

BLAZING TORCHES

*T.M. Umarani
Gomez Sophia
U. Anamica*



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Jayaraj Annapackiam College For Women (Autonomous)
Periyakulam, Tamil Nadu, India.**

- 10 Adultery In John Updike's *A Month Of Sundays* 51
E.Seetha Selvam
- 11 Female Infanticide In Indian Writing In English, With Special Reference To Dattani's *Tara* 56
Angeline Sorna
- 12 Woman Empowerment: A Tool To Purge Violence Against Women 64
Sheba Premsingh
- 13 Calamitous State Of Femininity in the Commercialized Orbit 69
U.Anamica
- 14 Treatment of Women In The Novels of Shashi Deshpande 73
A.J.Saleema Kathoon
- 15 Feminist Themes: Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting.* 78
S.A. Sadaffunisha
- 16 Gender Based Violence in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session!* 87
A. Jaseema Banu
- 17 Violence Against Women: Identification and Remedy 95
J. Sunitha Evany
- 18 Domestic Violence in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror'* 101
J.Sharmila
- 19 Problems in Empowering Indian Women 108
T. Anita Caroline
- 20 The Veiled Desires of Women – A Study of Ismat Chughtai's Short Story *The Wedding Suit* 113
R.Gowrimanohari

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION!*

A. JASEEMA BANU

Vijay Tendulkar is a leading contemporary Indian playwright, screen and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator. For the past four decades he has been the most influential dramatist and theatre personality in Marathi, the principal language of the state of Maharashtra, which had a continuous literary history since the end of the classical period in India and has nearly seventy-five million speakers today. His dramatic output and theatrical activities in Marathi and his work in Hindi cinema have received wide recognition over the past three decades bringing him the Maharashtra State Government Award (1956, 1969, 1973), the Sangeet Natak Academy Award (1971), and the Film Fare Award for the best original screenplay (India's equivalent of the Oscars, for *Akrosh* in 1980, and for *Ardha Satya* in 1983).

His play, "Silence! The Court is in Session!" has brought him fame on a national level. It is a fascinating play in three acts. In Tendulkar's plays, one can see his acute observation of life. The events and incidents depicted in the plays have their origin in real life. The play explores psychological violence of the frustrated people in the white-collar middle-class society. Tendulkar got inspiration from a real-life incident to write this play. He met an amateur group that was on its way to stage a mock trial in Vile Parle, a suburb of Mumbai. While overhearing their conversation, the outline of the play began to take shape in his mind, and the ultimate result of it was the birth and creation of the play. The original title in Marathi is, 'Shantata! Court Chaly Ahe' written for Rangayan, the theatre group at the behest of his friends Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande in 1967, and was first performed in its English version in 1971, in Chennai, and

was directed by Ammu Mathew. 'Shantata' was translated into several languages. Tripti Mitra, the eminent actress appeared in the main role in the Bengali version. A little later, Satyadev Dubey rendered the play into a film with support from Film Finance Corporation. The BBC broadcast it in English. 'Shantata' brought Tendulkar recognition on a national scale. He came to be regarded with Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad as a leading force in a national theatre movement.

The play, "Silence! The Court is in Session" comes as a turning point in Tendulkar's career. It is a "play within a play" or a "play in the form of rehearsal". It is a social satire on the male-dominated society, in which "a woman can neither get a sympathetic response nor win a man to give legitimacy to her child". The play is in reality a mock trial of simple and straightforward school teacher Miss Leela Benare, who is presented as a female protagonist. She is charged with infanticide and having illicit relations with a married person Prof. Damle. She is cross-examined in the court with full mockery. In this way her private life is exposed. The theme of the play revolves round the idea of a game in which Benare, who is on the offensive in the beginning, finds herself entrapped in the game towards the end of the play. Benare as a woman trapped and helplessly victimized in the cage of selfishness, hypocrisy, and lust of the middle-class men folk. The play begins with a group of artists, planning to stage a play in a village. A local resident, a young bachelor called Samant, escorts the group to the hall where the performance is to take place that night. The members of the group are Leela Benare, a spinster schoolmistress in her mid-thirties, Mr. Kashikar, a pompous social worker, Mrs. Kashikar, his wife and a self-opinionated woman, Balu Rokde, the young man adopted by the Kashikars, Sukhatme, a lawyer, Ponkshe, a science student who has failed twice in the Intermediate examination and Karnik, an actor associated with 'experimental theatre'.

The play has elaborate stage direction, which enables the action of the play very lively. The group of actors is very small consisting of a few witnesses, a judge, his wife, an advocate who plays a dual role as the counsel for the defence and the crown, a servant, and the accused herself. The language of the play is very supple and the style very impressive. But for a few soliloquies, dialogues are very engaging and pointed enough to suit the atmosphere of the play. There is plenty of humour, banter, jibes and counter jibes, satire and irony. The mock-trial of Benare, which is carried through a light-hearted atmosphere in the beginning slowly becomes surcharged with cynicism, pettiness and sadism by exposing the private life of the accused and pinning her down in the name of social justice and moral code. She is first accused of infanticide by the court but the very same court sentences her to destroy the child in her womb, as she was unwed begot it out of illicit love. Thus the play exposes the social hypocrisy and its dubious double standards, which offer no protection to women. While Benare is punished for bearing an illegitimate child out of wedlock, Prof. Damle, a married man with family who is responsible for Benare becoming pregnant is left untouched! The play is well structured and the acts lead us from one to the other naturally. There is sudden shift in mood and tempo and like Benare; we are also suddenly taken unawares. The play, no doubt, is a feather to the cap of Tendulkar.

In love, she is cheated twice; first by her maternal uncle and later by Prof. Damle, her loving-companion. However, in the first event, the guilt passes unnoticed and hence, unpunished. But, in the other one, she is caught in a trap, through the cruel game cunningly arranged by her companions, for her love affair has been already exposed by her pregnancy. Though she is cheated, she feels happy with the thought that her body carries within it the witness of her love.

One of the focuses of the World Literatures has been women all through the history. It has outgrown the size since the

last decades of the 20th century. Women are projected as suffering a lot at the hands of their male-counterparts. They do not have equal status with men and, sometimes, part with their individual dignity. They are exploited both socially and economically. Although men are largely responsible for the exploitative and oppressive nature of society, women remain contributory to it. Each time Benare is disillusioned by her male-companions, for they love just her body and not her mind. Prof. Damle too, like her previous lover, is interested in her love just physically. Having fulfilled his sexual lust, he turns away, leaving her to suffer her fate in the so-called modern society.

At the beginning of the mock-trial, Benare is accused of the charge of infanticide (actually, it is foeticide). Surprisingly, at the end, this fake charge turns into a verdict, into a punishment. This very rehearsal of the mock-trial takes a serious turn as the co-actors arrange it cunningly to discuss and dissect the private life of Benare, which has been full of excitement since she was in her teens. Karnik's and Ponkshe's remarks in this matter are full of word-play. In the so-called game, her relationship with Prof. Damle, which has resulted in her pregnancy, stands exposed. All the male-members, Prof. Damle, Mr. Rawte, and her maternal uncle who are responsible for her awkward, humiliating situation, are significantly absent at the time of trial.

As a public prosecutor, Sukhatme conducts the case very cunningly and illustrates his point against Benare emphatically. But all his enthusiasm disappears as soon as he works as a defence counsel. The witnesses for Benare are chosen from the absent members of the group. Benare is punished severely for her present conduct, which, in her companions view, is licentious and also for her past life which is besmeared with sin. These are the words of Benare,

"Now, back to infanticide. I was wrong, Milord. But there's no reason for the prisoner to show such respect for the

judge. I plead not guilty. I couldn't even kill a common cockroach" (79)

The character of Benare symbolizes simplicity, innocence, and straightforwardness and the characters of her fellow-companions symbolize meanness, crookedness, and cruelty. She raises several questions about love, sex, marriage, and established moral values. Her long soliloquy in self-defence reveals that the voice of protest of a simple, innocent woman is always submerged in the male-dominated society. Her tragedy gives the fact that, in the male-dominated society, woman's innocence is punished and man's violence goes scot-free. In act three Miss Benare expresses her rage and grievances in life.

"Life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. 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 something that's nothing" (116)

The play depicts the tragedy of Miss. Benare, a teacher. The public discussion of her private life is not just relished by her co-actors, but she has also been entrapped in the mock-trial that becomes a cruel, cunning game. The judge pronounces his final judgement thus, "Neither you nor anyone else should ever do anything like this again. No memento of your skin remain for future generations. Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed" (119). Although Miss 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. Thus, she is punished ruthlessly for the crime she has not committed.

A woman plays a central role in Tendulkar's plays, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *The Vultures*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Kamala*, *Kanyadan*, *A Friend's Story*, etc. All women in these plays are drawn from real life situations and as such they belong to our society and our surroundings. Their problems, feelings, approaches and thoughts are similar to that of

ours. It is through the portrayal of female characters that Tendulkar exposes vices and weaknesses of society.

At the end of the third act, the school authorities are asked to dismiss such an immoral woman. Miss Benare tried to defend herself through a long soliloquy. She is like the sparrow in the song that has lost its nest and worried about it, and her troupe mates are like the crow that is not bothered in the least about her troubles.

“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?

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... (121)

The play, *Silence! The Court is in Session* discusses the problem of unmarried motherhood through the conflict between an individual and society where innocence is ruthlessly crushed by cruelty; the other plays like *The Vultures* expose the evil tendencies inherent in human psyche that render people blind and transform them from human beings into loathsome animals; *Sakharam Binder* depicts excessive physical lust of a straightforward, angry, and frustrated man and destructive nature of a secretive woman. Likewise most of his novels expose vividly the plight and the humiliation of women. Even through Nel, who is a daughter of Helene in *Sula*, Toni Morrison has made an attempt to highlight the disappointment and anguish of a defeated wife. Besides, we could see Ammu, who is subject to humiliation, insults and mental blows by her own family members in *The God of Small things* by Arundhati Roy. In the

same line, Nadine Gordimer also who died at the age of 90 exhibited the sufferings of the women through her novels.

The primitive society praised women as "Sakthi" because of her gift to deliver a new life. Women enjoyed a high level of freedom and equality in the society. There was no discrimination against them. Women enjoyed equal status and equal educational opportunities. They were the center of most of the societies in those days. Later the status of women was adversely affected gradually and now women are used merely as sexual objects. They are denied equal rights. They suffer indignities. Violence against women is quite alarming and is increasing day by day. Violence against women takes place in different forms and in different contexts, in different situations and circumstance. They are the worst victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, physical violence, emotional violence, etc. They are subjected to violence at home, work place, public place, armed conflicts, riots, etc.,

To conclude, it can be stated that Tendulkar, like the post-war British, American, Playwrights such as Osborne, Tennessee Williams, etc., have written plays dealing with real situations. This play proves how a woman has been mocked and humiliated whereas the males escaped, left free and has led a comfortable life. As far as Benare is concerned she can't be claimed to be the real part of the crime. In both the attractions she trusted the partners fully. She had a genuine plan to marry them. But both the partners of the sin turned out to be unfaithful, deserting her to face the scorn and condemnation. Benare has to fight the battle unarmed and has to succumb to the unkind and cruel abuse of the world which refuses to consider her plight from her shoes.

WORKS CITED

Post-Modernism and English Literature Ed. Bhatnagar M.K. and Rajeshwar M. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001.Print

Tendulkar, Vijay, *A Pioneer Playwright* By Shailaja B.Wadikar, by Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) LTD. 2008, 2013.Print

Gordimer, Nadine, *A Champion of Freedom and Equality* By Gilbert Camillus.V, AVA Publications, 2014.Print

Tendulkar, Vijay, *Five Plays*, Trans. Priya Adarkar Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Title of the Book	:	Blazing Torches
Editors	:	T.M.Uma Rani Gomez Sophia U. Anamica
First impression	:	February, 2016
Page	:	224
Price	:	Rs.600/-
ISBN	:	978-93-84193-59-1
Printed at	:	Laser Point, Madurai-625 003.

Publisher

Department of English

Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women (Autonomous)
(Accredited With "A" Grade in Cycle – 3 By Naac)

Periyakulam-625601 theni Dt, Tamil Nadu.

Web:jaceng@annejac.com

(Affiliated to Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal-624102, Tamilnadu.)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced. Stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Application for such permission should be addressed to the publisher.

Disclaimer

The authors are solely responsible for the contents of the papers edited in this book. The publisher or editors do not take any responsibility for the same in any manner. Errors, if any, are purely unintentional.

They burst into blaze and the Flames
roar with a sudden blast of enthusiasm...



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Jayaraj Annapackiam College For Women (Autonomous)
Periyakulam, Tamil Nadu, India.

ISBN 978-93-84193-59-1



9 789384 193591