

SOCIAL CONCERN IN THE WORKS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

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Abstract:

In his renowned play, Silence! The Court is in Session Vijay Tendulkar raises very important questions on the need of maintaining social stability, moral sanctity and legal integrity. The story of the play revolves upon the character of Miss Benare, the heroine of the play. Tendulkar's another play Ghasiram Kotwal has an historical assertion. The play though based on historical legend, does not comment on morality or immorality of Peshwa Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. It is a mere statement of degeneration of society, in which will find universality.

Key words: Independent, Woman, Society, Politics, Hierarchy

In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Miss Benare is a schoolteacher who is dedicated to her profession. She has never gone late to school. She has given her entire self to the upliftment of her school children to the extent of losing her health. She has always been very strict with her students. But her children always adore her and are willing to do anything for her. Her professional popularity has caused the envy of her colleagues at school and even the school management. They plan to institute an enquiry for a small bit of scandal about her.

Miss Benare is frank, freedom loving and independent woman. She feels that her life is her own and nobody needs dictate her how or what to do with it. She cannot understand why the management should try to dismiss her from her job when she is impeccable as a teacher school. It is not proper on their part to punish her for the unfortunate happenings in her private life. Benare confesses that she is a victim of love and life. She has not harmed anyone. If at all she has banned anybody, it was her own self. She feels that everyone around her, including her own people and her lovers has betrayed her. This being the case she is already victim of life and it is meaningless on the part of the management or the society to victimize her further. It will be tantamount to adding insult to injury.

So far, we have examined the stand of Miss Benare as a victim of life and society. But during

the course of the mock-trial of Miss Benare for infanticide, the witnesses for the prosecution prove that she had a love affair with her maternal uncle while she was just fourteen and tried to commit suicide as she could not marry him because her mother and others were against it calling a sin; that she loved Prof. Damle, a married man with children and became pregnant by him and he had jilted her, that she tried to persuade her colleagues like Ponshe and Balu Rokde into marrying her and fathering her child, and that she carried a bottle of Tik-20 in her bag with an intention to commit suicide if everything failed.

In the court Miss Benare's crimes of infanticide and illegitimate motherhood is established by the prosecution as crimes against society. Public prosecutor Sukhatme points out that motherhood is sacred and a mother bears the responsibility of rearing her child unmindful of her own difficulties. Motherhood is sacred and pure. A mother weaves a magic circle with her whole existence in order to protect and preserve her little one. So he points out that Miss Benare has brought shame to the holy motherhood by her conduct. He says:

"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." (46)

Sukhatme further points out that Miss Benare has committed a far more serious crime than infanticide by her unmarried motherhood. If the latter is permitted unchecked, promiscuity will become the order of the day. In this connection he observes:

"The charge against the accused is one of infanticide. But the accused has committed a far more serious crime. I mean unmarried motherhood. Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our religion and our traditions. Moreover, if the accused's intention of bringing up the offspring of this unlawful maternity is carried to completion, I have

a dreadful fear that the very existence of society will be in danger. There will be no such thing as moral values left." He further draws the attention of the court how unwed motherhood will pull down the institution of marriage to the dust and become a breeding ground for immorality. (49)

In this connection lie aptly points out to the judge: "Milord, infanticide is a dreadful act. But bringing up the child of an illegal union is certainly more 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."

So Sukhatme appeals to the court to give the utmost punishment to the accused Miss Benare who has tarnished the institution of marriage and shaken the citadel of morality by trying to blow it out. He says very forcibly:

"The accused has plotted to dynamite the very roots of our tradition, our pride in ourselves, our culture and our religion. It is the sacred and imperative duty of your Lordship and every wise and thoughtful citizen amongst us to destroy the plot at once." (54)

Judge Mr. Kashikar pronouncing his verdict in Miss Benare's case observes:

"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 chained down. Social customs are all of supreme importance. Marriage is the very foundation of our society's stability. 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 were planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow... The school officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from your job. By the grace of God, it has all been stopped in time. Neither you nor anyone else should ever do anything like this. No memento 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." (61)

Tendulkar condemns and discourages socially destructive tendencies through his characters, Sukhatme and Kashikar. Though Miss Benare argues that the society has no right to interfere with her private rights liberties, she cannot totally disown her responsibility to the society. As long as she is part and parcel of the society, she must think twice before violating the holy norms and regulations of society intended to provide security

to the individual through collective security of society. Emancipation of women is not a saber to violate the shrine of social order, tradition and morality. An individual should try to strike the golden mean between the higher interests of the society and the personal freedom of the individual. In this connection we shall do well to consider the view of Geeta Kumar:

"It is society which asks everyone to conform to its own yardsticks of decorum and propriety. The writer makes ample use of irony, satire, and pathos and even mock element (as in Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe) to highlight the hollowness of middle-class moralities. These moralities might be having slight variations but all times and at all ages they remain the same. An individual is not supposed to take the "Primrose path of dalliance", as Shakespeare put it. Conform or else—all hell can break loose. Irregular or abnormal is not to be tolerated. No reasons are good enough to justify and find alibis for a person's erratic behaviour."(23)

Next play we have considered, Ghashiram Kotwal is a fiction woven out of history. Like many other plays Ghashiram Kotwal also finds its structure on history but unlike them unfortunately it is often stated as presentation of distorted facts and sketching a Maratha patriot in unsavoury light. Sutradhar becomes an important character in the play who adopts several roles and slides into each one of them very- smoothly. He is also the narrator and the chief commentator. He keeps the audience abreast with this interjection and interposes. He slides into one role after another and the curtain does not fall. It is to the ability of Sutradhar who makes it happen with ease. He teases and ridicules Bhatjibuwa feigning respect. The conversation between the Sutradhar and the Brahmin is farcical, the short rhyming sentences are delightfully crisp and frivolity is the essence of the scene. The play of words and repartee sets the mood for a comic encounter between him and the Brahmin.

SUTRADHAR: Ho Ho Ho Bhatji Buwa! Wait now, wait now, hold your horses! Must you go?

BRAHMAN: Forces? Whose Forces? English?

SUTRADHAR: Where does your way go?

BRAHMAN: To the graveyard.

SUTRADHAR: Then, I'm coming.

BRAHMAN: He says, I'm coming. What for, to die? You look after here; I say 'good bye.' I go, you stay, call it a day. (27)

Sutradhar in an important tool in the hands of dramatist to satirize the contemporary society, brahmans and Nana amongst others which is the main aim of this play. Sutradhar mocks and baffles the Brahman into confession that he was going to

Bavannakhani. The other brahman are also accosted by him as Oho gentleman! Moneyed man! Mansioned man! Where are you going '?' (43). The three handsome brahmans tried to hoodwink him saying that they were going to a Kirtan. But Sutradhar is not a person to be befooled so easily. They finally relent and come out with the information that they were going to Gulabi's place. The seriousness of the offence is conveyed through comic overtures.

The play has been able to strike at a very vulnerable point of the contemporary society and has been able to bring out the ugly connections between power, sex and religion. Shamir Sengupta observes:

Sex and religion have acquired the status of institution in power. Whether it is Ghashiram or Poona brahmarary or Nana they acquire and delegate power to the institution of sex and religion. The association though is murky it continues to gain an upper hand never the less. (26)

The human wall in the play comprises twelve Brahmans whose function is to comment on the proceedings, act as stage props and dissolve into the various requirements of the play. When they turn their backs to the audience, they are supposed to play no part. It also serves as a mechanism of secrecy and revelation. It hides the characters, the scenic developments and other things when the dramatist wills so to focus on the other side on the stage and exposes the dramatic movement when it is so required. It thus prevents the fall of curtain rapidly and is novel.

The Sutradhar is sometimes the part of the human curtain. The human curtain sometimes temporarily acts as individuals and sometimes functions as a unit. As the play opens twelve Brahmans are seen on the stage invoking Lord Ganesha to shower the blessing on the play. Ganesha is set to be the remover of hurdles and all religious ceremonies have begun with invocation to him. Sutradhar in his conversation with the Brahman introduces them to the audience. He starts the singing and direct interventions to fill up the-gaps and also build a rapport with the audience.

The human curtain breaks and the Brahmans turn into revelers taking part in Lavani. Sutradhar addresses the audience and tells them that while Brahman enjoys the presence of other women, their own women are in the company of other men at home. In the next incident three brahman from the human curtain break away from it and haggle with an English man to get him entry into a place where Peshwa will shortly honour the brahmans.

They haggle over money and try to outwit each other displaying degeneration and corruption. When Ghashiram is put in jail Sutradhar assumes the role of fellow prisoner. It is there he apprises him of the state of affairs in Poona. His comments on the police, thieves and connection between them are exemplary. He advises Ghashi to take refuge in god and becomes a Quavalli singer. The human curtain joins the Sutradhar in Quavalli singing and when it finishes, they turn their back to the audience. When Ghashi is thrown out of the prison the human curtains sways to the tune of Shri Gajraj Narten Karen. Ganesha enters and the two Brahmans from the human curtain form a temple around him. The Sutradhar now becomes a teller of religious story. Some Brahmans from the curtain take the role of curtains while some even join them. The Sutradhar switches over from singing an abhanga to a lavani and then abhanga—then lavani. It is a place where the play focuses on the easy ship from religion to sex and sex to religion. Nana is sure perched on the stage and from his position of comfort he leers at women devotees. His position in administration, the place of worship and the mood becomes questionable.

After the appointment of Ghashi as the Kotwal, Sutradhar comments on his atrocities. He himself becomes a victim when he goes out at night to fetch a mid-wife. The human curtain then stands with the backs turned, the Kotwal knocks at the back of seventh man as if it is a door. The seventh man turns rubbing his eyes as if he has just got up from his sleep. He is questioned by Kotwal. Then the eighth man's back is knocked as if it was the next-door house and other Brahmans in the line serve as neighborhood.

Nana with Gauri and his wives is shown throwing colours in Rang Panchami. The human curtain comes arid covers the dance scene. Kotwal and his soldiers walk in front of the human curtains. He orders his soldiers to be alert and catch anyone throwing colours at anyone other than his wife. "Morality must be protected"(39) says he. The human curtain moves back and the dance continues once again. In the meanwhile, a woman appears as a complainant. Her father in law is dead and body is rotting and Kotwal wouldn't give permission to do the cremation for the want of permit. Nana is in too pink a mood to do a routine job like this. She is kicked out. The human curtain comes in front again and Sutradhar interposes saying that days and months passed without a change. The atrocities of Nana and Kotwal continue. The human curtain appears again at the fire ordeal of a Brahman who is accused of theft.

The Sutradhar gives details of the torture of the Brahman. While he screams the human curtain chants Radha Krishna Mukund Murari either to satirize or to drown his screams. The Sutradhar intercepts Bhatji Buwa again on the stage and is able to extract from him Nana getting married for the seventh time to a fourteen-year-old girl this time. She was bought with gold coins and a generous grant of land. He is present at the wedding and sings songs etc.

The human wall dissolves into the Brahmans coming from outside and visiting Poona. They are caught stealing fruits from Ghashi's garden and imprisoned. Sutradhar assumes the role of the guard, stacks them in takes opium and goes to sleep. He comes back to us as Sutradhar and tells that twenty-two Brahman died of suffocation. A Maratha Sardar discovers this, reports the matter to Peshwa who summons him. Sutradhar now acts as a palace guard and takes the message to Nana about the angry Brahmans mobbing his palace. Nana hands over the order of Ghashi's execution and Sutradhar comes to the riotous mob to apprise them of his order. The human curtain now takes the role of the mob when Ghashiram appears on the stage and he is beaten by it. Disfigured and bloodied. Ghashiram then lays dead. The mob yells and shouts. Nana appears and orders festivities for three days. Gulabi comes in dancing, Nana's wives also dance and the crowd joins them.

Conclusion:

Tendulkar is a creative writer with a fine sensibility. He exposed alienation of modern individual to contemporary politics. He also exposed men's dominance over women, his portraiture of overt and covert violence in human-beings and above all his deep and abiding consciousness of women's vulnerability in Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern is the relationship between individual and society. In play after play, he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man. All of his plays have direct, one to one relationship with reality with an extraordinary mixture of violence that is so much omnipresent yet invisible in real lives of people. Most of his plays deal with the individual placed against the backdrop of society and explore the tensions between the two. His creativity has a prismatic quality, myriad potential and a multitude of colours.

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