

Reformation of Society and Gender Discrimination: A Study of Vijay Tendulkar's "Silence! The Court is in Session"

¹Kalpna Pandey, ²Dr. Vinod Kumar Singh

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English and Other Foreign Languages
Dr. Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University, Lucknow

²Prof. and Former Head, Dept. of English and Other Foreign Languages
Dr. Shakuntala Misra National Rehabilitation University, Lucknow
Email: ¹ kalpana2331@gmail.com, ² vkumarsingh35@gmail.com

Abstract: *Vijay Tendulkar is a creative writer with a fine sensibility and at the same time a contemplative and controversial dramatist. He has been the most influential Indian Marathi writer. His plays are known for realistic presentation of neglected subjects, untouched problems and outspoken dialogues. His play "Silence! The Court is in Session" brought him national recognition in the late sixties. In this play Tendulkar presents the intricate relationship between art and life, and it also combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by the society. The play shows the male domination and the plight of a young woman is also visible through the character of Leela Benare, the heroine of the play. Benare is snared by the highbrows of cultured society. Tendulkar shows the problems of women and also presents the patriarchal structure of the society in this play. The words of the title "Silence! the Court is in Session" are very common in law courts. The very words indicate the absolute authority of the judge in the court room to decide upon the manners of others. In a civilized society the court system is in vogue for the sake of justice. In this play Vijay Tendulkar chooses a term of judicial register as the title of his play to make a powerful comment on society with a heavy patriarchal bias that makes justice impossible.*

The present paper will portray a very realistic picture of the plight and persecution of women in a male-dominated society with reference to the issue of the emancipation of rights. It will also question the sexual politics of the society and reveal the crisis of human existence.

Key Words: *Judicial register, intricate relationship, victimized, patriarchal bias, plight and persecution.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

India has a glorious history of drama which begins with the Sanskrit plays. In literary scene drama represents the universally acknowledged human sensibility without any constraint of time or space. It is the direct statement between the writer and the viewers by using the artists. Indian English Drama has been flourishing as it started its own distinctive tradition by managing a sequence of modern themes with originality. The major concern of contemporary Indian drama is the representation of socio-political scenario, marginalization, corruption, oppression, gender discrimination, oppression, poverty and hunger.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is a contemporary playwright and the social realist who is truly dedicated towards the society. He tries to represent always the concurrent social issues and the problems in his plays like other Indian playwrights. He has made unending efforts to bring forth the evils, problems and the harsh realities present in the contemporary society. As his plays focus on the real life problems, social norms, gender issues, man-woman relationship, domestic problems, political issues, norms of morality etc., he is considered as social critic.

Vijay Tendulkar has efficiently employed the fundamental themes of the society at different levels and by different modes which form the common ground for his dramatic merit. He is also a movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator primarily in Marathi. He has given the Marathi drama a global fame. Tendulkar is basically famous for his plays- *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Constable Ghasiram*, *Sakharam the Binder*. Tendulkar examines social inequalities in the sense of gender discrimination through his writings. His plays not only bring up gender issues and the liberty given to women in a patriarchal society, but also they deal with gender biases and prejudices which influence the lives of women amongst the middle class educated society.

2. Discussion:

Tendulkar's famous satirical play *Silence! The Court is in Session* indirectly attacks on the inflexible societal customs, evils, principles and manners of the middle class society. Vijay Tendulkar effectively portrays the gender discrimination along with the perception of the social system of modern India. The play also depicts the traditional,

orthodox and backward thinking of Indian people. In this play Vijay Tendulkar challenges the problems of the society that exist in our society. Through this play Tendulkar aspires to reform the society and provides the women equal status. Here Tendulkar depicts the sordid facet and pathetic position of the social order along with the gender prejudice of the Indian patriarchal society through the character of Miss Leela Benare.

'*Silence! The Court is in Session*' especially exhibits the narrow mindedness of the traditional Indian society where only woman is held responsible for any mistake. Varun Gulati rightly states in "Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session: Social Criticism and Individual Tragedy*" that "in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has depicted the plight of a young woman, who is betrayed by the male dominated society. A traditional male dominated society cannot relinquish its paralyzed values and customs. The society does not like to perceive or receive any social change. Tendulkar presents a treatment of those ugly ways of society in this play. It is a bitter satire against the social ills and an interesting attempt to criticize the follies that prevail in our society" (Gulati, 1-2).

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* has three acts which focus on the pitiable situation of women in the male dominated society. Through the unpleasant narrative of Miss Leela Benare the writer represents the story of every woman in society who has become the victim of patriarchy for her act of adultery like Miss Leela Benare. The play is in fact a mock trial of the school teacher Miss Leela Benare whose private life is open to the elements before the people. During the play by showing the illegitimate bond with Professor Damle she is charged with child abortion and immoral affairs with various persons. Gradually all the witnesses and authorities become unfavourable to Miss Benare. In place of finding out the real culprit of child abortion and unlawful relations, the judge Mr. Kashikar makes her the only victim for the same charge as she is a woman. Besides, the judge orders the school management to remove such a corrupt and immoral lady from the school.

At this Miss Leela Benare tries to defend herself by telling the true story behind this in which she imputes blame on various males for the same crime but she cannot manage to pay for it. In the end Miss Benare loses control over her physical and mental emotions which exposes the authority and the duplicity of male members of the society. This is an irony that the men consider women as their equal but if anything happens in the society, they point out fingers easily at woman's character in spite of blaming themselves. In his book "The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar" Mr. N.S. Dharan remarks that "Tendulkar though not a self-acknowledged feminist treats his women characters with understanding and compassion while pitting them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious" (Dharan, 28).

The play portrays the patriarchal values and tradition of the Indian society where the condition of women has degraded because of men's power. In the play Miss Leela Benare has to face the humiliation due to the power of male cast members of the trial. All the witnesses like Mr. Ponshe, Mr. Rokde and Samant verify about Miss Benare's immorality in the court. Miss Benare tries to protest against it by a long soliloquy but she cannot preserve herself before the supremacy of the male members. "The parrot to the sparrow said, 'Why, oh why are your eyes so red?' 'Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say? Someone has stolen my nest away'. Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow!" (Silence!, 23). Through the character of Miss Leela Benare Tendulkar represents traditional male dominated Indian society where women are exploited and treated as inferior to men in every field of life whether at house, office, social and public place.

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* raises the questions to the society against the violence and harassment of women. Tendulkar always attempts to portray those problems and issues of the society that are present in the internal structure of the society. Women are considered as second class citizens everywhere in Indian society. Moreover, he also underlines the intricate and value loaded relationship between husband and wife through the characters of Mr. Kashikar and Mrs. Kashikar which is another main element of established Indian society. Besides, male prejudice can be easily visible in their middle class society. Mr. Kashikar believes that Mrs. Kashikar is not a suitable match to him because of her illiteracy, so there is a formal relationship between them. The couple has adopted a boy named Balu Rokde as they have no child. By representing every detail of the relationship between Mr. Kashikar and Mrs. Kashikar, Tendulkar skilfully proves himself as a keen observer of society.

Tendulkar has powerfully projected the man-woman relationship in a variety of points along with the real life relationship problems, inadequacy and the uneasiness etc. He has also properly depicted the narrow mindedness of Indian society along with the psychology of the middle class through the characterization of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar. Tanmoy Kundu opines that "Tendulkar exposes the condition of women of the middle class family in Indian context. Both Benare and Mrs. Kashikar are presented as women who have fallen victims to male supremacy in Indian society. They both are not free to act independently. Benare's attempt to lead an independent life of her own has been frustrated by the group of men surrounding her during the course of the mock-trial. Her freedom has been mercilessly crushed". (Kundu, 2)

Tendulkar talks about various themes in this play as he not only raises the issue of gender discrimination but also the Indian judicial system in a satirical way. *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a bitter satire on the hypocrisy and evils of the judicial system of India. Through the play Tendulkar attempts to criticize the malice and follies with precision. In this way Tendulkar displays not only the problems and issues but at the same time he also presents a solution of those problems and limitations. Tendulkar shows his anxiety for the loss of morality, solemnity, belief as

well as degradation of court system which talks about equality before law. But in reality it restricts the picture of equality completely.

In the play Miss Leela Benare has to encounter the superiority of male domination only because she is a female. She is found guilty for the child abortion in her womb before her marriage which is not in favour of the standard community. It is believed that a legal court should be an emblem of justice, honesty, parity, gravity and decorum. Besides, there should be an accurate place of a witness box in the court room and there must be some sacred or religious scripture for taking an oath by the witness. But in place of it the witnesses take oath by touching the Oxford English Dictionary in this play and the judge Mr. Kashikar violates all procedures and etiquettes by jumping into the witness box and announces his judgment from the witness box.

Vijay Tendulkar represents bold and burning subjects of the society triumphantly in his writings. He has depicted about all this very precisely in his play *Silence! The Court is in Session*. For this play he has got the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya award. In this play, Tendulkar reveals the issues of gender discrimination, suppression and marginalization. Social norms and cultural elements can be questioned for the inequality against the woman. Here, Miss Leela Benare is the victim of the social system that controls the minds and the actions of the people.

Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is sarcasm about the function of law which is used as a tool in keeping women silent. Vijay Tendulkar represents the social inequalities in '*Silence! The Court is in Session*' through the members of the theatre group. They all are different from one another in terms of age, psychology, gender and social status yet they are taken together through the device of "mock trial" performance. This device exhibits that it is certainly varied from the established theatre which has the power to affect the spectators of the play.

Thus every aspect of the society is portrayed by Tendulkar so delicately and candidly that it looks like a critical analysis even with the technical hitches. The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* is an attempt to present numerous problems of conventional Indian society such as degradation of judiciary system, domination of women, male authority etc. It also shows the gender inequality and discrimination widespread in the society which is harmful for the women. Tendulkar strongly demonstrates societal instability and makes a place for himself in Indian English Literature. He is a social activist type whose protagonist suffers from social and moral pangs. Because of dealing with such themes in this play his readers and the audience find the story very influential.

3. Materials and Methods:

The base material and research methodology which are applied for finishing the objectives of the research paper are as follows:

- The essential information is achieved from primary source i.e. selected play "Silence! The Court is in Session" written by Vijay Tendulkar.
- Qualitative research method is used here to analyse the characters, situations and themes of the selected play.
- Available secondary sources like views and articles in journals, anthologies, interviews, internet sources and critical books on Vijay Tendulkar are also used for getting the result.
- For making the complete paper in an organized way the 7th edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper* is also used in it.

4. Results:

The research is based on the hypothesis that gender discrimination is a cultural product. It is analyzed from the play that the female protagonist tries to defend herself but at last she fails to do so because of male supremacy in the society. The play explains the basic elements of conservative society as gender discrimination, domination of women, male authority and identity crisis very well.

The present research paper discusses on the long history of conventional male domination and it also substantiates the view that women should apart from being a material only for men; they should be an effective tool for disseminating culture.

In the study the main themes i.e. 'gender discrimination' and 'marginalization' were examined and it was found that the impact of male domination was visible on the characters, especially on the men characters. On the contrary, woman has to face a lot of difficulties and she has to adjust herself according to men in the society. It is also discussed that the man not only affects the physical body of a woman but the mental status also. The woman has no choice of her own and she has to maintain a moral code for the society.

5. CONCLUSION:

It is examined from the study that women have to face various problems every time in the patriarchal society. Through the character of Leela Benare Tendulkar depicts gender prejudice, harassment and domination prevalent in the society. It is to be pointed that in the play only the woman character Leela Benare was found as sufferer. Tendulkar

symbolically uses the word ‘silence’ in the title of his play. On the surface level it means the silence in the court-room by judge’s order but on the deeper level it means to silence the appeal for justice by weaker section of the society i.e. woman.

In the play Tendulkar perfectly depicts social and gender disparity which always considered women second to men. Here, women never get equal opportunities like men who have the better opportunities as compared to women characters. The writer examines the supremacy and oppressive power structures through the male characters of the play.

Furthermore, it is clearly depicted that the women characters were unable to enjoy their life freely. The final process of the play shows that women are still at the marginal level and assaulted on the ground of femininity. They are entrapped mentally and physically by cultural transformation of the patriarchal society. On the other hand, the study points out that it is quite a pity situation that women cannot speak in favour of their existence. Leela Benare has to confront many problems because of her sense of independent self. This study also evokes the question about the suppression of women, loss of dignity of judicial system, forceful male supremacy through the female characters of the play.

REFERENCES:

1. Tendulkar, Vijay. *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Trans. Priya Adarkar. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1978.
2. Dharan, N.S. *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999.
3. Gulati, Varun. “Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*: Social Criticism and Individual Tragedy”. Web.22 Feb.2015.
4. Kundu, Tanmoy. “Exploitation of Women in Vijay Tendulkar’s Plays *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Kamala*”. *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* II. ii (March, 2013): 1-5.