

Gender Consciousness in Tendulkar's Play *Silence!* *The Court is in Session*

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Abstract: *Tendulkar's first play Silence! The Court is in Session is pregnant with many themes and issues but it mirrors broadly the theme of gender consciousness. . In this particular play male - controlled values and society has been criticized. It also displays the social norms which operates women as a tool in silencing the female's speech. The word "silence" is a very small word but has deep sense. As the title includes the word 'silence', it has varied stages of senses. Actually, it means the order of judge for sustaining silence in the court - room but symbolically, it suggests officially silencing the plea of weaker gender for justice.*

Keywords: Feminism, Gender consciousness, Identity, Patriarchy, exploitation, Marginality.

Needless to introduce Vijay Tendulkar who occupies a very high rank due to his immense contribution to the growth of Indian English Drama. Being a Marathi dramatist, he establishes how society adds to the decline of womenfolk as human being and removes their social rights. He displays how females are oppressed, tortured and subjugated. Human nature has been analyzed deeply by Tendulkar. His dramas probe deep into the actualities of life in modern social ambience. Being a true observer of society, he observes the marginal and aboriginal status of women. He feels pity for them and states "As a social being I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end."

Tendulkar in his play *Silence! The Court is in session (1967)* which is divided into three acts, familiarizes a theatre group that focusses on some social evil, separates it and lastly interrupts it for its rejection through stage performances. Now the main issue - the charge of infanticide is put against an unwed i.e. Leela Benare. She becomes pregnant by Prof. Damle. A case has been set against Benare to look at in a court - a false court that adopts to be genuine.

It is very important to select the title of the play by the dramatist. It is the accused's imposed silence in the mock trial which is considered to propose the dramatist, the title, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, a satirical declaration on the state of the present working of courts of law. Imposing serious allegations and dreadful comments on Benare who was trapped in the cage of fake trial got used to this forced silence. Kashikar's sudden interrogative statement at the beginning of mock trial can be observed as the consequence of gender consciousness when he calls, "prisoner Ms. Benare, under section No: 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the afore - mentioned crime?" (*Silence* p.74 - 75). Benare became astonished. She says "I just got a bit serious to create the right atmosphere. For the court, that's all. Why should I be afraid of a trial like this?" (*Silence* p75). Even the comic relief delivered by the 'pan - spitting' competition supports her to recover her self - control only for a brief while, for the short interval whatever she achieves is not long lasting. Miss. Benare progressively seeks accommodation in her self - imposed silence when the mock trial reassumed. But all efforts were in vain due to Kashikar,

the mock - judge's imposition: 'silence.' In such a hostile condition, deserted Benare has no other choice but to remain silent, as no language can arise to her emancipation.

In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar aims to raise numerous problems about sex, love, marriage and decent principles predominant in the society. To represent gender consciousness the dramatist has used beautifully satire, irony, despair and even mock - element to high light the emptiness of middle class principles.

Here gender consciousness can be found when Benare's condition became miserable due to the trial. Arundhati Banerjee clearly remarks that the allegation conveyed against Benare in the initial of the trial turns into the consequence in last. She asserts that where modern Indian society with its origins grounded resolutely in intolerant notions, cannot allow a woman to give birth to a child without marriage there who allows men to impregnate women. It reflects that how society has given power to men to subjugate women. It shows clearly gender consciousness, which is a major issue in the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* in which Miss Benare's private life has been exposed and widely separated during the court proceedings, blaming that she is a woman of loose character.

Here, Tendulkar displays gender consciousness that makes a female individual as destitute as tearful. As a result the custom of child Marriage has been approved by Kashikar, the Judge when he listens that Benare is an unwed woman. Here one can see that how women's yearnings are suppressed in the basically conventional society. Women are interrupted at every step to do certain things established by the social norms. Neither she can crack jokes nor talk freely, walk freely & live freely. Miss Benare who tried to cross the boundary of social norms has been verdict of infanticide. Miss Leela Benare and Prof. Damle both are equally guilty but the trial cannot be set against him. It is Miss Benare who is accused of all the charges and verdict. When Ponshe discloses that Benare lives only for the child in her womb and will give birth to it, the whole position becomes complicated. Now Sukhatme, the lawyer, counsels for the prosecution says: "The woman. . . has made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood. . . Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our

religion and our traditions. Moreover, if the accused's intention of bringing up the offspring of this unlawful maternity is carried to accomplishment, I have a dreadful fear that the very existence of society will be in danger. . . Milord, infanticide is a dreadful act. But bringing up the child of an illegal union is certainly more horrifying. . . "Woman is not fit for independence". . . That is the rule laid down for us by tradition. Abiding by this rule, I make a powerful plea. "Miss Benare is not fit for independence". (Silence p.115)

This shows gender discrimination and gender consciousness. clearly where woman is the sole responsible for her miserable condition. The co - participants attempt to determine their own personal outlooks and blame Benare of her lechery and dissipated acts putting aside the main charge during the trial. In the play the mock trial initiated just for enjoyment but it turns into Benare's misfortune. Benare is entirely shattered. She, like an animal who has been caged, separated decently and publicly. Gender consciousness. can be observed after her disappointment in love with her maternal uncle, when Benare states: "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 a very dreadful thing." (Silence p.74). She desired to die, but she could not. Miss Benare is not a victim of such oppression but the entire feminine race has been oppressed. From the time immemorial, women are preserved like animals and slaves. Virginia Woolf, a feminist, defined the similar image of gender consciousness in society as Tendulkar has portrayed.

Gender consciousness can be also observed where one may find that men never miss the chance to criticize women disclosing their past. It can be seen when Benare goes to the interior room to wash her face, Ponkshe and Karnik having some knowledge of her past contrive against her. Sukhatme suggests and others agree that she be made an accused in the mock trial and Mrs. Kashikar supports the idea. Thus, one woman goes against another woman.

Now the time comes when Kashikar finally pronounces his judgement, "The crimes you have committed are most terrible. There is no forgiveness for them. Your sin must be expiated. Irresponsibility must be chained down. Social customs, after all, are of supreme importance. Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure. This court takes a serious view of your attempt to dynamite all this. . . . It must be said that the school officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from your job. . . . No memento of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed. " (Silence p.118 - 119) Benare cannot bear this judgement and asserts that she will never let this happen. She is not able to bear the mock trial. She is broken - hearted and faints. Other characters gather round her and say that it is just a game which she took too much to her heart. All this is not true and the time has come for the real show to start. This play is an illustration of the victimization of a young woman. It all started as a harmless game but ended as a serious indictment on her.

In this way to sum up, we can say that gender consciousness is a burning issue in Tendulkar's *Silence!* The court is in the Session. Tendulkar has depicted remarkably the suffering of women and how they are victimized due to patriarchy. Miss Leela Benare is such an oppressed woman who suffers a lot because of her gender. Women have been a victim of society because of social norms. Miss Leela Benare suffered from beginning to the end of the play. All this suffering comes to her because she is a woman.

In this way the title of the research paper is justified and appropriate.

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