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## Oppressed Women in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

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### Abstract

This paper is to explore about delineation of women in Indian society by the patriarchy and subjugation of women in all her stages as daughter, wife and mother. In Vijay Tendulkar's plays, he has explored discrimination, oppression, sexual objectification, patriarchy and stereotyping. He presents a world dominated by men. He voices for women and creates historical women characters in his plays. Tendulkar portrays the darker aspects of human existence in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. He is a realistic observer and social critique who delineates the struggles of middle class and marginalized Indian society. His plays are vividly brought to the readers without neglecting violence, misuse of power, domestic cruelty and moral decay. The present article deals with status of women in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

**Key words:** Exploitation, struggle for individuality, alienation of women, inequality, male domination, patriarchy, stereotyping

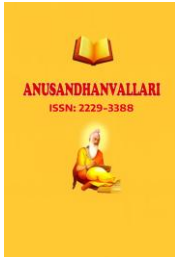
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### Introduction

The strength of Indian literature in English comes mostly from the English education that Christian missionaries gave in the 1800s and 1900s. Indian literature in English was able to change by mixing the discipline of English with Indian feeling, emotion and experience. It makes sense that the first Indians to write in English did it in prose. About a hundred years ago, Indians had to communicate with their English rulers about a lot of important public issues in English language.

Postcolonial literature, often known as New English literature(s), is a collection of literary works that respond to the narrative of colonization. Postcolonial literature frequently encompasses texts that address themes of decolonization or the political and cultural autonomy of individuals previously subjected to colonial domination. Postcolonial literature refers to works produced subsequent to the exit of imperial authority from the indigenous region. After gaining independence from colonial domination, the Postcolonial people have begun to consider their identity. So, they have spoken out against the wrongs and injustices of the past and tried to find their own identity.

The modern Indian English drama is divided into two parts. They are Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Drama. Before Independence, Indian drama takes place during the colonial period. The East India Company's arrival and the British Empire's colonization of India gave rise to a new and radical literary genre known as Indian English Literature. Indian English drama is a significant genre of this literature.



Vijay Tendulkar is a dramatic voice of distinction in the modern era. He has made a lot of contributions to both Marathi and Indian English drama. He has written twenty-eight full-length plays and twenty-one one-act plays. He has also written various plays for kids. Most of Tendulkar's plays are translations into English. Some of his famous plays are *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Kanyadan*, *Sukhram Binder*, *The Vultures* and *Kamala*.

Tendulkar has done a lot to modernize Indian theatre. Before his plays arrival to the stage, Indian theatre was old-fashioned and behind the times. He has changed Marathi theatre in many ways. His theatre has both real and made-up stories. He has used a lot of different colors to make the real world stand out. His plays show what life is really like nowadays. He has met a lot of different people as a journalist. He has been able to meet his needs because of the news stories or scenarios that have been told to him. He has not liked the old way of doing things. He has become well-known as a modern playwright. Before Tendulkar, Marathi plays were mostly about history, myths and feelings. He eliminates these ideas and turns them into a good way to tell a story. He messes up all the rules of classical play. Tendulkar is the only Marathi playwright who has taken Marathi theatre to the next level. His writing is about Indian history from a social and cultural point of view until he died. His personality is as complicated as his plays.

### Discussion

*Silence! The Court is in Session* comes to a suburban village of Bombay to stage a play in a miniature cross-section of the middle-class society. The members of the group are representative of its sub-strata. They show spiteful attitude towards Leela Benare the central character of the play and their fellow artists reflect their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings. A well-targeted conspiracy is hatched out against her and in the name of mock trial, they expose and dissect her personal life and she reveals the basic hypocrisy and double standards of society. The play exposes the vulnerability of women in Indian society. The trial court is like:

KASHIKAR. I wonder, should we have the judge's chair this side or that?

KARNIK. Here, of course. The entrance is over there. That room next door can be used for the judge. You can enter from there. President Johnson will stand over here like this

SAMANT. [amazed] President Johnson!

KASHIKAR. No, no. Johnson's dock should be left over there. So when I speak as a Judge

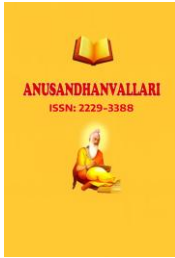
KARNIK. I don't agree. If you look at it from audience's point of view, it should be right here

SUKHATME. Mr Karnik, I shall prosecute you for seeing things from audience's point of view!

And you a man of modern theatre! [a lawyer's laugh.] (21)

One way to look at how society, power and oppression in *Silence! The Court is in Session* is to observe Leela's situation that gets worse because she believes the bad things people say about her and so she doesn't speak out for herself. This shows how sneaky tyranny can be, since it can become part of a person's personality and keep going on its own. Miss Benare's character shows how women are often penalized and judged for things they can't control, as well as how society has different rules for sexual behavior.

The play's male characters, on the other hand, show how society's oppressive forces work. They use their power to manage the female characters and they often use words to show how much better they are. For instance, Professor Damle is a high-ranking official and he can silence anyone who disagrees with him. The characters' conversations show how power works in society and how it is used to keep things the same. The play also looks at how language may be used to control woman. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the characters' interactions show how power works in Indian society in a convoluted way. The characters come from different backgrounds, such as their gender, class and level of education and each has a different amount of power and privilege. Leela Benare, the woman on trial, is a schoolteacher who can support herself and has some education, but she is still at the mercy of the men who are in charge in the play. The men use their power to scare and silence her, while the other women in the play, who are also not very powerful, work with the men to feel safe and protected. In *Silence!*



*The Court is in Session*, Vijay Tendulkar gives a bigger picture of social issues like caste, gender and class. The play explores the intersections of these issues and how they lead to the oppression of certain people and groups. The characters in the play come from many different socio-economic background.

Leela Benare is a teacher who is accused of having sex before marriage and is harshly judged and watched by her coworkers. Her male coworkers gradually turn against her and she is eventually punished for not following the rules of society about sexual activity. The character of Sukhatme, a Brahmin who is always reminded of his privileged status, also talks about the topic of caste inequality throughout the play. People think that he looks down on his coworkers from lower castes and helps to keep caste-based prejudice going. The play also talks about gender inequality by showing women as weak and silent. Leela Benare is penalized and silenced for her sexual behavior, while Miss Benare has a hard time asserting her authority and is always undermined by her male coworkers.

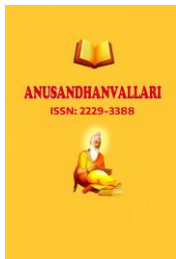
*Silence! The Court is in Session* analyses the problems in society that affect and oppress certain people and groups. Tendulkar's characters and interactions show the flaws and biases in the legal system, making the audience think about how they might be helping to keep these wrongs going. In the play, one can see how the people in control of the justice system utilize their power to keep their power and keep people from speaking out. Male judges, lawyers and jurors are in charge of Miss Benare's trial and they use their power to insult and disparage her. They ask her rude questions, make fun of her and treat her with disrespect in general, all to scare her and make her do what they want. Miss Benare fights back against persecution by utilizing her intelligence, humour and determination to show how unfair and dishonest the court system is in the society. She won't be quiet, even though it would be easier to just do what those in charge say. Instead, she tells the truth to people in power, showing how the judicial system is flawed and biased and standing up to those who want to use it against her. In this way, the play makes a powerful case against the legal system and how it keeps people unequal. It shows how people in power can use the law to suppress critics and keep their position, while also showing how brave and determined people who refuse to be silenced.

Tendulkar's female character represents the Indian woman who has long been under suppression and cruel domination of man, but is emerging as a new woman in modern times. Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, who plays the leading role in the play, presents a world apparently dominated by male chauvinists. It is mainly because of these women figuring in them, the dramatic fiction in the play gets intensified. Both Leela Benare is an educated and efficient woman who refuses to be cowed down by men. Though Tendulkar is not a self-acknowledged feminist, one can see that he treats his female characters with understanding and compassion, while juxtaposing them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious. Arup Kumar Mondal points out "the game becomes a trap for the helpless Miss Benare" (Benare, a Victim of the Patriarchal)

In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has explored the status of women in contemporary Indian society. Men's selfishness and hypocrisy and women's insignificance in her own place in life have been brought out through the character of Leela. She strikes on reader's consciousness about the reality faced by women in the male dominated society. Jasbir Jain's states as: "...while feminism has generated awareness, created space, intervened in legislation, values and structures continue to be patriarchal and tradition continues to define roles and respectability, especially in traditional societies like ours" (91). The dramatist illustrates the idea of a male chauvinistic society while examining women's individuality, as noted by Mr. Kashikar:

All right. She's not less than thirty-four. I'll give it to you in writing! What I say is, our society should revive the old custom of child marriage. Marry off the girls before puberty. All this promiscuity will come to a full stop. If anyone has ruined our society, it's Agarkar and Dhondo Keshav Karve. That's my frank opinion, Sukhatme, my frank opinion. (73-74)

In the patriarchal society, the plight of women is pathetic. They have no rights to express her feelings, love and emotions. Even the religion projects that woman is created for man. Marriage is a social institution supported by tradition, custom and social morality. Some kind of relationships are not advocated for women whereas extra



marital affair is not a crime for a man. Tendulkar tries to awaken people's conscience and has created awareness about the defects of society. He envisions an ideal society, free from exploitation and oppression in which there is equality, freedom, happiness and peace for everyone.

The play doesn't focus on anything specific about the time or place, but it does give hints about what life is like in India after independence. The most evident sign of the modern era is perhaps the debate about Benare's behavior as a "modern" lady. Traditionalists are afraid of Leela who is smart, brave, attractive, funny and not afraid to break the rules. Kashikar laments that child marriage is banned and other rules that are used to regulate women's activity have changed a lot since the 1960s. This means that someone like Benare can usually live her life as she wants. The drama, on the other hand, suggests that she can't live this way without getting a lot of backlash from her friends, who are less likely to accept this new, "permissive," seemingly morally rotten society.

Tendulkar harshly mocks at the middle class, whose members think that they are better than those below them and see their lives as a way to teach lower people through theatrical acts with "social significance." These social workers, students, actors, lawyers and professors are fake and hypocritical. They are dissatisfied with their lives and use their unhappiness to hurt other people. They are mean, sneaky and greedy. Tendulkar doesn't like how narrow-minded they are.

Most of the people who are after Benare are hypocrites. They don't see their own shortcomings while they try to make the world a better place by punishing people whom they think of, as bad. Each person's hypocritical attitude is different, but they all have one thing in common. They don't want Benare to live her life in the way she wants to. They keep trying to blame her for not following the rules of behavior, thought and feeling that males set.

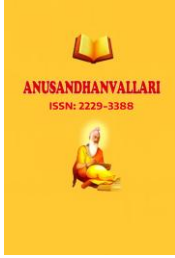
Samant seems to be a good person. He is humble, naive, kind and doesn't want to lie or be mean on purpose. During the first half of Benare's trial, he stands back and watches with a childish sense of wonder. He seems more confused than the others when things get more intense. But when he is supposed to take the stand and make a convincing and devastating lie about Benare, he starts off cautiously but quickly gets into character and gives a powerful "testimony." This is an example of the bystander effect, which is when people who are normally good and normal don't want to get involved when they see something awful happen to someone else. It goes along with a type of bullying called "group-think," which is why Samant puts up with the others' violence even if he can't stop himself from being violent as well. Samant harbours a fear of sinning and is reluctant to assume the role of the fourth witness. He has a sense of overload, and unlike the other players who aspire to alter reality, Samant harbours a fear of transgression, particularly in the form of deceit. He disapproves of fabricating evidence against Benare.

## Conclusion

The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* seems to explore themes of power and oppression within Indian society. Vijay Tendulkar shows a false trial of a woman who is accused of having an illegitimate child. The way the players interact with each other shows how society's oppressive forces work. The present research elucidates the insidious characteristics of oppression, the function of language in sustaining power dynamics and the intricate mechanisms of power within Indian society, particularly the intersectionality of caste, gender and class. Finally, the study adds to our understanding of power and oppression in Indian society and makes theaters to think about how power works in our own lives.

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