

Vijay Tendulkar's "Silence! The Court is in Session": Exploring the role of power and oppression in Indian Society.

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Abstract - "Silence! The Court is in Session" is a play by Vijay Tendulkar that explores the themes of power and oppression in Indian society. The play tells the story of a group of amateur actors who gather to stage a mock trial of a young woman accused of having an illegitimate child. As the trial progresses, the power dynamics between the various characters are revealed, with those in positions of authority exerting their power over those who are less powerful. It is a powerful critique of the social and political systems that allow for the oppression of marginalized groups. Through its portrayal of the trial, the play encourages the audience to reflect on the ways in which power operates in their own lives and to consider how they might work to challenge and resist these power dynamics. Ultimately, this research paper contributes to a broader understanding of power and oppression in Indian society and offers insights into the complexities of social change in this context.

Index Terms - Power, Oppression, Indian Society, Gender, Patriarchy, Double Standards, Victimization, Justice.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vijay Dhodopant Tendulkar (1928-2008) is a versatile great Indian playwright in Marathi known for his multi-faceted creativity. He is considered one of the foremost playwrights of the Post-Independence Indian theatre and is known for his powerful and socially relevant plays that address a wide range of issues related to Indian society, politics, and culture. He had given definite contribution to the contemporary Indian Marathi novel along with Badal Sarkar, Habib Tanvir, Girish Karnard and many others. Tendulkar was the recipient of numerous awards and honours throughout his career, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, India's highest award for the performing arts, and the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan, two of India's highest civilian honours. His works continue to be performed and studied in India and around the world, and his legacy as a playwright and social commentator remains an important part of Indian theatre history. Tendulkar's plays often dealt with taboo subjects such as sexuality, gender, caste, and religion, and he was known for his sharp critique of social and political institutions that perpetuate injustice and oppression. His plays are characterized by their realism, psychological depth, and political engagement. Some of his most famous plays include "Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe" (Silence! The Court is in Session), "Ghashiram Kotwal" (Ghashiram the Constable), "Sakharam Binder" (Sakharam the Bookbinder), and "Kanyadaan" (The Gift of a daughter).

"Silence! The Court is in Session" (1967), a play which is originally written in Marathi (Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe) and later translated into English by Priya Adarkar and staged in 1971 at Museum Theatre, Madras in March 1971. In "Silence! The Court is in Session", Tendulkar has depicted the plight of Leela Benare who is schemed by the male dominated society. A Traditional society has never been able to come out of its values and customs. Our culture is a male dominant one. The Indian women exist among conditions often bordering on dismay. What Tendulkar depicts in his play is woman, they fight for their own life and their right to their own lives. This represents the patriarchal treatment and injustice on women. Victimization of innocent women is one of the continuous concepts.

One way to explore the role of society, power, and oppression in "Silence! The Court is in Session" would be to analyse the characters and their interactions within the play. For example, Leela's situation is also complicated by her own internalized oppression, as she believes the negative things said about her and struggles to assert herself. This highlights the insidious nature of oppression, which can become internalized and self-perpetuating. Miss Benare is not present for most of the play, but her absence and the accusations made against her drive the action of the play. Her character represents the way in which women are often blamed and punished for things that are outside of their control, and the double standards that exist in society regarding sexual behaviour. The male characters in the play, on the other hand, represent the oppressive forces in society. They use their positions of power to control and dominate the female characters, and their language is often used to assert their dominance. For example, Professor Damle, one of the male characters, is a high-ranking official who uses his authority to silence those who disagree with him.

Through the interactions between the characters, the play shows how power operates in society and how it is used to maintain the status quo. The play also explores the role of language in perpetuating power dynamics and how words can be used to silence and oppress. In "Silence! The Court is in Session," the characters' interactions reveal the complex ways in which power operates in Indian society. The characters occupy different positions in society, such as gender, class, and education level, and each has a different level of power and privilege. Leela Benare, the accused woman, is a schoolteacher who is financially independent and has some level of education, but she is still vulnerable to the power dynamics of the men in the play who are in positions of authority. The men use their power to intimidate and silence her, while the other women in the play, who are also in positions of relative powerlessness, align themselves with the men in order to gain some measure of protection and security.

In "Silence! The Court is in Session," Vijay Tendulkar presents a broader commentary on societal issues such as caste, gender, and class. The play explores the intersection of these issues and how they contribute to the oppression of certain individuals and groups. The characters in the play represent different social groups and are portrayed as victims of various forms of oppression.

For example, Leela Benare is a schoolteacher who is accused of having premarital sex and is subjected to intense scrutiny and judgment by her colleagues. Her male colleagues are quick to condemn her, and she is ultimately punished for violating societal norms around sexual behaviour. The play also highlights the issue of caste discrimination through the character of Sukhatme, who is a Brahmin and is constantly reminded of his privileged status. He is shown to be condescending towards his lower-caste colleagues and is complicit in perpetuating caste-based discrimination. In addition, the play deals with gender inequality through the portrayal of women as powerless and voiceless. Leela Benare is silenced and punished for her sexual behaviour, while Miss Benare is unable to assert her authority and is constantly undermined by her male colleagues. Furthermore, the play examines the issue of class inequality through the character of Naidu, who is a working-class man and is shown to be at a disadvantage compared to his middle-class colleagues. He is unable to articulate his thoughts and ideas effectively and is constantly belittled by his colleagues. Overall, "Silence! The Court is in Session" is a powerful commentary on the ways in which societal issues intersect and contribute to the oppression of certain individuals and groups. Through the characters and their interactions, Tendulkar exposes the flaws and biases inherent in the legal system and challenges the audience to reflect on their own complicity in perpetuating these injustices.

Throughout the play, we see how the men who control the legal system use their power to maintain their own authority and suppress dissent. The judges, lawyers, and jurors who preside over Miss Benare's trial are all men, and they use their positions of authority to demean and belittle her. They ask her insulting questions, make snide comments, and generally treat her with disdain, all in an effort to intimidate her and make her conform to their expectations. At the same time, we see how Miss Benare fights back against this oppression, using her intelligence, wit, and determination to expose the hypocrisy and injustice of the legal system. She refuses to be silenced, even when it would be easier to simply comply with the demands of those in power. Instead, she speaks truth to power, exposing the flaws and biases of the legal system and challenging the authority of those who seek to use it against her. In this way, the play offers a powerful critique of the legal system and its role in perpetuating oppression. It shows how those in power can use the law to silence dissent and maintain their own authority, while also highlighting the resilience and courage of those who refuse to be silenced.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The paper explores the themes of power and oppression in Indian society through the analysis of the play "Silence! The Court is in Session" by Vijay Tendulkar. The play tells the story of a mock trial of a woman accused of having an illegitimate child, and the power dynamics between the characters reveal the oppressive forces in society. The paper highlights the insidious nature of oppression, the role of language in perpetuating power dynamics, and the complex ways in which power operates in Indian society, including the intersectionality of caste, gender, and class. Ultimately, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of power and oppression in Indian society and encourages reflection on the ways in which power operates in one's own life.

III. REFERENCES

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