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Address

- Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
- Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512
- (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

- aiirjpramod@gmail.com

Website

- www.aiirjournal.com

CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Feminism in Vijay Tendulkar's *The Court is in Session* and *Kamala***Vijay.D. Songire,**Assistant Professor,
SIES, Graduate School of Technology, Nerul, Navi
Mumbai**Dr. Subhash P. Zanke,**Research Supervisor & Head,
Department of English, Arts, Science and P.O.
Nahata Commerce College, Bhusawal, Jalgaon**Abstract**

Vijay Tendulkar, the recipient of Padma Bhushan Award (1984) is a leading Indian playwright, movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and a social commentator basically in Marathi. He is the most influential dramatist over the five decades in Maharashtra. Being an experimentalist Indian dramatist, he has exposed the social ills through his plays. His plays offer powerful documentaries on the contemporary socio-political issues. Tendulkar seeks to portray the plight and predicament of women in the urban middle-class society. The present paper discusses Tendulkar's plays, *The Court is in Session* and *Kamala* with the view to depict Tendulkar's ideology of feminism. It shows how women though humiliated, exploited and marginalized in the male dominated society, try to assert themselves. The dramatist exposes gender inequality and finds a solution over it in feminism.

Key Words: Gender discrimination, patriarchy, feminism, women empowerment, etc.

Tendulkar is best known for his plays, *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session) (1967), *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* and *Kamala* (1981). His dramatic world is women-centric where he unfolds the pains, sufferings and fragmented self of women on the account of gender exploitation. *Silence! The Court is in Session* reveals the ugly reality of ghastly treatment meted out to women. It attacks the male dominated Indian society where woman is treated merely as an object of wish fulfillment. Tendulkar's *Kamala* deals with the life of a woman, Kamala who is sold in a rural flesh market. It is a Gyno-centric play which discusses the futile existence of woman in male dominated Indian society. The play is based on a newspaper story and Tendulkar has used it to expose the social evil of patriarchy which denies the existence of women. Both of these plays reveal Tendulkar's strong belief in feminism. Like the feminists he too believes that the same rights, power and opportunities that men enjoy should be allowed to women. In the words of N. S. Dharan:

In Tendulkar's plays, generally, women are at the centre. It is around women that most of the action revolves. The roles Tendulkar's female protagonists play eclipse those played by the men figuring in them. It is Leela Benare in *Silence!* And Sarita in *Kamala* who play the leading roles in these plays which present a world apparently dominated by male chauvinists. And, the dramatic action in this gain in intensity mainly because of the presence of these women figuring in them. Both Leela Benare and Sarita are educated and efficient and refuse to be cowed down by men. (28)

Silence! The Court is in Session is translated by Priya Adarkar into English from the original Marathi play, *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* with three acts. In this play, Tendulkar ridicules the social evils of patriarchal society. He introduces a theatre group that concentrates on some

social evils, and finally through stage performances want to expose the reality before the public. According to Kathakali Gupta, "Feminist concerns are central to the play." (02) The female protagonist, Leela Benare is a central character in the play who is accused of infanticide. She is an unmarried woman who gets pregnant and her case is set to examine in a court, a fake court that assumes to be real. The Indian orthodox society cannot allow the birth of a child out of wedlock. The basic hypocrisy and double standards of Indian traditional society is exposed blatantly in the course of court proceedings. Miss. Benare's private life is exposed and publicly dissected revealing that she is a woman of loose character. Tendulkar focuses on the psychological violence that makes a female individual completely helpless. When Kashikar, the Judge listens that Benare is a spinster, he very irrationally approves the custom of child marriage. It also displays how women's desires are repressed under the name of patriarchy. If anything happen wrong, only woman is held responsible. Prof. Damle who has an affair with Miss Benare, is equally guilty. But no trial is set against him. The situation becomes complicated when Ponshe reveals that Benare lives only for the child in her womb and will give birth to it. Sukhatme, the lawyer, counsels for the prosecution, "Woman is not fit for independence... That is the rule laid down for us by tradition. Abiding by this rule, I make a powerful plea. „ Miss Benare is not fit for independence." (TCS 61)

Tendulkar's objective in presenting this mock-trial concept is to reveal the subjugation of women in the society on the account of gender. As Simon De Beauvoir asserts in her most famous book, *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"(16) Ms. Benare is attacked for no fault of her own and as it hints to her personal tragedy, she collapses; but the impact of her free self-declaration haunts the readers throughout. Her monologue at the end is very significant where she states assertively: "My life is my own. I have not sold it to anyone for a job. My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those – no one. I'll do what I like with myself and my life. I'll decide." Here Miss Benare is similar to Morrison's *Sula* who vehemently declares: "I want to make myself." (92)

All the characters in the play other than Ms. Benare, like Ponshe –the science student, Sukhatme – the lawyer, Karnik – the theatre actor, Balu Rokde and Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar are the agents of the patriarchal forces of the society. They don't provide sufficient space for a woman like Benare to live an independent life. They all subjugate her pathetically. Though one character namely Samant seems to be quite a non-chauvinistic character at the initial stage eventually turned into a male chauvinist. The male characters in the play give an authentic portrayal of the middle class patriarchal mentality. They want to crush down her existence on the account of her illicit relationship with the Professor Damale from whom she gets pregnant. Moreover, they attack Benare more severely because she attains a greater level of self-confidence and mental clarity that they wish to have but cannot attain. The man woman relationship is very well depicted in the play which brings the power structure to the limelight. The relationship between Balu Rokde and Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar also indicates a master-slave relationship in a hegemonic power-bound society. Though Miss. Benare is threatened and accused she does not lose courage. The feminist voice is very well reflected through Miss Benare when she asserts "...my life is my own-I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own." (04) This endows Benare with the identity of a "new woman" emerging against the coercive attacks of

patriarchy. The women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergo a series of sufferings and torture as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. It indicates the humiliation and exploitation of the weaker sex by the dominant one. Tendulkar presents the futile struggle of a woman in the male-dominated society of post-independent India. He exposes the hypocrisy of the male chauvinists and attacks the sham moral standards of the so-called civilized society. In his article 'The Playwright as a Social Critic: A Critical Study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*', Dr. S. John Peter Joseph rightly comments that, "While exploring the depths of human life and its complexities he does not fail to expose the hypocrisy, promiscuity and emptiness of value systems found in the traditional Indian middle-class society. By using the techniques of satire, irony, pathos and mock-element effectively he criticizes the middle-class mindset and its conventional attitude towards life." (03)

Kamala, a two Act play is about gender discrimination. It embodies Tendulkar's strong belief in feminism. The play focuses on an intricate husband-wife relationship and marriage as a social institution. Kamala, a female protagonist in the play is a woman from flesh market. Mr. Jadhav is a reporter who works for a reputed news agency. He buys Kamala for 700 rupees and takes her to his home and then to the Press Conference. Jadhav wants to expose the evil of gender discrimination at the flesh trade through Kamala. Thus, he uses her as a tool in his project to earn name and fame in his profession. He attempts to come up as a successful journalist in the industry by doing so. He is a man who represents hypocritical patriarchy in Indian society. He does not treat his wife Sarita with due respect. Sarita, as a wife is extremely honest and sensitive to her husband's needs and different tastes. She looks after her husband as an ideal Indian woman does. Despite being an independent and educated woman, she has become a slave in her own house. In the play, Kakasaheb says, "You may be highly educated; Sarita, but you are still a girl from the old Mohite Wada" (*Kamala* 5). Sarita begins to realize that there is no difference between her own identity at home and Kamala whom her husband bought her to exhibit at the Press conference. It is said that a woman can understand another woman. Although Kamala is illiterate and quite simple believing in her jungle deity, she can understand how a woman suffers a lot in her married life by her mother-in-law, a husband and society. She sympathizes with Sarita over her barrenness. Their long dialogues show Kamala's readiness to produce children for them.

Sarita: How many children do you have, Kamala?

Kamala: I'll have as many as you want. (34)

Act I ends in the success to take her to the Press Conference letting a great relief to Jadhav and his wife Sarita. But later they know from his friend that Sheth Singhanian, the press baron dismisses Jadhav because of his expose of flesh-trade at the Press Conference. There is a pressure on the proprietor as some big people got involved in the flesh racket. After listening to this shocking news, Sarita still is worried of her husband and asks him to come home from the party. Jadhav finds him helpless in this situation.

Sarita, though ready to live life with her husband, her vision is different than before. She is going to be emerged as an independent and successful woman within the institution of marriage. She thinks, "But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object

to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it." (Kamala 52) Sarita's sacrifice in a domestic world finally leads her to become an able modern woman, strong willed, optimistic and free. As Pramod Pawar rightly asserts, "The play shows the radical changes in the life of a modern woman who always dreams to retain her status in Indian society." (07) Sarita's behavior is changed ultimately at the end of the play and she proposes to hold a press conference to expose the hypocrisy of her husband. The women in the respective plays, though humiliated and exploited at the hands of patriarchy, assert their voice at last. The woman's voice is not negligible in both of these novels. As Talluri Mathew Bhaskar remarks, "Tendulkar's aggressive women though they accept patriarchy, raised their voice against the social inequality on the basis of gender." (13)

To conclude, Tendulkar's plays – *The Court is in Session* and *Kamala* are true documents which unfold gender discrimination on one hand and female awakening on the other. Women characters in these plays appear as feminists who are self-empowered and ready to defy the oppressive patriarchy in the society. Both of these plays are very significant so as to expose the ghastly evils of humiliation and oppression of women in the 21st century where women are still treated as secondary or subordinate on the account of gender.

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