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DRAMATIC ELEMENTS IN TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

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Abstract:

An attempt is made to unfold the dramatic elements employed by Vijay Tendulkar's in his drama Silence! The Court is in Session so as to evaluate to what extent these elements have helped the playwright to present his plot effectively.

KEY WORDS:

Dramatic Elements , plot effectively , society , demonstrate.

INTRODUCTION

THEMES

The main theme of the play is the exploitation of helpless woman at the hands of modern, civilized but orthodox society. The play dramatizes the conflict between individual and the society, in which individual is ruthlessly crushed by the society. The rules and norms are more important for the society than the individual. It also exposes the sexual politics in patriarchal norms of family and gender relations. Maya Pandit succinctly remarks in this connection: "Benare's defiance of the male domination and her subsequent trial explode the myth of motherhood as a sacred phenomenon and demonstrate how the biological phenomenon is deliberately glorified in order to obtain control over women's sexuality" (67). The play narrates the story of a carefree and self-asserted modern woman, who breaches the conventional bond of morality by keeping physical relations before marriage. Consequently she has to beg for the legitimacy of her child. It is noteworthy to quote here Asha.S.Kanwar, who says: "Silence! The Court is in Session is a social satire on male dominated society in which a woman can neither get sympathetic response nor win a man to give legitimacy to her child" (13). Freedom of any sort is not allowed and tolerated for women in male dominated societies. Leela Benare is one of the examples, there are thousand others, who have and are meeting such dreadful situations every day. In a patriarchal society, there is nothing like emotions and sentiments. But as in the words of Benare, "Body is everything" (Five Plays 118).

This shows that the conventional, patriarchal society can never offer sexual freedom to women. At the same time the play throws light on the malignant characters like Ponkshe, Karnik, Sukhatme and Mrs. Kashikar, that are prevalent in the society,. Benare's personal life is dragged into open and condemned her love affair with professor Damle. Mrs. Kashikar is the living example of those women who take pride in derogating her own sex.

Apart from this, the play raises several questions of love, sex, and moral values that are prevalent in the society. Moreover the present play is one of those great plays that bring out new dimensions to each reading.

PLOT:

The play has expertly structured plot. It is single and unified one. The action follows a logical sequence from the beginning to the end, except some of the interruptions like pan spitting contest, and Mr.

Kashikar's usual toilet programmes. Because it is a modern play, so there are no scenes but only acts. And these three acts are well organized and expertly related to each other. It is presented like a detective play, as it causally unfolds the events in the life of Miss. Benare. Every new detail either from Rokde, Ponshe or Mr. Kashikar, concerning to Benare is shocking. The play is so well structured that the denouement unravels itself as reversal.

SETTING

The setting of the play is village. It opens and ends in a hall, where the trial was to be performed. The hall is a perfect place for mock law court. It is an empty hall with two doors, one to enter by, and one to go to an adjoining room. Within the hall are a built-in platform, one or two old wooden chairs, an old box, a stool. A clock, out of order, on the wall. Some worn-out portraits of national leaders. And a picture of Lord Ganesha. An ideal surrounding for a mock-trial.

The atmosphere of the play is the mixture of levity and seriousness, with occasional patches of comic relief. Till Rokde's evidence, the atmosphere is full of jokes, fun and hilarity. But with Rokde's evidence levity gives place to seriousness. And this serious and tense atmosphere is carried to the end. Though there are some innocent comments by Mr. Samant that gives comic relief to the characters as well as to the audience.

DICTION | LANGUAGE

The language that is used in Silence! The Court is in Session, is the vernacular used by the common people in the society. "The style that Tendulkar uses in this play are demotic modeled on the language, rhythms and associations of ordinary speech" (Abrams 166). At times he uses Sanskrit slogans to heighten the importance of the situation. For example lines like: "Janani Janambhumishcha Svargadapi gariyasi", and "Na jeevan jeevanamarhati" (Five Plays 79, 116). The former means Mother and Mother land both are even higher than heaven, While latter means life is not worthy of life. "The dialogues in the play are characterized by a certain idiosyncratic use of syntax. Most of the utterances are short and there are abundant pauses, marked by numerous dots and dashes. However, whenever serious topics are discussed, the dialogues pick up a faster rhythm and the sentences certain depth and fullness" (Dharan 63). About Tendulkar's dialogue writing, there are no two opinions. His characters are the output of his minute observation of the society. Every detail matters lot to him. It is because of this that his characters are not types but the living and moving persons in the society.

Silence and pauses form an important element in Tendulkar's plays. It means and speaks a lot in a play. "For the first time Tendulkar attempted to show that an unspoken meaning lay beyond the spoken word. People loved teasing us in those days, saying your Tendulkar writes only half sentences. But these half sentences had the power to create something quite tremendous. That is why i feel that the acting idiom i was exploring found its perfect math in Tendulkar's writing" (Ten Ani Amhi 14). However he has written this play in a naturalistic manner. The language is bold and explicit.

PLAY-WITHIN-THE PLAY/MOCK-TRIAL

The mock-trial in this play is a systematized plan or game to trap Ms. Benare. The mock-trial forms the basis of the play. As all important activities like accusation and judgment occur in this mock-trial which almost functions like a play-within-the play. The real performance was supposed to have been Mock Law Court. But before the real performance starts, the mock-trial has been intentionally organized to ridicule Ms. Benare. It is the mock-trial that causes the terminal 'reversal' in the play. "Benare, who has all been baiting her male counterparts, ends up being the game ruthlessly hunted and baited by them all. This element of reversal gives the play its unique dramatic significance" (Dharan 61). The mock-trial exposes the sadist attitude of the characters like Rokde, Ponshe, Karnik and Mr., Mrs. Kashikar. The jealousy and wrath that heaped up all these years, against the libertine character of Ms. Benare is thus relieved through this play-within-the play. All the characters seemed to have ganged up against Benare. As the charge is leveled against her, the mock-trial does not remain mock, but becomes real, and discusses a real life event.

Characterization

As it is earlier discussed that Tendulkar writes in a naturalistic manner. His characters never seem to be unreal and romanticized. "They are the first and foremost human beings of flesh and blood who draw their features from the widest range of observed examples" (Gokhale 32). His characters live out the roles as a living and real persons and not as a card board character or the mouthpiece of the playwright.

Leela Benare, the most original of Tendulkar's character, is drawn with greatest care and complete attention. She is a woman, full of life, who always likes to enjoy every bit of life. Her feeling for life is reflected in the sentence. "We should laugh, we should play, we should sing, if we can and if they let us, we should dance too" (Five Plays 61). Such an innocent character is made to humiliate and suffer, by the other

vicious characters in the play. The reason behind her humiliation and exploitation is her rebellious nature. She openly opposes and rejects the conventional values of the orthodox society. Beyond doubt she has committed mistakes or one may call them sins, but still the question remains, “was she all alone in that crime? If not, then why she alone to be suffered and punished? The play raises such many questions, which probably cannot be answered. One such heart-rending question Benare raises in her soliloquy. “I was in love with my mother's brother. But in our strict house, in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. How was I to know that if you felt like breaking yourself into bits and melting into one with someone. If you felt that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life – and if he was your uncle, was it a sin?” However, one may observe and praise Tendulkar's art in combining rebellious and feminine qualities in Benare. Her feminine nature can be seen in an event where she objects Ponshe not to call Prof.Damle, a scoundrel. This type of attitude can be expected from woman only.

In the light of the protagonist Leela Benare, all other characters seem vague and unimportant. Because they only assist in the final tragedy of Benare. They are mere witnesses who speak about Benare. Even the playwright gives very little attention in delineating these portraits. Their characters can be summed up in a single line that they all are malicious, spiteful, facade and sadist. Their spiteful nature is seen not only attacking Benare, but among themselves also they are not united. They look down upon to one another. It would be unjust here to ignore Mrs. Kashikar's character. Mrs. Kashikar is the truest picture of middle-aged, married Indian housewives. She is one of the conventional, orthodox and surrendered Indian housewives. She is the example of 'thy is your enemy'. Mrs. Kashikar upholds the moral values prevalent in the society. She strongly believes that women must follow some limitations in life. She reflects her ideology through sentence. “should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a man. An unmarried woman? No matter how well she knows him?” (Five Plays 100). Instead of being sympathetic to the person of her own sex, she is rude and cruel with Ms. Benare. “Her collusion in the attack of Benare demonstrates how women internalize the dominance of men over themselves as a natural phenomenon and turn against other transgressing women as the 'other'” (Pandit 68). Another important character is Prof.Damle who is physically absent in the play.

MONOLOGUE:

The monologue at the end of the play, has become very famous in the contemporary Marathi theatre. Tendulkar was all against such monologue, because he believed that silence is more influential than the words. But due to his director's constant pursuance, he had to insert the final statement from Benare. The monologue allows Ms. Benare to break the silence that was imposed on her. It is an outlet to her suppressed feelings. She is accused of the crime of infanticide under section no.302 of Indian penal code. All her attempts to protest are callously drowned in Kashikar the mock judge's imposition of “Silence!” However she breaks this 'silence' at the end of the play, when she burst forth into a long and brilliant monologue, “which brings out in most eloquent terms, her love of life, focusing with astonishing brilliance on her betrayal at the hands of Prof.Damle, and the consequent torture at the hands of her fellow characters” (Dharan 61).

From the feminist point of view, the monologue is of greatest importance for it unfolds the inner psychic response of the accused to the tormentation and humiliation meted out at the hands of her fellow colleagues. Through soliloquy, Benare relates her heart – rending suffering in so called modern and sophisticated society. In a male-dominated middle class urban societies woman is not considered as a human being with emotions and feelings, but she is taken as a 'body', a thing for the pleasure of men, used and thrown as if a use-an-throw object. Her agonizing feelings can be seen through sentence: “I offered my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual God took the offering and went his way. He was a man for whom everything was of the body! That's all! Again, the body! This body is a traitor! I despise this body – and love it” (Five Plays 118).

COMIC RELIEF

In the admixture of tense and comic atmosphere of the play, Tendulkar brilliantly adds comic patches at the appropriate places. The most famous comic relief is provided in the pan spitting contest. This occurs instantly after the serious and grave charge that is labelled against Benare, of infanticide. When Benare is dumbfounded after the accusation of infanticide, the pan spitting contest helps her to regain her composure for a little while. Apart from this there are numerous comments from Samant, Mrs. Kashikar to laugh at. The tug-of-war between Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar is also quite amusing. One such example from the text is:

“Mrs: Kashikar: shall I be the accused? Mr. Kashikar: No. the minute there's half a chance to butt in, you're right there, pushing yourself forward. Mrs. Kashikar: Enough. So I won't be the accused. I hope that pleases you” (Five Plays 72).

SONG

Song is the most representative art of one's culture, tradition, and life.

Therefore its representation in literature is mandatory. However Tendulkar's writing is the outcome of his observation of the society, hence the songs and poems that are prevalent in the society, are ought to be the part of his writing. There are four small songs in this play. All are sung by Ms. Leela Benare. All these four songs are meaningful, symbolic, and of great dramatic significance. For example the first song that Benare sings in the opening scene:

“Oh, I've got a sweet heart. Who carries all my books, He plays in my doll house, and says he likes my looks. I'll tell you a secret. He wants to marry me. But mummy says, I'm too little to have such thoughts as these” (Five Plays 58-59)

The song is too meaningful as it tells us about Benare first love affair with her maternal uncle. She was deeply in love with her uncle, but she could not marry him. Because he turn away from his responsibilities. Moreover, her own mother opposed to this marriage.

The second song that makes her realizes that there is nothing in the world that she can own, or call her own.

The grass is green,
The rose is red,
This book is mine
Till i am dead!

The third song is a poem by Shirish Pai:
Our feet tread upon unknown
And dangerous pathways evermore,

And the wound that's born to bleed
Bleeds on for ever, faithfully.
There is a battle sometimes, where
Defeat is destined as the end
-----spend----- (Five Plays 62-63)

The poem by Pai is more significant as it presents the absurdist view of life. Life is meaningless, it is destined to be defeated. The last song is even more symbolical, in it Benare narrates her whole story in just four lines:

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. (Five Plays 74)

In this song 'parrot' is symbolic to Samant, and 'nest' to the chastity of Benare.

Apart from the techniques and devices discussed earlier there are other devices which may not deserve such detail study, but without whose mention this chapter cannot be concluded. The first such important device is symbolism, which is abundant throughout the play. The playwright makes ample use of sarcastic and paradoxical words that contribute to the symbolism in the play. Besides this, the use of irony, satire, pathos and mock elements, are praiseworthy. In short, Tendulkar's genius as a playwright lies in the subtleties of his writing skill. He uses these aforementioned devices with a view to criticize the society. He excels in his both roles as a playwright and as a social reformer.

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