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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION*

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Abstract

The whole responsibility of morally upright behaviour is bulldozed on women. Men are by nature considered to be willful, wild, childish, innocent and mischievous. Their sins are no sins at all. The society has a very light parental and pampering sort of attitude when it comes to sexual offences of men. In case of women the iron rod gets hot and hotter. No punishment is actually enough for such a woman. There is no respite, no 44 shade and no soothing cushion for a sinning woman. She must be stained and abandoned. Her femininity, her needs, her very existence must be ignored or rather destroyed. She must be cornered and brutally killed both in physical and psychological senses. This play is about the pathetic position of women in the male dominated Indian world. *Silence! The court is in Session* (1967), the first Tendulkar's play to become part of the New Indian Drama phenomenon of the sixties and the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as protagonist and victim. With its production Tendulkar became the center of a general controversy.

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Introduction:-

Since the Independence – since 1950, to be precise- the name of Vijay Tendulkar has been in the forefront of the Marathi drama and stage. His personality both as man and writer is multifaceted. It has often been puzzling and curious with a big question mark on it. In that last 55 years he has written stories, novels, one act play, plays for children and adults. Similarly he has done script-writing and newspaper column as well. And in all these fields he has created an image of his own. Thus he is a creative writer with a fine sensibility and at the same time a contemplative and controversial dramatist. He has made a mark in the field of journalism also. Because of his highly individual outlook on and vision of life, and because of his personal style of writing he has made a powerful impression in the field of literature and drama, and has given the post-independence Marathi drama a new idiom. By doing this he has put Marathi drama on the national and even international Map.

During the days when Tendulkar started his dramatic career the names of B.V. Varerkar, P.K. Atre and M.G. Ranganekar were dominating the scene. Each one of them had carved a niche for himself. The period between 1920 and 1950 is generally seen as a low watermark in history of Marathi drama. It was against this uncongenial background that Tendulkar started writing his plays. In the initial period he was naturally influenced by his predecessors. This does not mean that he merely imitated them, but that he grew in their shadow. However, Tendulkar's greatness lies in that he outgrew that influence and did not remain stuck there. He was uneasy about the

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stereotypical dramatic writing of the time and also the stagnation of the Marathi stage. He wanted to rebel and break new ground.

Tendulkar began his dramatist career with writing one-act plays. One of the characteristics of Tendulkar's writing is that though the personal relationships of his characters he explores the theme of man's existential loneliness. *Silence! The court is in Session* (1967), the first Tendulkar's play to become part of the New Indian Drama phenomenon of the sixties and the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as protagonist and victim. With its production Tendulkar became the center 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 fundamentally orthodox society. Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence ! The court is in Session*. Consisting of middle-class characters, is in the nature of a "discussion play." The social issues discussed in it are not quite organically integrated into its plot, "but expounded in the dramatic give and take of a sustained debate among the characters" (Abrams 139).

It is the imposed silence of Benare that gives the little (*Silence!*) its unique significance. Till the commencement of the 'mock-trial' Benare remains a picture of poise and vitality. She makes comments on the behaviour of her fellow-characters, and sits singing and humming. Benare breaks her forced silence at last, towards the close of the play, when she bursts forth into a long and brilliant monologue which brings out in most eloquent terms, her love of life, focussing with astonishing brilliance on her betrayal at the hands of Professor Damle, and the consequent torture at the hands of her fellow-characters. In fact, it is this monologue that has captured the imagination of the audience of the Marathi theatre. Tendulkar deliberately makes Benare break her silence through this stunning monologue which 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.

The 'mock-trial' marks a deft-stroke on the part of Tendulkar. It functions almost like a 'play-within-the-play'. As the real performance is supposed to have been 'Mock Law court'. It is the 'mock-trial' that causes the terminal 'reversal' in the play. Benare who has earlier been sprightly, ends up being the game ruthlessly hunted and baited by her male counterparts. This element of 'reversal' gives the play its unique dramatic significance. The 'mock-trial' also helps the playwright expose to his audience the cruelty that is latent in the collective psyche of the city-bred male chauvinists of urban India. Benare is horror-struck at the naked display of their innate cruelty towards her. The eagerness and enthusiasm with which the Kashikars, Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponshe and Karnik heap evidence after evidence against her terrify her and eventually, she sits frozen like a motionless statue. While showing the contempt for this helpless woman, a fierce psychological violence becomes evident. The latent sadism of the characters of Sukhatme, of Mr. & Mrs. Kashikar, of Ponshe, Karnik or even Rokde, surfaces during the process of the trial. In delineating these characters, Tendulkar has explored their psyches to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure pervading their lives – the inefficiency of Sukahtme as a lawyer, the childlessness of Mr. & Mrs. Kashikar, the non-fulfillment of Ponshe's dream to become a scientist, the vain attempt of Karnik to be a successful actor and the inability of Rokde to attain an independent, adult existence. The title itself is suggestive. Before the 'Mock-trial', Benare is active, in a sense. She makes comments on the behaviour of her fellow-characters, as well as sings. But silence descends on her when 'Mock-trial' begins with Kashikar's sudden interrogative statement – prisoner "Miss Benare, under section No 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime." Benare is dumbfounded. As the trial precedes her attempt at protest are callously drowned in Kashikar, the Mock judge's imposition: "silence!" In such a helpless, hostile situation, Benare has no other choice but to remain Silent, as no language can come to her rescue.

Structurally, the songs Tendulkar assigns to Benare are of great dramatist significance, for instance, take the song she sings in the opening scene :

Oh, I've got a sweetheart
Who carries all my books,
He plays in my doll house,
And says he likes my books.
He wants to marry me.
But mummy says, I'm too little

To have such thoughts are these (*Silence! The Court is in Session* 58-59).

More important than these two compositions in verse is the one which she recites in the opening scene:

Our feet tread up unknown

And dangerous pathways evermore.

.....

And the wound that's born to bleed

Bleeds on for ever, faithfully

Defeat is destined as the end.

Some experience are meant

To taste, then just to waste and spend (*Silence! The Court is in Session 63*)

It is from the above Marathi poem by Mrs. ShirishPai that Tendulkar has conceived Benare, the central character in *Silence!* in accordance with the above aphoristic kind of verse, Benare feels another ballad-like verse favoured by Benare is :

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,'

..... (*Silence! The Court is in Session 74*)

Benare sings it to herself towards the end of act I and repeats it again at the end of Act III where it supposedly emerges from an indistinct source in Benare's voice, The 'parrot' in the play is suggestive of Samant and the 'nest' may refer to her chastity which she is deprived of by Professor Damle and 'the crow' too seems to be none other than the callous and selfish Professor himself.

There is of course a certain element of 'anti-climax' in the pan-spitting context presented at the opening of Act II of *Silence!*. The playwright introduces this comic interlude mainly with a view of relieving the gloom of the immediately preceding somber atmosphere towards the close of Act I. This comic context offers Benare some respite and her quickly recovering her usual cheerfulness, though only for a very brief moment is felt.

Benare's deep-seated, caring love that she bears towards her pupils can be seen in passages such as the following: "I cried inside, and I made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair, and I taught them hope..." (*Silence! The Court is in Session 117*). And referring to the unpredictable demand of her body she says: "this body is a traitor! I despise this body – and I love it" (*Silence! The Court is in Session 118*). It is such paradoxes that lend Benare's monologue its dramatic richness, sophistication and a certain enigmatic intensity.

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