

MARGINALIZATION OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

Asmita J. Badhe
Research Scholar
Shri Shivaji College,
Akola (M. S.)

Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most renowned playwrights of India. He is a leading Indian playwright, screen and television writer, political journalist, a literary essayist and social commentator. Tendulkar's plays exhibit almost all aspects of human life in the modern world. His Silence! The Court is in Session reveals marginalization, plight and predicament of women in our society. In our Indian society only women are targeted by so called codes and principles of morality. This discrimination is vividly portrayed by the dramatist in this play. An attempt is made in the present paper to reveal how females have been victimized, conditioned and marginalized by male-dominated society as it revealed in Silence! The Court is in Session by Vijay Tendulkar. The play powerfully criticizes the shallow conventions, hypocrisy and deception of the middle-class patriarchal society.

Key Words: *Mirginalization, male-dominated, patriarchal, Judicial System hypocrisy, shallow conventions.*

**MARGINALIZATION OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN
VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION**

- **Asmita J. Badhe**

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most renowned playwrights of India. He is a leading Indian playwright who has carved a niche for himself in the literary horizon of the nation. He is a unique personality who started his writing career as a journalist and ended up as a profound dramatist of international fame.

As an avant-garde of Marathi theatre, Tendulkar has given a new direction to the post-independence Marathi drama. He has brought it on the national level and abroad also. In this context V. B. Deshpande aptly remarks:

Because of his highly individual outlook on and vision of life, and because of his personal style of writing he has made a powerful impression in the field of literature and drama, and has given the post-independence Marathi drama a new idiom. By doing this he has put Marathi drama on the national and the international map. (18)

Tendulkar is best-known for his plays, *Vultures*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Kamala*. He started his dramatic career in mid-fifties and has been the vanguard of Marathi as well as Indian theatre for almost five decades. This versatile genius is the author of thirty full-length plays and twenty-four one-act-plays. Besides that eleven plays for children are also to his credit, several of which have become the classics of Modern Indian theatre. He wrote his plays in Marathi but most of them have translated and produced in major Indian languages as well as in English too.

Tendulkar's dramatic achievements and theatrical innovations have won him a wide fame. He has been celebrated as the 'Playwright of the Millennium.' He is the recipient of prestigious awards including, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Award, Filmfare

Awards, Padma Bhushan, and Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar. He received the life time literary achievement Katha Chudamani Award too.

Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* is based on a real life incident in which Tendulkar overheard the conversation amongst the amateur players, the group of the members of the part-time theatre, when they were going to perform a mock-trial at Vile Parle suburb. In it, he has focused on several cardinal questions regarding sex, love and moral principles which are existed in contemporary Indian society. He has nicely portrayed the hollowness in the middle class morality and the double standard attitude of society through the elements of irony, satire, pathos and mockery.

The play is one of the best plays of Vijay Tendulkar. The play exhibits the plight and predicament of a young school teacher, who becomes victim of the male dominated society. It is found that in our Indian society the place of women remain secondary even today. Today's modern educated man is not wholeheartedly ready to give equal status to woman in society. Though she is highly educated, she confines herself within the four walls and look after children and family.

Miss Leela Benare, female protagonist of the play, is a young, energetic and bold woman. Besides she is a prompt, punctual and devoted school teacher. The other members of the group are Kashikars, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Karnik, Pongshe, Prof. Damle and Rawte. They all belong to the urban middle class of Bombay. They all are hypocritical in their behaviour. However they are frustrated due to failure in their personal life and career. It is clearly reflected through their ill treatment to their fellow being, Miss. Benare. In this connection it is apt to quote Arundhati Banerjee who writes: 'Their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerism reflect their petty, circumscribed existences fraught with frustrations and represent desires that find expression in their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings.' (viii)

The story of the play moves around the prominent character of Leela Benare who becomes a victim of the carnal lust of some men who seldom care of her innate desire to

live a peaceful domestic life. In love, she is betrayed twice. When she was fourteen her own maternal uncle took advantage of her innocence and later as a grown up woman she is cheated by Prof. Damle. She is not only becomes the victim of physical violence of her lovers but mental violence by her co-actors in amateur group too. She is trapped in a cruel game of mock-trial cunningly planned by her co-actors. Under the garb of the mock-trial, they discuss and dissect her private life. She is being isolated and become victim of male dominated society. They collectively criticize and humiliate her.

Miss Benare is accused of the charge of infanticide. Sukhatme proceeds the case as a prosecution and Kashikar performs the role of the judge. He accuses her of the crime of killing her new born child. Silence descends on her by the abrupt interrogative statement by Mr. Kashikar, the judge: 'KASHIKAR. Prisoner Miss Benare, under section No. 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty of the aforementioned crime?' (SCS 74). This charge is closely associated with the dignity of Miss Benare because she is unmarried and the idea of infanticide for an unmarried woman is essentially a ruin of her self-respect. The charge of infanticide is collectively decided by all the characters. Their motif is to ruin the self-respect and womanhood of Miss Benare.

The irony of the mock trial is that Benare is accused before the court in the absence of Prof. Damle, who is responsible for Benare's tragic condition and real accused of the court. Males are free from the rules and regulations. The man responsible for the child in Benare's womb is himself coward and who is already a married man and father of five children. Therefore, he does not want to go against the social customs and norms getting involved with an unmarried woman. As a result he leaves her at the hands of cruel people. They dissect her personal relationship with so called intellectual professor. All these men exploit her by all means. Thus the play reveals the evil inflicted on a lonely and helpless woman in the male-dominated middle class society.

It is surprising to note that the main accused, Prof. Damle is absent at the time of the mock-trial. In the court, he is summoned merely as a witness and not as accused. The dramatist aptly presents the double standard mentality of the society. The play reveals the bitter truth existed in our patriarchal society that woman's innocence is punished while man's blunder goes scot-free. Both Miss Benare and Prof. Damle are doing job and have done same crime. But our society blames and punishes Miss. Benare only. She is forced to leave her job while Prof. Damle is set free though the guilt committed by both is the same. She punishes for the guilt that she has not committed. She is denied the right to be a mother. She is punished by the court that the baby in her womb must be destroyed. Miss Benare remains the prime accused primarily 'because contemporary Indian society, which all its roots grounded firmly in reactionary ideas, cannot allow the birth of a child out of wed lock.' (Banerjee viii).

In this play within the play Benare is provided any chance neither by the legal authorities nor by the custodians of the society to express her opinion during the court procedure. Every time her voice is silenced by the mock judge's words 'order'. All witnesses were against her. Till the last scene of the play her voice is silenced. But in the last scene of the play, she expresses an elaborate argument in defense of her conduct and the cruel ways of the society that makes human life impossible to live. In this context Beena Agrawal says:

It becomes a mechanism to give a voice to the silence of Miss Benare because it gives an opportunity to register her protest against the system that trapped her. Such a process of the social recognition of marginalized groups through theatre opened a new era in the history of the English drama beyond the canons of historical and philosophical perspectives (79).

Miss Benare expresses her grief through her elaborate monologue that she has suppressed in her heart for a number of years. According to her every human being has a right to live and to enjoy life as per his/her will. But ironically speaking she is not only

rejected the right of living but also the right of death. It is seen that in both the situations the decisions in the life of the woman are dominated by the male. She is denied the right of living her personal life. She is dismissed from her job of teaching and even denied the right to be a mother. She criticizes the decision of the management. She expresses how she has betrayed by her lovers, her maternal uncle and Prof. Damle. The former has cheated her at the early age of fourteen while the later as a grown up woman. She says: Why, I was hardly fourteen! I even didn't know what sin was! I swear by my mother.... And my brave man turned tail and ran....Again, I fell in love. As a grown woman. I threw all my heart into it; I thought, this will be different. This love is intellectual. It is love for an unusual intellect. It isn't love at all-it's 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! [*Feebly.*] He wasn't a god. He was a man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body! That's all (SCS 118).

Thus the play reveals the evil inflicted on a lonely and helpless woman in the male-dominated middle class society. She is denied the right of living her personal life. In the play Miss Benare represents simplicity, straight-forwardness and truthfulness. Other male characters stand for cruelty, hypocrisy, double-standard and violence. Benare's tragedy exhibits the fact that women are born to suffer even though she is educated and self-reliant. She is victimized even in the highly sophisticated and civilized section of the society. Yet even today in 21st century, women are not considered as a free human being, but the weaker sex only. In the play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar exposes the evil in the form of outdated customs and codes prevalent in Indian middle class society.

Work Cited:

Banerjee, Arundhati. "Introduction." *Five Plays by Vijay Tendulkar*. Mumbai: UP., 1992. Print.

Deshpande, V. B. "Vijay Tendulkar's Contribution to Indian Drama": *Vijay Tendulkar's Plays*, ed. V. M. Madge, New Delhi: Pencraft, 2007. Print.

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Trans. Priya Adarkar. *Collected Plays in Translation*. New Delhi: OUP, 2004. Print.



Higher Education &
Research Society