



THE DRAMATIC CONFRONTATION BETWEEN REALITY AND ILLUSION AS PROJECTED BY VIJAY TENDULKAR IN HIS PLAY, SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to strive on the dramatic collision between reality and illusion as projected in the play Silence! The court is in Session, which deals with themes unravel the exploitation of power and violence in human relationship and to show how his characters are mostly contradictory personalities struggling between emotion, intellect and conflicting actions.

Key Words :Struggle,Self-Justification, Frustration,Oppression, Judgement.

Truly speaking, Vijay Tendulkar is considered as one of the most notable Indian playwrights, who has been in the Vanguard of Marathi Theatre for more than fifty years. His career as a dramatist began in the mid-fifties and has, no doubt, been a prolific writer and he has to his credit publication of twenty-eight full-length plays, twenty-four one act plays and eleven children's dramas. Almost 75% of his plays are said to have been translated into English language. His play **Silence! The Court is in Session** earned him a significant place among the leading Indian playwrights while his play **Ghasiram Kotwal** won him international fame and name in the mid-seventies, winner of several national and international awards and fellowships. Even if he has been both venerated and controversial in India, his works have generated much intellectual debate and controversy.

Vijay Tendulkar, the prolific Marathi playwright, has become a name to be reckoned with not only in Marathi stage but also in the Indian theatre. A journalist by profession, Tendulkar has tried his hand at various genres during the last fifty years as a creative writer. These include articles, short stories, one –act plays, dramas, screen plays and dialogues, literary criticism and also translations. Even though he has been very successful in whatever he has tried his forte remains in dramatic field. An excellent wielder of the pen, he has won the Sangeeth Natak Academy Award, the Kamala Devi Chattopathyay Award and the Padma Bhusan Award.

Tendulkar's very first major work was **Manus Navache Bet** which gave vent to the tormenting solitude and alienation of a modern individual in an urban industrialized society. **Manus Navache Bet** was followed by a spate of plays **Madhalya, Chinnicha Ghar Kota Menacha Mee Jinkle Mee Harlo, Sasi Ga Sari**. There seems to be 'consistency' of theme in these plays despite the apparently disparate nature of their subjects. In all these early plays, Tendulkar is concerned with the middle-class individual sets against the backdrop hostile society. Generally speaking, Tendulkar is a dramatist who presents modern man in all his Complexities and he portrays life as it is from different angles, without trying to moralize or philosophize. One important quality of Tendulkar is the underlying sympathy for the 'Little big man' in the modern world. With the publication of **Shanta! Court Chalu Ahe (Silence! The Court is in Session)** in 1967, Tendulkar became the centre of a general controversy. He had already acquired the epithet of 'the angry young man' of Marathi Theatre, but now he was definitely marked out as a rebel against the established values of a fundamentally orthodox society. The theatre group in **Silence!** which comes to perform at a village is a minuscule cross section of its different sub-strata. Their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerism reflect their petty, circumscribed existence fraught with frustrations and repressed desires that find expression in their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings.

Leela Benare, the central character of this play, is the only exception possessing a natural, lust for life and a spontaneous 'joie de vivre', she ignores social norms and dictates. Being different from others, she is easily isolated and made a victim of a cruel game, cunningly planned by her co-actors. During the course of this so-called game, which is meaningfully set in the form of a mock-trial, Miss. Benare's private life is exposed and publicly



dissected revealing her illicit love affair with Prof. Damle, a married man with a family, has resulted in her pregnancy. Prof. Damle's absence during the trial, shows his irresponsibility and for the social and moral, condemnation of Miss. Benare. During the trial, he is summoned merely as a witness while Benare remains the prime accused as the unwed mother of his illegitimate child. Interestingly, the accusation brought against her at the beginning of the trial – that of infanticide – turns into a verdict at the conclusion, principally because contemporary Indian society, with its roots grounded firmly in reactionary ideas, cannot allow the birth of a child out of wedlock. This very severe in the attitude of the authorities expresses the hypocrisy and double standards on which Indian society is founded.

Leena Benare's defense of herself against the onslaught of the upholders of social reforms in a long soliloquy has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theatre. It is important to note here that Tendulkar leaves us in doubt as to whether or not Benare at all delivers the soliloquy, thus struggling that in all probability what she has to say for herself is swallowed up by the silence imposed upon her by the authorities. In fact, on several occasions, during the court session, the judge's cry of 'silence' and the banging of the gavel drown proceedings here objections and protestations. Benare's monologue is reminiscent of Mora's declaration of Independence but lacks the note of protest that characterizes the speech of Ibsen's heroine. It is more a self-justification than an attack on society's hypocrisy. It is poignant and sensitive highlighting the vulnerability of women in our society.

It is generally held that the theme of 'raw' violence is rampant in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. But **Silence! The Court is in Session** is an exception. It deals with the issue of social morality and shows how a young and attractive women school is trapped and coerced into making a confession about her illicit love affair. Sumit Mitra seems to have voiced the general opinion when he said, "the raw brutality and lewdness of Gidhade make a triumphal return in the post-Shantana! Phase, particularly in ...Sakharam Binder" (P 36). It is evident here that **Silence!** is "free from the naturalistic theme of violence, unlike vultures and Sakharam" (P 39) Benare, the principal character in the play, is as sprightly, rebellious and assertive as the heroines of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. She frightens away the other characters when they enter the village hall. She mocks at Ponshe and she laughs at Rokde. Even though she is "the soul of seriousness", she never goes around "with a long face". Even the innocent Semant compliments her: "Miss Benare is really amazing", "She's a very nice lady." She has been a punctual teacher. She has never given "a bit of room for disapproval – I don't give an inch of it to anyone" (P 59). Her class is scared of her still it adores her. She would spend the last drop of her blood teaching them. That is why other teachers and even the principal are jealous of her. She is a keen observer. She can see that Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar have sheltered Rokde in order to escape from boredom and have made "a slave" of him. She is rebellious too. She likes to mother her illegitimate child.

With all her liveliness and efficiency, Benare becomes a butt of ridicule "just because of one bit of slander." It is here that the middle class morality exploits her. A group of teachers, among whom she is also a member, plan to stage a play in a village. As one of them has not turned up, a local man is asked to replace him. A rehearsal is arranged and a mock trial is staged to make him understand the court procedure. Ironically enough, it is Miss. Benare who suggests that a different play other than the atomic weapons trial should be played for the purpose. When she goes to bathroom that is in her absence, all the men conspire together against her, as it is "a charge with social significance." She looks around when Kashikar announces that she is accused of infanticide. She pleads innocence:

"I couldn't even kill a common cockroach.
How could I kill a new born-child" (P 79).

His falls deaf on the ears of the men vultures. Karnik claims, "The crime itself is imaginary." But immediately Ponshe expresses the contrary: "Only the accused is real. It is rightly said that we never know when reality and fiction lapse into each other, heightening the mock-seriousness of the serious and seriousness of the mock-serious: and thus heightening the absurdity of Banare's condition in the play" (P 47). The man in the play overwhelm her with a shower of evidence against her. Rokde summons up courage and makes a devastating statement that he has



seen Benare in Prof. Damle's room in the college hostel. Once Prof. Damle's name mentioned, it is no longer a mock trial and the mock-seriousness merges with the serious. Even though he enjoy at heart, Kashidar feels uneasy about it and says that they are getting on to too personal a level" (P 41). When Benare collapses sobbing, the other characters exclaim that it is just a "joke" and she has taken it really to heart. This is Tendulkar's "cold blooded" "moral impartiality" projected throughout his plays. "This play is a caustic satire on the social as well as Legal justice ... The mental agony suffered by the girl throughout the play is in no way less than the Legal punishment... Is that all you wished to convey or something more?" Tendulkar said :

"This is exactly what I had in mind. If I say anything else, that will be an after-thought.

Tendulkar continued:

"Had I shown her aggressive, that would have been my attitude, not hers. Otherwise also the playwright should only suggest leaving the rest to the viewers" (P 72)

Benare's find collapse leaves one with a feeling of pity and horror. It is true, "There is in it (the play), pity and horror and not just violence" (P 49). The violence of the play without this technique Tendulkar could not have made his characters directly attack Benare on the charge of infanticide. The play is widely acclaimed for this technique. So, **Silence ! the Court in Session** comes as a turning point in Tendulkar's career. It has a play in rehearsal and a real-life story and the two intertwine to produce some unusual dramatic confrontations" (P 63). The dramatic confrontations in the play is between reality and illusion. The mock trial is an illusion but the charge of infanticide on Benare is a reality.

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