

A Thematic Study of ‘Silence! The Court is in Session’

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Abstract

The present paper tries to explain the themes of the play ‘Silence the court is in session’, written by Vijay Tendulkar. This play gives him enormous popularity as an Indian writer in English. The theme of the play is very simple and concentrated but it is quite aggressive in tone. It emerges the forceful voice of lower middle class society problems through modern view. It discussed the problem of a women who is charged to female infanticide. The play is continued to the Preparation and rehearsal of a play. At the end of the play we come to know that it was a trap for the woman who is charged for infanticide.

Introduction: The play was first written in Marathi by Vijay Tendulkar in 1967. Later it was translated in English by Priya Adarkar in 1947. It was translated in different languages and performed on the stage popularly. The texture of the play is built on a pattern of contrast. The play portrays the rehearsal of a play in a small village by theatre group. The play is an illusion of a social problem of unmarried motherhood and men’s attitude to her. It reflects the realistic picture of orthodox society towards women. The protagonist of the play, Miss Benare lives in a world of illusion to escape the bitter realities of life. No one is ready to accept her. She revolts against it and raised her voice at the end of the play. The play itself is a rehearsal of a play. The actual show is scheduled at night. All characters of the play arrives in the village where the rehearsal will take place. In an empty hall of a village, the setting is created by the theater group. It is a court scene where the women is charged for infanticide and the women is Miss Benare. She seems to be free minded women looking for a male friend. She enters in a room with Samant, a local resident. She very frankly says him that she likes him and wants to go away with him. She becomes very romantic with him. Samant is an innocent villager and talks about different things in village. She says that she is very honest to her students and wants to do everything for them. She does not allow anyone to interrupt in her private life. She is very clear about her private and public life. She is very excited about the play and remains unknown about what is going on behind the curtain. She is completely unconscious about the reality.

At first the characters are introduced to Miss. Benare. She has bitter experience with Prof. Damle who runs away from the real-life problems. He is also member of the theater group but he doesn’t dare to come in front of the society. He developed sexual relationship with Benare and withdraws her when she becomes pregnant. All other members of the group are very jealous of Benare for being successful and independent women. So they prepare a trap for Miss. Benare

in which she easily gets trapped. She disregards the social norms and tradition and lives her life in her own manner.

Miss Benare represents the working class society women and wants to live a liberated life. She is talkative and bubbly young woman. She is robbed of her virginity at the age of fourteen years. The focal point of the play is the violent response of the male dominated society to pre-marital relationship and motherhood. The rehearsal is completely male biased. What is wrong immoral for a woman is not so far for a man. Miss Benare is accused but not Prof. Damle.

The play is divided into three acts. The first act of the play explains the setting of the rehearsal and preparation of the stage and introduction of the characters. It is explained that there is a rumor about Miss Benare and all of the characters want to share that upfront of each other or society. They create a plan to seduce Miss Benare who is completely unknown about the reality. She is accused and the play begins with the charge of infanticide against her by the judge Mr. Kashikar. She does not understand what is going on. She first opposes the charge and her opposition is ruled out and the trial continues. Sukhatme plays the role of prosecutor and the defense lawyer. He always tried to tear her to shreds. He exposed her for being her a mother before marriage. She tries to protect and preserve her little one.

The judge Mr. Kashikar and the prosecutor Mr. Sukhatme unofficially shifted from infanticide to discover the illicit relationship of the accused. Whenever Miss Benare takes objections, those are overruled. She is often silenced with 'silence- order-order'. No one is serious in the play, they are all excited to make the whole story spicy at the expense of Benare's fundamental right.

No one listens to her. They all turn a deaf ear to her pleas in the name of game. Everyone is taking fun out of it by adding something to it. They give the reference of her affair with Prof. Damle; who is a married man. Miss Benare interrupts Mr. Ponshe at this and says that this has nothing to do with this charge. Samant gives surprising and sensational but imaginary disclosure about Benare's happenings in actual life. He says that he heard the words of Benare where she should go in this condition. Miss Benare tries to control the situation and says that it is a lie. She angrily says that she will smash all of them at this reaction only the bitter truth will come out. All of them enjoy the plight of Benare. They rejoice it as their victory over Benare's success in independent life. Up till now violence is limited to psychological level. The violence of men against women in the middle class society. There is constant conflict between the social taboo of male superiority and women's assertion of her individuality. This superiority complex of men results into violence against women in deep frustration.

The third act shows the physical violence when Rokde is asked to conduct the accused to witness box. Mrs. Kashikar forcefully drags Miss Benare to the witness box. Miss Benare is very outspoken woman and immediately she becomes silent due to her inevitable fate in a patriarchal system. She could not answer to the question – why she is unmarried? Rokde is threatened by all and Mrs. Kashikar expresses her views against free life of modern girls and women. She objects on the behavior of Benare and criticizes her way of living, dancing, singing, sharing jokes with men.

She is also accused of keeping bottle of poison in her purse. Ponshe says that once Benare requests him to marry her as she has been made pregnant by Prof. Damle. Here Benare speaks out that Ponshe has promised her not to take the name of Prof. Damle. She requests Ponshe not to speak about their conversation; but Ponshe is forced to speak out. He says that Benare tried to commit suicide because of disappointment in love with maternal uncle when she was fourteen years old. Sukhatme says that Benare has committed crime in her past and present. At the end Mr. Kashikar also comes in a witness box and discloses that the school management has set up an enquiry against Benare due to which she has to leave her job. He further says that she will be dismissed tomorrow. This is a shock for her and she burst out her silence and speaks passionately at the end of the play. She says that she have a lot to say as she haven't said a word for so many years. She says that she wants to laugh at all men and women till she burst. She is proud of her commitment to her students. She remains honest to them with purity. She does not allow anyone to enter in her private life. She wanted to marry her maternal uncle but he ran away and her mother was also against of it. The mock trial ends up with an interruption by a visitor reminding them of their being late in the show. Actually this interruption brings them back from illusion to reality. But Miss Benare remains in the same position in the thought for she is overtaken by the reality implied in the illusion. The parrot in the play is the symbol of illusion and the sparrow is the symbol of reality. The play ends with the poem about the parrot and the sparrow.

Conclusion: We can say that Tendulkar has a keen sense of humor and it has a redeeming effect in this play of personal tragedy and society's revenge on a woman violating its norms. Miss Benare has done no offence in the eyes of the law, but she has violated the social taboo. This false option of the men in the court, as she has not done any infanticide prompts them to an illegal wedding of the judicial laws to prosecute the woman challenging men's authority. A feminist would discern a realistic depiction of the society and the court biased against the woman as they are dominated by men. Sex is the weak part of Benare as it is for any modest woman/girl that is exploited in the court to browbeat her.

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