



THE PATRIARCHAL WALL OF SILENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

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ABSTRACT

The Padma Bhushan awardee Vijay Tendulkaris a well-known name in the Modern Indian Drama. He is a realistic playwright who mirrors our society and its callousness in a natural way. *Silence! The court is in session* remembers Shakespeare's Hamlet as the writer employs a play within a play technique to exhibit the true color of men towards a woman. Silence is used as a tool of suppression and persecution by male dominated society on women by centuries.

KEYWORDS: Silence, Infanticide, mock trial, motherhood, hypocrisy, gender inequality.

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The present paper entitled *The Patriarchal Wall of Silence in Vijay Tendulkar's Silence! The Court Is In Session* is a study on silence of women in patriarchal society. Women are sexually oppressed and our Indian culture has enslaved women for ages while men are free to enjoy within and outside the marriage. There is a mock trial which is conspired on Benare to unveil her personal life. The male chauvinists prosecute her by dissecting her private issues and she is badly tortured. Vijay Tendulkar defines Violence, "At a very sensitive level, violence can be described as consciously hurting someone, whether it is physical violence or psychological violence.... Violence is something which has to be accepted as fact. It's no use describing it as good or bad. Projections of it can be good or bad. And violence, when turned into something else, can certainly be defined as vitality, which can be very useful, very constructive. So, it depends on how you utilize it or curb it at times." Benare is found guilty of infanticide and a verdict is sentenced on her. She is a spinster and has consumed the baby without wed lock and her conscious is thwarted for her sin. The man behind this sin is not accused of anything who is equally responsible. Whether it is rape or child by an unmarried woman, only the woman is targeted and tormented and made her feel guilty. Tendulkar questions this thinking in the society, why only a woman alone has to face this sort of assault and succumb in silence.

Benare is a dedicated school teacher. She is very happy that she remains in the midst of children from eight years. She feels children's are better than adults. "They don't scratch you till you bleed, then run away like cowards" (57). Benare loves her job and children and she is good in teaching. Children also adore her and she wants to teach them till her last breath. It's her one bit of slander that the management has taken decision to throw out of the school. In rage she utters, "My life is my own – I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! 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! I'll decide...." (58).

Along with Benare, Samant, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, Mr and Mrs Kashikar and Balu Rokde are involved in enacting the mock court. They intend to spread enlightenment through their plays and it's the prime objective of their programme. Ironically all characters are incomplete and unsuccessful in their lives but are enthusiastically enquiring Benare's life. Mr and Mrs. Kashikar are childless and they have given shelter to a young boy Balu Rokde and have educated him. But they have made him a slave and defeated barrister. Even there is an intellectual but he is absent as he is not dare enough. He is an intellectual who boasts of his intelligence and flaunts on his book learning but he is not gutsy to face the real life problems. Ponshe always hangs false modesty and dignity. He aspires to be scientist and trying hard and even works as a clerk in the central telegraph office. Samant is an innocent village guy. Sukhatme has failed to become successful as a lawyer. Karnik is a struggling actor. Rokde is not having his independent life only. In fact the mock trial was a case against President Johnson for producing atomic weapons. Before the actual play they plan to rehearse the trial and in the mock trial they make Miss Benare as the accused of the crime of infanticide. In the beginning everything seems to be light hearted but later it becomes very clear that Miss Benare is purposefully targeted. She is locked up in the trial room significantly that there is no escape for her even in her life. Benare from the beginning is warned to be silent while others do the Postmortem of her personal

life. There is glorification of motherhood by the men. Sukhatme says Motherhood is a sacred thing and mother holds a great responsibility in raising the child. Further he says, "She weaves a magic circle with her whole existence in order to protect and preserve her little one. (79) Kashikar is reminded of Sanskrit proverb 'Mother and The Motherland both are even higher than Heaven. Sukhatme even says, "Woman is a wife for a moment, but a mother forever" (180).

Gradually these men in the name of prosecution put negative shades on Benare's character. As she is unmarried in her 30's they mean she is like running behind every man all the time. They even raise question of remaining single as though she avoided to get married so as to enjoy her freedom and flirt with men. It's very tragic that Mrs. Kashikar is not sensible as a woman to witness the degradation of woman but helps men to uphold it. Miss Benare requests them not to bring her personal life in the mock trial but men were very much interested and enjoying it. Whatever she utters is taken in a negative sense. The witnesses give hint that she was found alone with Professor Damle in his room. Samant had found her crying very secretly and he narrates the conversation between Damle and Benare. Damle wants to save his reputation and it's entirely Benare's problem where to go and what to do. Benare threatens to kill herself and he is not bothered about it even when she says he will be murdering two. But the members of court are thrilled by the news. Benare cries out, "You've all deliberately ganged up on me! You've plotted against me!" (93). Kashikar Says "Our society should receive the old custom of child marriage. Marry off the girls before puberty. All this promiscuity will come to a full stop." (98) Mrs. Kashikar says it's Benare's earning which has made her like that and the way she moves freely with men that too being unmarried. Even she makes a reference that after a performance they wanted to leave her home but she had taken Damle with her. Whereas Mr. Damle is referred as a responsible elder person, family man with five children. To emphasize Miss Benare as characterless Mrs. Kashikar says she had tried for much younger guy Balu. Even Ponshe says Benare had kept the proposal to marry her. Kashikar asks him she was pregnant by one man and wanted to marry another. But they are not seeing her helplessness, straight forward and her honesty to seek help to save her child. But these men make fun of her. She had fallen to his feet but Ponshe wanted a matured partner for himself. Ironically the truth is that he is not matured enough to understand and broad mind to marry a woman. Whenever Miss Benare wanted to open her mouth to defend herself or to disprove her accusations made on her she is not given any chance and is silenced. Even she can't go outside as the room is locked from outside. She is caught from inside its like a maze. It symbolizes the society and its norms. Everybody feels it's her fault not even a single person to show pity on her. She had even approached Rokde to marry her but he feared about the society which would laugh at him if he married her in this condition. Benare just wanted to save her baby's life so she wanted to get married to any man so that the baby may be accepted in the society. She had even kept Tik-20 in her purse that shows she wanted to kill her life, so as to end this turmoil. Even that is ridiculed by all as she had earlier in her teens had already attempted to kill herself. She had loved her maternal uncle.

Nanasaheb Shinde the chairman of education society had taken decision to dismiss Benare from the school. He says, "It is a sin to be pregnant before marriage. It would be still more immoral to let such a woman teach, in such a condition!" (113). Sukhatam in his prosecution says Benare has made a heinous crime. She is immoral and bringing up the child of an illegal union is even more dreadful. She is seen as a taboo for our culture and society. Sukhatam wants the court to show no mercy on her on the basis of woman. He says "woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. Woman is not fit for independence" (115). He seems to be a believer of Manu's principle. Even in this world of

modernity there are many in our society who still stick to this to chain women.

With all the charges on her Benare is asked to speak and the given time is ten seconds. She is having whole lot to say but she is silent, motionless. But she speaks in her mind about her pains. She blames life and it is life that is responsible for everything. She is very upset for her banishment from the school. She had given her whole self to the children. She never taught children despair she taught them hope. She drank the poison and kept them untouched of her private life. The only source of hope and life was her job and she is shattered. She never wanted them to judge her from the private life as she was professionally good as a teacher. She was just 14 when she fell in love with her maternal uncle. It was considered sin by her strict house. But she wanted to get married. He turned his back and she embraced death but in vein. Her body dint die. Second time again she fell in love. It was purely intellectual. She surrendered to him on the altar of worship. She fell for intellectuality but what he wanted was her body not her mind and devotion. She accepts her mistake and says body is a traitor and one needs to accept it as it can't be rejected. Her life was burden to her and she thinks that the trouble, the difficulties, is because of this body only. Her maternal uncle or Damle just wanted to take advantage of her body and were granitic. She was betrayed by her body and now she wants her body for the little life in her. "He must have a mother... a father to call his own - a house - to be looked after - he must have a good name. After her soliloquy Kashikar gives his verdict Benare still remains motionless. He calls her crime unforgivable and for her irresponsibility she should be chained down. "Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. Motherhood must be sacred and pure"(118). Marriage is an institution which is a metaphor for woman's loyalty but not for male counterpart. Praising the school authority for dismissing her from the school, he says, "Neither you nor anyone else should ever do anything like this again. No moments 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" (119). Benare cries out "No! No! No! - I won't let you do it - I won't let it happen - I won't let it happen!" (119). Thus the mock trial is over. But it is the true story of her life. Thus unmarried motherhood is seen as obscene and the child brought up from it is rejected from the society.

The most striking is the silence of the victim. Benare adheres to silence and it indicates her subjugation and helplessness. She is forced to accept her sin and the co-partner in the sin is left free. That's how society is designed in favor of men to control women. Simone De Beauvoir rightly quotes, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth". The hypocrisy of the society is well narrated through the words of Benare, "Their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires"(117). Benare is educated, frank, self-reliant and free thinking. She is a woman so her independent way of leading life is condemned. Tendulkar is condemning the so called modern society which fancies about everything and in reality suffocates women living. Only Benare is dismissed from her teacher job questioning her morality but Mr. Damle is having illegal relation with a woman though married and still he continues as a professor. Tendulkar voices against gender based exploitation and he feels, "As a social being I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end." Thus protagonist Bendre is succumbed to power and suffocated in the wall of patriarchal silence.

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