

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE SELECT PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

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Discriminatory attitude towards men and women have existed for generations affect the lives of both genders. Although the constitution of India has granted men and women equal rights, gender disparity still remains. Before nineteenth century, woman was treated as slave and second rate citizen. In spite of the introduction of democratic practice in all walks of life in modern society in the twentieth century, it is difficult to eradicate gender discrimination and oppressions. In support of the struggle of liberation and getting her deserving place in social, moral and economic arena of discriminating and unjustified male dominated system. Many novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande and many play wrights such as Vijay Tendulkar have voiced their concerns on these serious issues.

Vijay Tendulkar is ranked with great playwrights like Badal Sarcar, Girish Karnard and Mohan Rakesh. He has powerfully articulated the socio-political situations in his plays. He has expressed it by saying:

As an individual or rather as a social being, I feel deeply involved in the existing state of my society (because I am affected by it though not immediately in some cases or not as much as some others are) and in my way brood over it. Once in a way I even do something to relieve myself of the tension and anxiety and agitation produced by this brooding. I participated in a protest meeting or dharna or mocha or a satyagrah. I align myself with some civil liberty organization...

As writer, I find myself persistently inquisitive nonconformist, ruthless, cold and brutal as compared to other committed and human...

As a social being, I am against all exploitation and I passionately feel that all exploitation must end...

As a writer, I feel fascinated by the violent exploiter and exploited relationship and obsessively delve into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that the relationship is external fact of life however cruel, will never end. Not that, I relish this thought while it grips me but I cannot shake it off. (Tendulkar 92).

Vijay Tendulkar emerged as a rebel against the established values of a fundamentally Orthodox society with the production of successful novels. He has become an important spokesperson for the suppressed women. Many of his plays present the position of women in the contemporary modern society. Plays like Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, The Vultures and His Fifth Women bitterly criticises the status of women in the patriarchal society. His women characters are in the course of play gain knowledge, strive to gain freedom and dignity and the so called modern men's true colours are brought to forefront.

Vijay Tendulkar chooses the title “Silence! The Court is in Session” to make a powerful comment on a society with a heavy patriarchal bias that makes justice impossible. In this play we find how Leela Benare became the victim of sadism of his male counterparts. She is a woman, who is modern, independent, free-thinking, who loves life, but happens to fall in love with a man who loves only her body and gets impregnated by him. Through this most powerful play, Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy the male chauvinists. Though the frustrated male members try to subjugate women to prove their power in social hierarchy, Miss.Benare desperately fights against the oppressive power structure. The play further shows how law operates in silencing the voice of women.

Miss.Benare is presented as an extraordinary and crucial character in the play. She is a young middle class woman of thirty four years, who is working as a teacher to earn her livelihood. Her admiration for her profession is shown when she says to Samant:

I never had been behind with my lesson! Exercises corrected on time too ,not a bit of room for disapproval ,I don't give an inch of it to anyone!(Silence...4).

Benare wants to be free from patriarchal dominance and conservative norms of the society. She displays self-determinations, self-assertiveness and cynicism but is also receptive to the conventional norms of integrity. Tendulkar throws light on the character of Benare, through the conversation Benare and Samant.

BENARE. *I am the soul of seriousness: But I don't see why one should go around all the time with the long face...we should laugh, we should play, we should sing! If we can if they will let us, we should dance too! Should not have any false modesty or dignity or care for anyone! I mean it. When your life is over, do you think anyone will give a bit of theirs? What do you say, Samant? Do you think they will?*

SAMANT. *You are quite right. The great sage Tukaram said... at least I think it was him.*

BENARE. *Forget about the sage Tukaram. I say it-I, Leela Benare is a living woman, I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It is a very very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious... (Silence...8).*

Balu Rokde, Ponshe, Karik and Samant want to rehearse the drama, a mock-trial and also find it as an opportunity to dig up Benare's past life. They form a group to torture Benare. She is charged as a licentious woman, who is always ready to sell her body. She is even charged to share an illicit relationship with her maternal uncle. She explains the way in which she was abused by her own maternal uncle at the age of just fourteen. Benare says:

Why, I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was, I didn't! I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dreams openly...But all of them -my mother too-were against it, and my brave man turned traitor and ran. (Silence... 74).

When she remembers her uncle she says:

Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a betrayal, life is a fraud. Life is a drug. Life is drudgery...Life is a dreadful thing... (Silence...75).

Benare studied and became a teacher. In spite of previous failure in a love with her maternal uncle, she fell in love with Prof.Damle, who was a married man and wanted to satisfy his bodily thrust. She was discharged from her school due to her pregnancy without marriage. Mr.Nane Saheb Shinde, the chairman of the education society failed to drop an enquiry against her. According to Benare:

Again I fell in love. As a grown woman, I throw all my heart into it. I thought this will be different. This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It is not love at all-it is worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went his way. He didn't want my mind, or my devotion- he didn't care about them! He was not a God. He was a man. For him, everything was the body, for the body? That is all (Silence... 73-74).

She pleaded in front of Rokde and Ponshe for marrying her but the proposal was shorn of by them. Here Tendulkar picturises the unjust male dominating society. The court allows Prof.Damle to enjoy his married life and does not accuse him to exploit and abuse the life of a woman. Benare is accused in the court without the presence of Prof.Damle. This depicts the condemnation on the Indian society and the prejudices it carries against women.

Benare has always kept her professional life away from her personal life as she wants to be loyal to her profession. It is evident from her statement: I just put my whole life into working with the children... I loved it, I taught them well... Emotion is something people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. It was burning through me. But do you know? I did not teach any of this to those tender; young souls. I swallowed the poison, but did not let the drop of it touch them. I taught them beauty. I taught them purity. I cried inside and made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair and I taught them hope. (Silence... 75-76).

The judge, Mr.Kashikar orders Benare to abort her child. According to him, to have the child without marriage is against the tradition of Indian culture. She screamed to this:

No! No! No! I won't let you do it. I won't let it happen, I won't let it happen. (Silence...76).

The court of law, the magistrate and the judge who are supposed to be the honourable men, protectors and guardians of law and justice, fail in their duty to protect the innocent girl. In contrast the judge, Mr.Kashikar orders Benare to abort her child. According to him, to have the child without marriage is against the tradition of Indian culture. The judgement to Benare seems to be absurd. Though Benare shows her opposition in the beginning of the play, at the end she begins to realise her inability. She remains silent instead of attacking those vultures of patriarchy. She is made to feel handicapped only because she is a woman.

Benare is a prey of male chauvinism, used simply to gratify the quench for bodily thirst and deserted at the end of her own destiny. She represents all the women in India

who are suppressed, oppressed and marginalised. The play dwells on an extremely sensitive, social and political issue, namely, the conflict between the male chauvinists and an individual woman. Tendulkar as a best dramatist introduces a play within -the play in the form of ' mock-trial, which helps him satirises the male dominated society.

Tendulkar depicts the male chauvinism in his novel **Kamala**. The entire activity in Sarita's day-to-day schedule is based on furthering Jaisingh as her own commonsense dictates. When Sarita dutifully answers the numerous calls in her most courteous manner, like a trained telephone operator and makes a note of the details, Kakasaheb advises:

How many are you going to write down? If it's any one important, they'll tell you their names. If they don't, you can happily assume they're not important. (Kamala3).

Sarita's reply to these sensible words shows how Jaisingh dominates her even in trivial matters. So that he may utilise her like a servant. "That's the way you see it. My husband sees it differently. If I say they didn't tell their names he gets angry with me for not seeking".(Tendulkar 3) . Sarita is important to him only because she provides him domestic comforts like preparing his bath, making tea for him and washing his clothes. He does not consider it important enough to speak to her or inform her of his dangerous plan of buying Kamala. Sarita is repulsed by his heartless act of buying Kamala but she is able to show her opposition only in bed by not responding to his sexual advances.

Sarita's dialogue with Jaisingh proves that she is trying to find a way out from her slavery after he bought Kamala. She wilfully refuses to accompany him to the party just because he compels her authoritatively to comply with his demand. She is angry with him at the manner in which he has disposed of Kamala without any concern for her feelings or wishes. She protests mildly in the following manner:

J AISINGH. Don,t you want to come to the party?

SARITA. No.

J AISINGH. You don't to come, why?

SARITA. That's my will.

J AISINGH. (Rather surprised) Your will?

SARITA. Aren't I allowed to have will of my own?

J AISINGH. (Sarcastically) Never noticed any signs of it before. If you didn't want to come, you could atleast have told me earlier. They wouldn't have accepted for both of us.

SARITA. Did you ask me?

J AISINGH. Of course! I left a message with Kamalabai.

SARITA. That isn't called asking.

J AISINGH. You could have phoned me back.

SARITA. You could have waited till I come on the phone.

J AISINGH. I was busy.

SARITA. I didn't like phoning you.

J AISINGH. What's special about your feeling today...? (Kamala 45).

When Sarita is explaining her feelings to kakasaheeb, Jaisingh does not wait for her reply. Kamala is a naive villager who believes that she has been bought by Jaisingh and that she would have to live with him and serve him for the rest of her life. Sarita is upset at the shabby treatment meted out by Jaisingh. Jaisingh would not allow Kamala to bathe or change her clothes, though the latter is ashamed of her shabby appearance at the press conference. As he wants to present Kamala as shabby and pathetic in the press conference, he doesn't bother about her. His manner of talking to Kamala and dealing with her is in no way different from that of medieval lord.

J AISINGH. *Kamala, we will have to go together. If I go alone' they will be angry. They'll ask where is Kamala?*

KAMALA. *Tell them, she had a long journey. She is ill. Really tell them that.*

J AISINGH. *You will have to come Kamala.*

KAMALA. *I'm your servant, master. But I won't come today. I'll come tomorrow, or day after. As soon as I'm well...*

J AISINGH. *Kamala, you won't obey me?*

KAMALA. *How can that be? You are Kamala's master.*

J AISINGH. *I order you to come there with me, today.*

(Kamala is silent) (Kamala 20).

Jaisingh is adamant in sending Kamala to orphanage, while Sarita wants Kamala to stay in their house. He ignores Sarita and says: ' It's I who take decisions in this house and no one else. Do you understand? Chalo Kamala... (Kamala 42).

Kamalabai, the servant is the third woman character, who is exploited by Jaisingh. Though Saritha is socially superior her life is not different from that of Kamalabai. Jaisingh has no concern for the feelings of both. He feels that it is their duty to serve him, no matter what they feel about his order to them. He is very rude to Kamalabai, mocks at her and calls her "stupid" in an ungentle manly manner. He is also highly authoritative as it is obviously seen in the following dialogue:

J AISINGH. *Kamalabai, tea for Kakasaheb.*

KAKASAHEB. *I'll have my tea with Saita. Why trouble Kamalabai three times?*

J AISINGH. *What trouble? It's no trouble that's what Kamalabai is here for. We pay that (Kamala 36).*

Jaisingh's dominating attitude as one of the male character is nothing unusual in the Indian society. Every married man treats his wife in more or less the same manner. Tendulkar's view of this situation is expressed through Kakasaheb's words to Sarita, "Look Sarita, Jaisingh is no different from other men. He's not unusual. You're wrong to think he is a bad man". (Kamala 46).

Tendulkar reflects the actualities of life and tries to reawaken awareness of the permanent realities of contemporary Indian life through his novels. His plays are satire on today's society and the position of women in such a society. He offers no solutions but conveys the message that women must awaken to their rights.

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