save herself from defamation. Thus, she is cheated by both the men whom she loved. She is frustrated due to the bitter experience of love. She cries out her bitter mental agony. Yet no one comes forward to help her and soothe her. None feels pity for her. They feel indifference towards her. She firmly tells the Judge that she wants to live for the sake of 'my god-my whole existence'. Finally, she wants her body now for her son and 'he must have a mother.....a father to call his own-a house-to be looked after-he must have a good name!'

In this way, Benare is a typical woman concerned with the future of her unborn child. She wishes to have everything not for her own sake, but for her son. Any mother is worried about her to be born child. She dreams a lot many things for his sake. Her desire to live life comes back for his sake. She wants to make his life comfortable and happy. But the world around her is not ready to accept the unborn child as it is illegitimate. Without wed-lock, if a woman is pregnant, then it is considered as a worst sin. She should not give birth to such infant. The society would banish such children. They would not have any respect or love in this society. So the sentence is passed that she can live, but not her illegal child. She would also be bereft of her job, the only source of her livelihood. They wanted complete destruction of her self-respect and bow before them.

CONCLUSION:

In this way, Tendulkar exposes the condition of women in the middle class Indian society. Both, Benare and Mrs. Kashikar are presented as women who have fallen victims to male supremacy. They both are not free to act independently. Benare's attempt to lead a free life of her own has been frustrated by the group of men surrounding her during the course of the mock-trial. Her freedom has been mercilessly crushed. Everyone tries to unravel her past life with humiliating comments. They consider her a morally degraded woman and not even think the co-culprit, prof. Damle, similarly responsible. They put the total blame on her and even pass sentence on her. On the other hand, Mrs. Kashikar is also fully oppressed by her husband. He insults her and suppresses her voice. She is an instrument in the hands of patriarchy that uses her as an enemy of another woman, Miss. Benare. Thus, a woman married or unmarried childless or potent without wed-lock are crushed by the society. They are not even given a chance to speak. Their voices are completely silenced.



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