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Victimized Womanhood in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! the Court is in Session*

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Abstract:

Women are being ignored, oppressed, exploited, trapped and tortured everywhere. Whether they are educated or not, the scenario is the same. Under the mask of patriarchy, women are being victimized in the Indian society. Many conscious writers have assayed to picturize the victimized womanhood. Vijay Tendulkar is one of them. In his well-acclaimed play *Silence! the Court is in Session*, he has shown with a poke in the eye of the readers how the main character Leela Benare has been victimized by the male-centric society. Her personal life has been dragged for an open discussion with a view to making an object of humiliation. She has been made silent so that she will not be able to raise her voice against them, who are the root reason for her pregnancy. But it is not picture of Benare alone. However, she is the representative of those voiceless women, who have been being kept in silent mode.

Keywords: Trap, victimization, silenced, patriarchy, infanticide.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! the Court is in Session* original title "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" is a play written in Marathilanguage in 1963. It was translated into English by Priya Adarkar. This play was not based on the imaginary concept but on the actual experience. Some droplets of commotion the author overheard from the outside of the wings while an amateur group was on their way to rehearse a mock trial. Tendulkar was pressured by actors, friends and directors to figure out this play as soon as possible. Basically, this play was written for 'Rangayan', which is a theatre group, at the instance of the director Arvind Deshpande and Sulbha Deshpande. This play sheds the light on the collision between human values and socially accepted norms. We all know that rules and acts are there to preserve justice in society. However, sometimes they fail to keep up the spirit to maintain its grip over humanity. Only then the devaluation and underestimation infect the justification of social

health. This play is one of such plays which demand the humanitarian aspect to bring back the order of laws. This play is a fine caricature of social drama to portray the familiar characters who wear a self-righteous face to suppress their ingenuity. Humanity is subdued here in the hands of other human beings.

The middle class is the junction of the upper and lower sections of society. To build the social infrastructure, its role is very important in the mid twentieth century. It is a different set of categories of people who were not so much magnificent or rich or not so less. This intermediate state of society played a crucial role because they were the largest in number. The middle-class people pretend to be better in behaviour, morality and thoughts, but remain as it is in reality, what actually they are. They make fun of trivialities and sometimes remain blind to the fundamental factors of the life. Emphasis has been given in the discussion of the middle class in this paper because the basic theme of the play is the victimised womanhood in society by the middle-class society. The characters we find in the play are not downtrodden or illiterate but are urbanized and respectfully positioned in society. This background has brightened the critical point of the play. It is womanhood which falls prey to the falsehood of society. The tricky and mischievous people pounce on the women when they get access.

The main character Leela Benare is confident but is found devastated and wretched at the end because of the mental pressure, given by the majority of the members of the drama group. The typical trend of women torture in society has got to a different level through this mental violence rather than materialistic deprivation. Generally, we find women are morally or physically violated. In the role of Benare with her companions, we see how much she is humiliated mentally. The excellency of this play is to present the accurate layer of society through a perfect dramatization. All the characters except Leela Benare, Samant, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar represent the whole community and prove that the possibility of women harassment can also be done by women themselves. In the context, we see the approach of Mrs. Kashikar, the other female body, was not at all favourable to Benare. So, some significant relevant issues are coming up in the context of the play. The perverted dissatisfaction and jealous mentality of the middle-class families is surprisingly interested in finding faults of others hiding their own.

The role of Benare has unmasked the apparent surface of society that suppresses its failure and despair. Her role may be compared to an outlet through which she has tried to

release all the dirt of society. The very theme of this play is based on gender discrimination where women in India do not get the equal position to men. Benare is put to show a woman's combat against her hostile surroundings. She is a thirty-four-year-old self dependent school teacher. She is intelligent and confident. However, on the other hand, she is frivolous and so talkative that she unknowingly releases all of her secrets to others. She is the embodiment of a typical middle-class woman who pretends to be free and unworried. She is not timid or shy but not so dignified as a woman of personality. She behaves like a child which is unbecoming for her age. She approaches Samant to make a very close relationship with her. At the end of the play, we see Benare become the victim of the situation, sitting alone, devastated, hopeless and failing to be indifferent to all fake mockers drawn to her. This play draws the afflicted womanhood but the women characteristics are not levelled respectfully. Either they are dependent on their husband as an enslaved person or perkily superficial like Benare.

The two women characters we see here are not satisfied personalities- one is confined within the grip of her husband, while the other one is still unmarried but lacks of an actual personality. From the beginning of the play, we see the role of male guys along with no bias. Rather Benare is shameless and desperate to grow a close relationship with Samant, who wants to avoid Benare, but she tries to be closer while talking by spreading her temptations around him. The woman image, Tendulkar wanted to draw, was not traditional. In the light of mid-twentieth-century culture, Benare, by profession was independent, free and daring but lacked sense and sensibility. It is true that Benare herself told her secrets, like her pregnancy and her hidden relationship with professor Damle. The social scandal, family crises and relationship troubles - all were the standard features of the society.

In this play, an amateur group named "Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association" came to a village hall to perform a play conveying a robust socio-political message against the American President Johnson for giving consent for manufacturing of atom bombs. As the play progresses, we find that due to the absence of Rawte, they decide to use Samant as the 'Fourth Witness' in their play. But Samant has never seen a real court in operation. Therefore, to make him aware of the actual court proceedings, it is decided that a mock trial may be arranged. All the characters will play their roles as usual. Only the accused is changed (Leela Benare will be there instead of President Johnson in the real play). In the mock trial, Benare is accused of infanticide. No doubt, it was a mock trial, but the mockery of Benare's position made the situation claustrophobic. The psychological stress, antipathy and social malignity smashed Benare's normalcy and happiness. In the course of the play, she was

trapped as the pitiable victim of gender discrimination. Her personal issues raised doubts about that burst out through this mock trial. We know how Samant continued his witness against Benare with the charge of infanticide from a book and presented all these false pieces of evidences as if it was for Benare. Before the trial, Sukhatme passed a very significant comment that the presence of a woman adds a different complexion. His comment has raised all the questions with all the rumours together. It proves that people objectify women for their entertainment. Patriarchal society feels no profound impression over women's plight, demand and sufferings. Now, it is the next turn towards the climax of the play. We find Benare, like others, believed the accusation, mock court trial. Everything was for fun and was going on accordingly from the beginning. However, the scenario began to change, and the situation became severe. Hearing the charge against herself, Benare became numbed, and she could not believe it at first. The whole atmosphere grew sombre excessively with the declaration of charge of infanticide. Though the points began lightly, the gender discrimination became evident inside the light tone. We see Sukhatme proposed Kashikar for letting them have little time to spit out betel juice. They were smoking and making fun of each other. Nevertheless, whenever Benare interrupted in the middle, they disallowed her because they thought that it was out of court law. Benare rightly opposed that she might have been given accusation for snatching public property or some other charges except the atrocious charge of infanticide. Initially, that trial was relatively lighter in tone but forced to be serious later when the witnesses began to present the evidence against her charge. Karnik, as the first witness, raised the most crucial question of who the mother is. A bitch or a respectable woman? A bitch gives birth to a baby; a respectable woman also gives birth to her baby. This very point is locating that womanhood should be responsible for being cursed or blessed without the touch of others. The patriarchal society openly blames a woman for her follies. The gender-discriminating tone is significantly more complicated here. Society is acting like a one-eyed judge to women that the role of a woman, as a responsible mother or non-respectable bitch, is imposed. Tendulkar is outspoken here to design his target from a lighter, playful personality to the serious, grim outcome of human rage, jealousy and antipathy. Surprisingly, when Karnik was asked to express his observation on Benare, Sukhatme reminded him to tell his real-life observation. The second witness was Balu Rokde. His former witness Ponshe, passed the game to a mysterious level and left it on Rokde to complete.

Genuinely speaking, Rokde was very nervous and unwilling to attend his part. However, being forced repeatedly, what he spoke, was bizarre for Benare. To add fuel to the

fire, Rokde began to say that one day he found Benare in the house of Professor Damle, who is also a member of the amateur group. One most vital point to notice is whenever any awkward moment came, they added the question of whether it was in real life. Though it was believed to be a mock trial, gradually the mock trial shifted to the secret and forbidden reality. The fact lost its purity just because, to relish the matters, the members added spices according to their taste. Rokde said that he found both Benare and Damle sitting in his house together when night was falling. This information did not make others happy because they were waiting for many serious incidents to linger. In what typical way, they scrambled the trivial matters so seriously that they acted over attentively to the points of Benare's presence specially at the moment on night falling. In typical a middle-class concept, it is a contaminable practice for a woman to step out of home at night to go to someone's house, because it is pretty defying the social norms and regulations, set up by the patriarchal society. Rokde's witness was the transition from mock to real because what he told was actual as he had nothing imaginary. However, according to the direction of the trial, the simple issues were drawn to the malicious corner. The third witness was Samant. He was utterly ignorant of what to tell Benare on the charge of infanticide. The very notable point is that all were imaginary except the accused.

It is proved again that the sin of Benare is believed to be true, while the others were fake and imaginary. Samant, as the fourth witness, gave his imaginary speech standing in the witness box. He said that Benare and Damle inside a room were locked from behind at night. He continued that Damle did not take him in, and when he came back, he heard a suppressed sound of crying of a female voice. Samant knew about Benare's unmarried pregnancy. His witness highlighted the situation of an unmarried Indian girl's hidden pregnancy enhances their helplessness so that they take the risk of committing suicide at last if there is no way out. Samant placed some imaginary dialogues to prove Benare's helplessness in surrendering to Damle. When Benare heard all this insulting stuff, she became furious. Mrs. Kashikar teased her by asking that if she was innocent why she was angry. That a completely shrewd contentious woman's nature against another woman drawn here was the typical manner of then society. Everybody knew that Samant was giving his statement from a book he was holding. However still, it was intensely enjoyable because the plot undoubtedly matched to Benare's situation. Benare found her protest went in vain. So, she decided to leave this place immediately because the whole situation had already gone out of her control. Unfortunately, she could not open the door. The lock was not in good condition. Somehow, it got locked

from the outside and would not open until anybody unlocked it from the opposite. Seeing her futile attempt, everybody in the room felt pleased, as if they had trapped the mouse, and their enjoyment seemed fulfilled as they wished to make her trapped in all possible ways.

The play ascends to its climax, when Benare is summoned to the witness box to express her opinion. However, she remained silent despite being asked repeatedly by the others. Fearing the game might get over untimely, other members took the responsibility to continue it by discussing her issues among themselves. Those topics are like why Benare was unmarried in such a mature age. They all conclude that if any person can get “everything” without marriage, why he or she will marry. They mean “everything” as the sexual pleasure one searches through marriage. Some ridiculous social concepts are being highlighted that marriages are for sexual pleasure, and people who remain unmarried fulfil this desire by some illegal means. Benare is not an exception. The community belief was on some conservative ideas without any moral values, like unmarried woman cannot laugh, dance or talk and must maintain some restrictions while talking to a man.

When the cross-examination of witnesses again began to warm up the final stroke, the whole situation turned twisted. Everybody gets excited to give their imaginary witness again in a more grim way. Rokde again entered the witness box and started with Benare's act- how she held his hand and asked him not to tell others what she did with Rokde. But being refused, she threatened him to harm in future. Now Ponkshe grew impatient to be the next witness because by the time he made up his speech, it was more realistic and shocking. He continued that one day, he received a hidden letter from Benare to meet her. He went to her house and caught Benare opening a poison bottle named Tik 20 before him. Ponkshe said that as he refused her to marry, she grew violent and was ready to commit suicide by taking this poison. There, Benare also revealed the mysterious truth that by Professor Damle, she became pregnant who simply loved her body, not her mind. Benare requested him by holding his feet to marry to save her from this grave situation. All the people felt highly excited to get contaminable issues for fun regarding women characters. The mock judge Kashikar also grew impatient to present his role as a witness. He included that in Bombay, he had a man to visit Nana Sahib Shindey. At his place, he heard a female voice, quite similar to that of Benare. Suddenly Kashikar overheard Nana Shahib, talking over the phone angrily about the curse of being pregnant before marriage and for the offence of demoralizing society. At last, after the long- struggling hustle and bustle, Sukhatme pronounced the words that this very lady, Miss Leela Benare is a very immoral woman, who demoralized the sacredness of motherhood and

deserved an exemplary punishment to be shown in society. After a long time, Benare, who was watching the trial on her personal life and dissection over her moral values, came in motion. She talked about her profession and continued to say how she taught her children by saying that human beings give value to human body without giving priority to morality and justice. She poked other members as silly and nonsense as possible. While talking, she sobbed and broke down in tears. However, her long speech was considered foolish and dismissed in the mock court.

This trial was interrupted by the call of the villagers as they entered in to the room, unlocking the bolt of the door. All the members left the room to prepare for the show performance, leaving Benare alone on the stage. They only showed sympathy by patting her on the back. Nobody felt that they had imposed stressful and fake heinous charge on her mind for fun. Women remained alone in the dark, severely afflicted and devastated.

To conclude, if we take the whole trial as the shade of fundamental judiciary, we can feel how heartless and less sympathetic our society to women, be they fallen or ordinary ones. Tendulkar has vivified the truth that it is society or societal norm, which makes women fall rather than the fault of women themselves. So, the psychological approach to the womanhood through this play is undeniable and heart- touching. Even the title of the play booms the violence against women, who are not allowed of raising their voices. Tendulkar's play critiques patriarchal values and shows how the law operates as a device to silence the voices of women age after age.

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