

Humanist Perspectives in Vijay Tendulkar's Play "Silence! The Court is in Session"

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Abstract

The Indian dramatists have been primarily concerned with the attitude of belief of the individual that result in success or failure in his/her attempt at integration. They have tried to place individual in a situation where he/she respond with his whole vitality and his responses are unambiguous and unequivocal. It is in such irreducible moments of life that the individual is able to test the validity of his/her pattern of values. It should, therefore, be interesting to analyze the play "Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe" by Vijay Tendulkar, originally written in Marathi language in the year 1963 and published in 1967 and translated as "Silence! The Court is in Session" by Priya Adarkar. Vijay Tendulkar proved to be a rebel against the established values and customs of a fundamentally orthodox Indian society with the production of this play. He, through his writing, has shown sympathy towards the victims and neglected groups of the society in India, especially women. He draws sharp distinction between an authoritarian society and an individual. He seriously concerns over the tendencies of modern society which kills human potentialities. The objective of the paper is to find out humanist aspects in the play "Silence! The Court is in Session."

Keywords: unambiguous, unequivocal, customs, orthodox, authoritarian, humanist etc.

Introduction:

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is one of the leading Post modern playwrights in Indian English Literature who is considered to be the firm believer of humanity and human dignity. emerged as a rebel against the established values, customs and traditions of a fundamentally orthodox society with the production of "Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe" (Silence! The court is in Session) in 1967. The humanist emphasizes that man does need a religion and an object of devotion, but this object of devotion must be found in human society or in some principle or a set of principle concerned with human society. The humanist draws a sharp distinction between an authoritarian society and individual. Man can realize his destiny only by developing his human potentialities, and that can be possible only if his/her character is productively oriented. Humanist believes in the dignity of mankind.

Historical Context of "Silence! The Court is in Session":

Silence! the Court is in Session takes place in post-Independence India and when the ratification of a constitution allowed India to become its own democratic country. After independence in 1947 women's rights often took a backseat to questions regarding the future of the independent nation. After independence, activists focused on rights of working class, dalits and women. Vijay Tendulkar's play is a social satire on middle-class society The issue related to women brought into light in the play Silence! The court is in Session the character Leela Benare, a working woman is focal point in this play.

Exposition of the vulnerability of women:

This drama is in reality a mock trial of simple and straightforward school teacher Miss Leela Benare. She is cross-examined in the court with full mockery. She is charged with infanticide and having illicit relations with a married person Professor Damle and in this way her private life is exposed. All the other characters like Mr. Gopal Ponshe, Mr. Karnik Rokde, Samant, counsel for the defense and counsel for the crown Mr. Sukhatme and judge, Mr. Kashikar and his wife Mrs. Kashikar all behave in a way of mockery. Members of this groups represents the substrata of society and their spiteful attitude towards the spinster school teacher Leela Benare, the protagonist of the play, reflects their malicious nature. A well-targeted conspiracy is hatched against her and, in the name of a mock trial; they expose and dissect her personal life. This reveals their basic hypocrisy and double standards of the middle class society.

The play exposes the vulnerability of women in the traditional Indian society. She is, practically, made the victim of the cruel game very cunningly maneuvered by her fellow actors; her private life is exposed gleefully and strangely. The charge of infanticide, brought against her at the beginning of the mock trial, turns into a verdict against her at the end, mainly because contemporary insular. Indian society cannot allow the birth of a child out of wedlock. In an interview the writer himself says that "Human beings are like Mickey Mouse and kin, fighting for survival, in this battle one mouse kills another. Many mice gang up and end up ruthlessly destroying one another. I see this as a blind justice." (Batra, P. 37). It shows that judicial system become the face of a very repressive and dehumanized system if the person involved in the process of justice are themselves devoid of human values and compassion. They are outwardly decent folk and don't suspect that they have this dark sides.

Miss Leela Benare is summoned merely as a witness while Miss Benare remains the prime accused as the mother of an illegitimate child and having illicit relations with so many persons. As the trial go on all the witnesses and authorities become inimical towards Miss Leela Benare. On the charge of unmarried motherhood and having illicit relations with so many persons, the judge, Mr. Kashikar orders the school authorities to dismiss such an immoral woman. Miss Leela Benare tried to defend herself through a long soliloquy. "The parrot to the sparrow said, "Why, of 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 'oh brother crow, oh, brother crow. Were you there? Did you see it go?" No, I don't know I didn't see, what are your troubles to do with me? O sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow." (Tendulkar, 78)

The play is based on the theme of power, its sources and manifestation. The characters fight for authority and power and try to trap each other through a metaphorical mock-court. But peculiarly, the power, play that underscores the games operates more through the monologues rather than through the dialogues. The play oscillates between theatricalization of private life and privatization of theatrical performance. Leela's position within the game of the mock-trial is not steady she oscillates between reality and illusion and the imaginative and the mundane. While performing the role of a woman in the group, she transcends the limitations of verbal reasoning and tries to spy into the masculine strategies. The charges against Leela Benare are leveled by evidences of reality that mark out the boundaries what might be called the collective mindscape, the limits of same experience.

Leela differs as to the best way to break loose from this enslavement to collective prejudice, but she believes that truth and reality are achieved only when reality is approached in nakedness of mind. Leela's argument against body and its mechanical connections and her discourse of emotion saves her from dehumanization. Vijay Tendulkar again and again mentions society and social customs by his characters. Miss Benare has the charge of infanticide. Mr. Kashikar, the judge enquires Sukhatme, "Did you notice, also, Sukhatme, that this charge is important from the social point of view? The question of infanticide is one of great social significance. That is why I deliberately picked it. We consider society's best interests in all we do"(Tendulkar, P.26.). Miss Benare, the heroine of the play, is a school teacher. She is totally devoted to her profession and her popularity has caused the envy of her colleagues at school and even the school management. Initially, when Leela Benare narrates her life in the school with children, she transforms the empty scenic space of the proscenium, stage into a school situation.

The woman who is an accused has made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood- which is purer than heaven itself. For that, any punishment, however great, that the law may give her will be too mild by far. The character of the accused is appalling. It is bankrupt of morality. Not only that her conduct has blackened all social and moral values. The accused is public enemy number one. If such socially destructive tendencies are encouraged to flourish, this country and its culture will be totally destroyed.

Sukhatme further clarifies his point "Infanticide is a dreadful act, but bunging an illegitimate child is horrifying. If it is encouraged, there will no such thing as the institution of marriage. Immorality will flourish. Before, our eyes, our beautiful dream of a society, governed by tradition will crumble into dust." (Tendulkar,70). It is through his characters that Vijay Tendulkar expresses his deep concern about motherhood, morality, society, traditions and our religion. The judge Mr. Kashikar defends social customs while giving judgment on Miss Benare's case "Prisoner Miss Benare, pay the closest attention. The crimes you have committed are most terrible. There is no forgiveness for them; your sin must be expiated. Irresponsibility must be claimed down." (Tendulkar,75). The judge expresses his views on motherhood as follows:

"Motherhood must be sacred and pure. This court takes a serious view of your attempt to dynamite all this... The morality, which you have shown through your conduct, is the morality you are planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow." (Tendulkar, 75-76)

The judge pronounce his final judgment thus, "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." (Tendulkar,76). Although Miss Leela Benare says that society has no right to interfere with her private right liberties but in spite of that she cannot totally shy away from her responsibility. Vijay Tendulkar has developed the central character of Miss Benare through the contents of a beautiful poem by Mrs. Shirish Pai. Miss Benare is very frank in giving a fitting reply to the charges leveled against her in the court. She tells the judge that life is a very dreadful thing and life must be hanged.

"Na jivean Jeevanmarhati 'Life is no worthy of life.

Hold an enquiry against life. Sack it from its job,
but why? Why? Was I slack in my work? I just
put my whole life into working with children." (Tendulkar, 73).

Conclusion:

Vijay Tendulkar has presented the trial with humanist perspectives in his play "Silence! The court is in Session". The play exposes the vulnerability of women in the traditional Indian society. She is, practically, made the victim of the cruel game very cunningly maneuvered by her fellow actors; her private life is exposed gleefully and strangely. The charge of infanticide, brought against her at the beginning of the mock trial, turns into a verdict against her at the end, mainly because contemporary insular. In the climax Miss Benare delivers a brilliant monologue that exposes the hypocrisy of the male chauvinist. She narrates her story of suppression and loneliness, her dilemma of freedom and bondage, and her tale of a love-hate relationship with life. Leela Benare's soliloquy of self-defense is an expression of her inner turbulence.

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