

**Translated Play of Vijay Tendulkar Silence! The Court is in Session
- A Translation of Women's Empowerment**

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Abstract

The personality of woman has been damaged and distorted and her status as a human being is 'interiorized' under the overwhelming male domination. This drama Silence! The Court is in Session by Vijay Tendulkar provides a comprehensive review of the problems women like Benare confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom. Benare experiences an identity crisis because of the discrimination against women. She is forbidden to do what she likes and therefore feels she has no freedom in her work. Tendulkar delves deep into the hearts of his characters and makes an attempt to highlight on the endless decay and violence in the social mores inexorably impinging upon the man-woman relationship. The dramatist treats the incidents in an objective manner. He expects transformation within self for the transformation of the society.

Key Words: Women, Society, Freedom, Work & Human being

Introduction

Throughout history, the personality of woman has been damaged and distorted and her status as a human being is 'interiorized' under the overwhelming male domination. This drama provides a comprehensive review of the problems women confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom. Women are deprived not only of equality with men but also exploited by them as in the case of Benare, the female protagonist of the play, Silence! The Court is in Session. This play is a reflection of the violation of women's rights and portrays the alienation of the woman and the haunting question of the last destination of her life in the context of her relationship with men. Vijay Tendulkar highlights and exposes the hypocrisy, selfishness, sham moral standards and the sadism latent in the metropolitan middle class men.

The female protagonist is trapped and charged against, infanticide. She is referred to as 'a sinful canker on the body of society. Therefore "no allowance must be made because the accused is a woman. Woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. 'Woman is not fit for independence' . . . That is the rule laid down by tradition . . . Show no mercy . . .".

Women are portrayed as helpless victims of the conspiracies hatched by men. Benare of Silence! is mercilessly harassed by her own co-actors. The play satirizes the respectable facade of middle class men and the values they profess. These men are utterly hollow in their day-to-day life and hence are impatient with Benare, a successful teacher who leads a fairly independent life in She is vitally attacked on the point of marriage. "Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure". The gay and cheerful Benare suddenly becomes speechless, on being accused of her illicit relation with professor Damle and of infanticide. She is stunned when she is accused of infanticide

Benare is forced to collapse when the lawyer says that she has plotted to 'dynamite' the very roots of Indian tradition, culture and religion by being an unmarried mother. She should be given the severest punishment. The mock-judge, Kashikar, pronounces the final savage judgement. He declares the verdict. He tells her that she has tried to 'dynamite' social customs and the sacredness of marriage and motherhood, and hence, deserves no mercy. He goes on to say that Benare as a teacher has set a very bad example, by daring to conceive a child out of wedlock. - "it is a sin to be pregnant before marriage"

Pontificating about motherhood, marriage and morality, the judge commands the school authorities to dismiss such an immoral woman. Benare loses her job, her only solace. She is flabbergasted at her dismissal when she has been consistently an excellent teacher. The dismissal of a perfect teacher is disheartening and she feels it to be an outrageous infringement of her personality. She feels forbidden and her job as a teacher turns to be an unrewarding work. The unkindest cut is yet to come. The child in the womb is to be destroyed. This is like a never healing ulcer for her. Benare experiences an identity crisis in her place as a teacher because of the discrimination against women. She is forbidden to do what she likes and therefore feels she has no freedom in her work.

She is unable to speak her trouble out, for she is a woman who faces the reality of her life and the opposition of the milieu in the true spirit of ideal Hindu womanhood where womanhood has degenerated to the state of dogged subservience. Hence her life becomes chaotic. Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy of the urban middle class male chauvinists who have all ganged up against her, out of sheer collective envy of her assertive confidence and uncompromising independence of spirit.

Women are enslaved to their patriarchy; they feel that chastity is more important than life and that its loss brings an unbearable stigma worse than death. This concept of chastity gets its indispensable support. If man is permitted for all kinds of enjoyment, then it is a great injustice done to women in the name of values and culture. Women must eliminate these patriarchal cultures. Let them not give way to the oppressor to suppress and exclude them from enjoyment.

The 'mock-trial' is of great significance. It becomes a real trial at which Benare's private life is ruthlessly exposed, much to the malicious glee of her male tormentors. Her romantic longings of adulthood are transformed into rigid rules and rituals by tradition. The playwright uses this technique to satirize effectively the false conventions of the male-dominated society. It is a naked display of the cruelty shown towards Leela Benare's private life much to the malicious glee of her male tormentors. The trial merely acts as a booster, which brings out the potential of threat to Benare and the like. Tendulkar in anguish questions as to why women must glorify this enslaving value and accept it instead of violating these values.

The gang of men overwhelm her with a shower of evidence against her. Men make stark comments; "to the public eye, she is unmarried" and "she runs after men too much". Benare's amateur co-actors make sweeping generalizations that girls should be married before puberty. Unable to come to terms with her, the men use ungratified and meaningless words to identify her as an estranged woman because she has found a degree of economic freedom that makes marriage less necessary. Benare, who has all along been baiting her male counterparts, ends up being the game ruthlessly hunted and baited by them all. This element of reversal gives the play its unique dramatic significance. It helps one to realize how a woman is sought to be used, abused and manipulated by the theory of unreality.

The playwright exposes the cruelty that is latent in the collective psyche of the city-bred male chauvinists. They framed questions like "how many chances of

marriage have you had so far in your life? And how did you miss them?”. the mean men discussed as to how Miss. Leela Benare remained “unmarried till such a late age?”. Mrs. Kashikar joins hands with these men and makes a damaging remark that these days one gets “everything without marrying . . . It’s the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That’s how promiscuity has spread throughout our society”(99-100). She becomes more direct accusing Benare wandering with as many men as possible. Mrs. Kashikar never misses an opportunity to insinuate her venomous comments directed at Benare, as she is extremely envious of Benare’s boundless independence. She suffers from a persecution complex on account of barrenness and her abject dependence on her husband, makes her utterly spiteful of Benare.

The eagerness and enthusiasm with which the amateur co-actors heap evidence after evidence against her terrify her and eventually succeed in making her sit frozen like a motionless statue. She is compelled to face the reality. She desires to hide it by attempting to give the name of a father to the child in the womb. As she fails to do so she is dazed and desperate. She is ready to escape from this wasteland of life by swallowing poison to be free from the maddening violence of the so-called civilized beings. Benare wants to flee from the cribbed confines of an incarcerated life in order to find a new identity for herself. She pines for social communication but the society is impervious to her need when a more serious charge is against her.

. . . unmarried 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 completion, I have a dreadful fear that the very existence of society will be in danger. There will be no such thing as moral values left.

The dramatist asserts that these traditional measures lead women to ‘moral madness’ as they deny women’s capability of moral reasoning and thereby restricting them to the domain of the private and forcing them into a series of perverse moral double binds. With all her liveliness and efficiency Benare becomes a butt of ridicule. The middle class morality exploits her. The cheerful teacher transforms into silent and stunned Benare. Her view on life too changes.

In the beginning, as a cheerful woman her philosophy of life is “my life is my own . . . My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those-

no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life!" Towards the end, she understands the real meaning of life. "Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug. Life is drudgery. Life is a something that's nothing . . . Only one thing in life is all important-the body! . . . it is true". Benare is sexually suppressed, stands at the crossroads and pours out her heart.

Benare writhes in pain and confesses that she is afraid of them all. She admits that she has committed a sin, once, falling in love with her maternal uncle as a teen-aged girl. Later she realized that he was perverted and had his eyes on her new-blossomed beauty. He was the first hypocrite she met. Once again as a grown up woman she fell in love with Professor Damle. She thought that this time it would be an intelligent choice. But her second experience with professor Damle was still a bitter one. Infact it was not love again, it was worship, the fact that he is a middle-aged man with children does not deter her. Her relationship begins with the mind and not the body. Her interest in him mainly springs from her passion for crusading against oppression of any kind. She believes that with him beside her there is every possibility of achieving autonomy. Her psychological needs and practical ways to cope with problems of day-to-day living will be met without losing her dignity and sense of equality and that she can live a true life. However, Professor Damle changes her life to total misery. Professor Damle, the 'unusual intellect', exploited her hero-worship. All her bitter experiences have taught Benare that it is her body that brought about her current sad plight. The bodily love is the source of her misery.

Women are deprived not only of equality with men but also exploited by them. The teacher asserts in anxiety and in pain that hers is a selfless mother's quest, founded on her would-be son's most essential needs. The child must have a mother, father, a house and a good reputation in society.

Tendulkar turns it into a marvellous piece of satire by pitting the self-consciously independent, vehemently assertive and immensely cheerful Benare against the utterly selfish, hypocritical, merciless and malicious Professor Damle. Despite being an eminent intellect he demeans himself and his profession by having an extra-marital relationship and eventually refuses to accept her for the fear of losing his own reputation. When she realized Damle was not a protective master, an ideal husband, she leaves him and takes a firm measure. That was the only way she could save her soul and preserve her sanity, equilibrium, peace and serenity of

her mind. Tendulkar is at his satirical best when Benare talks of men's hypocritical and sexual morality.

Benare seeks shelter in her self-imposed silence. The word 'Silence!' in the title of the play appears to have double implication. While it entails the judge's orders to maintain Silence in the court, it, in fact implies silencing the innocent party's cry for justice. Tendulkar deliberately makes the protagonist to break her silence through a stunning monologue, which exposes the hypocrisy of the middle class male chauvinists who have conspired together against her. She unfurls and unburdens herself to activate the creative impulse smothered within her artistic self. The act of unburdening herself through the self-expression is not nearly reliving of particular moments of the past but a coming to terms with herself and making future life possible. That long silence is not an intrusion into the world of silence but a silent communion with the oppressed self, straining for articulation and for a voice.

A young woman belonging to the middle class society in India is denied the privilege of living a decent life, of becoming a mother. Benare tries in vain to marry someone who was prepared "to take a broad view of things for the sake of humanity, and accept the child along with the mother?". She pleads so in order to get acknowledgement for the illegitimate child. This is the way she disqualifies herself for marriage in the conventional society. Women have been both culturally and emotionally dependent on men; any disruption of attachment or affiliation is seen not as a loss of relationship but as a total loss of self, which then becomes a neurosis as in the case of Benare. She cries for love and relationship and her loveless relationship is an implication of Benare's anguished cry for love and life of involvement.

The victim becomes almost the playwright's mouthpiece and she reasons out the cause of her victimization. As an individual she is deprived of her rights, feelings and emotions and is rendered more vulnerable to sufferings than others and turns into becomes a case of violence and consequent victimization. In the conventional socio-cultural milieu the woman remains unrealised, trapped, caged and oppressed. Benare is now depressed and shackled by the traditional customs, but her depressed and oppressed mind rebels against it.

Tendulkar delves deep into the hearts of his characters and covertly pleads for sympathy with the victims of the society. He has criticized on the attitude and

morality of the middle-class that throttles the tender desire of a middle-class woman as in the case of Benare. He makes an attempt to highlight on the endless decay and violence in the social mores inexorably impinging upon the man-woman relationship. Sex and ethics seem to have created a sense of fatefulness out of which there is no escape, either for man or woman.

Man and Woman are trapped in their own helpless condition, left to the battering of cruel and irrational forces beyond their control. No rebellion, not even acquiescence is possible. They are subject to a sense of self-destruction and dissipation bordering on despair. This way, the play unfolds Tendulkar's tragic view of life in which innocent are bound to suffer and pay a heavily for allowing themselves to be emotionally entangled.

The man-woman relationship becomes an emblem of destruction of an unkind world of many Leela Benares of an unequal situation in which women suffer from the stings of misfortune, social inequities and injustices committed on them by a cruel male-dominated society. The treatment of the woman - Benare, highlights the psychic and corporal oppression to which women are subjected and their intense suffering, loneliness, alienation and isolation are portrayed with great effect.

Benare sinks into a world of isolation unable to welcome the bright prospects of setting up a new home. Eventually she picks up enough courage to turn the tables against men who are out to exploit and humiliate her. She endeavours to attain humanity and a human identity. The victimized begins to assert her individuality challenging to mother her illegitimate child. As a member of the society, Tendulkar deals with the crucial issues and shows his concern taking into consideration various choices, alternatives and options available to working women in particular.

As a writer, Tendulkar recognizes her independent spirit. Her new life had nothing to do with him or any man. She could be that rarity, a woman with professional etiquettes and an independent person living her own life. She didn't need a man for identity or status. She wins the admiration for her acceptance of the predicament and for her assertiveness. It makes one wonder whether she has in reality been able to reject the power of patriarchy. This expression exemplifies the view of man-woman relationship in an unequal society. M. Prabhakar refers to the same, and quotes Freeman's expression "practical as well as theoretical; it

illuminates possibilities for the future as well as criticizes the limitations of the present”.

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* pleads for radical changes in the gender relations in the society and indirectly indicates a way out of the gender power-struggle. It serves a guide for women in the context of male domination in respect to sexual status, role and temperament. It forcefully drives home the message that women are mere objects of beauty meant for carnal consumption of men.

Tendulkar treats the incidents in an objective manner. Women, one of the powerless sections of the society, are the victims of the irrational social vision. He is deliberate in his themes because the members of his audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or the sister in the woman's position and come up with a way of changing the situation to her advantage”. Vijay Tendulkar expects transformation within self for the transformation of the society.

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