

Gender Bias in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the outstanding Indian Playwright. He has mastered in different genres of literature like Essays, Short Stories, Criticism, Screenplay Writing and Drama. He displays his love of humanity and his commitment to human values. He has become the spokesperson for the suppressed women. Many of his plays present the position of women in the contemporary modern society. His women characters in the course of play gain knowledge, strive to gain freedom, dignity and also the true colours of modern men. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has depicted the difficulty of a young woman named Miss Leela Benare who is the victim of the male dominated society.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Motherhood, Patriarchy, Domination.

Vijay Tendulkar, the prominent dramatist of the Marathi theatre. He has received awards including the Padma Bhushan, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Film fare Award, Saraswati Samman, Kalidas Samman and Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar. He was the sub-editor of Nababharat journal. All his plays focus on real life problems. Its all about social norms, gender issues, man-woman relationship, political issues etc. He won fame in the national level with the publication of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, which is translated into English as *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967). *Silence! The Court is in Session* received the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya award. Tendulkar's *Silence* is a critique of patriarchal values. He shows how law operates as an instrument in silencing the voice of women. The word 'silence' in the title has different levels of significations. Literally it means the judge's order for maintaining silence in the court-room but metaphorically it implies legally silencing the women appeal for justice.

Gender bias is a preference or prejudice toward one gender over the other. It acknowledges that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's lived experience. Studies show the different lived experience of genders across many domains including education, life expectancy, personality, interests, family life, careers, and political affiliations. Gender bias is experienced differently across cultures. Gender inequality in India refers to health, education,

economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. Bias affects many aspects in the lives of women from career development and progress to mental health disorders.

Silence! is a play in three acts. Tendulkar got inspiration from real life incident. He met an amateur troop that was on its way to stage a mock trial in Vile- Parle, a suburb in Mumbai. While overhearing their conversation, the outline of the play began to shape in his mind, and the ultimate result of it was the birth and creation of the play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*. It's a social satire. Its indeed a mock trial of Miss Leela Benare, the school teacher. Along with Benare, Samant, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, Mr. Kashikar, Balu Rockde, Mrs. Kashikar involved in enacting the mock court. They intend to spread enlightenment through their plays, it's the prime objective of their programme.

The play explores the story of Miss Leela Benare is charged with infanticide and an illegitimate relationship with Professor Damle and this is how her personal life is exposed in the public. Tendulkar exposes the condition of women in the Indian middle class society. Benare was betrayed by the male dominated society. It is not only the tragic story of Miss Leela Benare, but also the story of every woman in society whether it is rural areas. All the characters in the play except Benare are the representatives of the orthodox society. Benare, with her zeal and zest for life is totally different from them. She wants to enjoy her life and to her happiness with the others. Her companions failed to accept her jovial and generous nature. The co-actors cunningly arrange the cruel game in the form of a mock trial. Benare becomes the target of their gossip and falls as victim and they leads to the assassination of her character. The women character in Tendulkar's plays undergo a series of tortures and sufferings. In *Silence!* The focal point of interest lies in the struggle between the women like Benare and her antagonists headed by the orthodox Kashikar and his associates. All the characters in the troop arrived in a village to enact a play. She was accompanied by Samant and was enjoying his company so, she proposed him. Samant felt embarrassed, in order to make him normal She introduces all her companions to samant in their absence. She sarcastically calls Mr. Kashikar as 'Mr. Prime Objective' Mrs. Kashikar as 'Mrs. Hands that Rocks the cradle' She further says that the '**Hands that Rocks the cradle has no cradle to rock.**' (*Silence...2*) Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar were childless and had adopted Balu Rockde. According to Benare, they have made him as slave.

Benare is unmarried in 30's so they considered, she is running behind all the time. Benare requested everyone not to bring her personal life in the mock trial but all the male characters in the play are interested in it and also enjoyed. Sukhatme glorified motherhood in order to talk I'll about Benare. All the male characters accused her. As a women Mrs. Kashikar doesn't think about Benare, she said that Benare was earning money so which made her to live her life as if and it's the reason she moved freely with men as a unmarried girl.

Benare pleaded in front of Balu Rockde and Ponkshe for marrying her but her proposal was rejected by them. Vijay Tendulkar has created a satire on the unjust male dominated society and on the working of court. She fell into the feet of Ponkshe, but he wanted a matured partner for himself. This shows that he is immature to understand a woman and wasn't a broad minded man. When she approached Rockde, he feared about the society which would laugh at him if he married her in this condition. As a mother Benare wanted to save her baby's life so she wanted to get married to any man then only her baby would be accepted in the society. Though Professor Damle neglects her, she wants to give birth to the child of the Indian sentiment of motherhood.

Mrs. Kashikar's secret agreement in the attack on Benare demonstrates how women internalize the dominance of men over themselves as a natural phenomenon and turn against other degenerating women as the 'other'. In the court, Miss Leela Benare is convicted on the charge of infanticide and illegitimate motherhood that are against societal norms. In traditional male dominated Indian society, women are treated as secondary citizen in all spheres of life. The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association, an amateur theatre group, arranges to entertain the people of a village adjoining to Bombay by enacting the roles in a mock-trial of American President Johnson who is considered to be the threat to humanity because of his policy regarding nuclear weapons. In spite of previous failure in a love with her maternal uncle, she fell in love with Professor Damle, who was a married man and wanted to satisfy his bodily thrust. She was discharged from her school due to her pregnancy without marriage. According to Benare,

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 is love for an unusual intellect. It is not love at all-it is worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my 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 is all
(Silence... 73-74)

Sukhatme wants court to show no mercy on Benare just because she is a woman. In the final verdict Benare is equated with 'criminals and sinners' and the court orders that she should live but the child in her womb should be destroyed. She considered herself as a trapped woman inside the net of cold blooded man in the court. Benare is lovely spark from the thunder bolt of Tendulkar. She is a new woman pleading for freedom from the social norms. This is suggestive of Benare's last speech when she breaks her silence and speaks passionately about conspiracy against her. Tendulkar has displayed a remarkable skill in achieving certain purposes through the presentation of his male characters. He made use of the character Miss. Leela Benare to voice his voice against the oppression of women. He gives the revolutionary warning to the Indian society that women won't be submissive, and they won't tolerate the ill-treatment and injustice patiently.

Though Benare shows her opposition in the beginning of the play, at the end she begins to release her inability. Benare is a prey of male chauvinism, used to gratify the quench of bodily thirst and deserted at the end of her own destiny. She represents all the women in India who are suppressed, oppressed and marginalized.

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