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## Patriarchy On Trial: A Gynocritical Approach Of Vijay Tendulkar's

*Silence! The Court is in Session*

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### ABSTRACT:

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The court is in Session* presents a scathing critique of the patriarchy entrenched in Indian Society. This paper employs a Gynocritical lens to examine the plays portrayal of gender dynamics, focusing on the character of Leela Benare, a school teacher who becomes the subject of mock trail accusing for becoming pregnant before getting married in her thirties. The mock trial was the real event in Benare's life, which no one knows other than her. Through an analysis of Tendulkar's use of symbolism and characterization, the study reveals how Benare's experience reflects the broader societal oppression faced by women. By highlighting the complexities of power, agencies and identity, this research illuminates the enduring relevance of "the court is in session" as a commentary on gender politics in contemporary India.

**Keywords:** Gynocriticism, Women Identity, Psycho-analysis, Power hegemony, Gender politics, Female relationship, Mock trial.

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Gynocriticism celebrates the peculiar voice in women's literature across eras and genres that explain cultural position of women as marginalized group, especially their experiences in patriarchal society, female bonding and psychological traits such as empathy and fluid ego boundaries. The term Gynocriticism or gynocritic is derived from the Greek word "gyne" means "woman", coined by American literary critic Elaine Showalter in her essay, "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1979). According Showalter, Gynocriticism not only confined to literature but also in multiple fields that creates a subculture including "occupation, interaction and internal consciousness of women."

Vijay Tendulkar was an eminent play writer, social commentator and screen writer, who is known as India's angry young man who established himself as one of the greatest writers in Indian writing in English. He is the one who has constantly raised his voice against patriarchal Indian society, shameful acts given to poor people and survivors of violence through his one-act plays. Tendulkar's work often delves into the complexities of human relationships and societal issues with powerful narrative and strong characterization. The paper focus on one of his notable works *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* published in the year 1963, which is later translated by Priya Adarkar in English entitled *Silence! The Court is in Session*. The play ordeals with the victimization of a young women by the male dominated society and hegemonic power structures through the lens of a mock trail conducted by the members of a cultural group.

Gynocriticism doesn't set up with traditional feminist approach such as patriarchy, marginalization and victimization. Instead, it focuses on women's internal experiences and struggles, their perception about life and their relationship with other women. Gynocriticism intention is to expose female model, their subculture and their "internalized consciousness". In the play *Silence! The Court is in session* the female protagonist, Leela Benare is a school teacher with the experience of eight years, has a mind of her own and enjoys her own confined life. She is financially independent, and "defies male hegemony and societal constraints" (Devi, 184) Leela Benare is initially portrayed as a confident assertive woman, but when the play progresses, her past is revealed exposing her vulnerabilities and insecurities. Despite her success, her life becomes miserable by the patriarchal lunatics like her maternal uncle, professor Damle and few men she befriends at the dramatic troupe.

Being an educated woman with a liberated mind, Leela Benare becomes the victim of a furtive love with sexual manipulation during her teenage, and another love cum sexual assault in her early thirties. In Indian society, an unmarried woman in her thirties is considered as a threat and adulterate. Especially, an unmarried woman with open mind is seen as "abettor of society" who impure the traditional values and "violates the moral code of conduct" (Devi 185). She is detested for "being a woman with a verse to go against the grain" (Devi 185).

As Nasrullah Mambrol remarks, Gynocriticism primarily engaged in portraying the "feminine mode of experience and subjectivity in thinking and perceiving the self and the world, and specifying traits of "woman's language", a distinctively feminine style of speech and writing" (Gynocriticism A Brief Note, 2016). With eight years of experience in the teaching field, Benare overcome her vulnerability, gets busy with life through developing her passion, getting involved in theatre and social works. Living in a patriarchal society, Benare's notion on life differs from other women, who fit themselves within a circle of being a daughter, a wife and a mother. It is clear, for Benare, life is a precious one despite it being pathetic, when she says, "life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It's a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of its precious" (ACT I 11).

One of the most important concepts in Gynocriticism is that the female protagonist's internal conflict and conscious. Samant is a young man from the village who is in charge of the hall, where the mock trial takes place. In act 1, when Samant asks about Leela Benare, she explains her experience as a teacher, her dedication in the teaching field and how others are jealous of her development. In the course of explanation, it is clear that Benare is a hardworking, workaholic woman, who could go to any extreme to save her job. It is proven when she unconsciously holds her stomach and rages nothing can stop her from perusing her teaching career. Simultaneously, the way she is mentally and emotionally manipulated to accept the dominions of patriarchy by her maternal uncle and Professor Damle that reveals the plight of modern women in India, who are controlled by their mind, physical and their sexual self.

Leela Benare's life has never been an uncomplicated since her teen. She has gone through mental and physical ordeals that make her to take wrong choices in her adult. She herself reveals this, when she aguishly utters, "I used to cry my guts out. I used to wish my heart would break! My life was a burden to me (heaving a great sigh). But when you can't lose it, you realize the value of it. You realize the value of living. You see what happiness means" (Act III 102). However, first deceitful experience gives her complete realization and she comes out matured despite her being ostracized by others, none to support just because she's a woman.

Though self-acceptance is not universal remedy for women, it does make modern women more resilient and tough. Benare admits in this play that she sinned by having an affair with her maternal uncle, who made love to her but abandoned her when she insisted on getting married. Thus, she says, "I insisted on marriage. So, I could live my beautiful, lovely dream openly. But all of the –my mother too–were against it. And my brave man turned tail and ran. Such a rage- I felt such a rage against him them- I felt like smashing his face in public and spitting on it! I threw myself off a parapet of outhouse to embrace death. But I didn't die" (Act III 105).

Another important theme of Gynocriticism is woman-woman relationship. Mrs. Kashikar and Leela Benare is complex and central women characters of the play. Mrs. Kashikar, often portrayed as condescending and judgmental towards others, while Leela Benare is a young woman who becomes the target of Mrs. Kashikar's scrutiny during a mock trial organized by a drama troupe. Their relationship is marked by power dynamics, with Mrs. Kashikar using her position to assert control over Benare. Mrs. Kashikar represents the

conservative and patriarchal society that seeks to impose its norms and values on individuals like Benare, who challenge these norms through their actions and choices.

As the play progresses, the true nature of their relationship is revealed, highlighting the complexities of gender, power, and social norms. The play ultimately questions the legitimacy of societal judgments and calls for a revaluation of the roles and expectations imposed on women. When the trail already begins to shatter Benare, Mrs. Kashikar adds fuel to the burning fire. She also fails to support Benare as a result of social justice. Tendulkar portrays the two women with two different distinct personality with different views. Mrs. Kashikar never speaks of her own in support of Benare, while Benare never seeks social acceptance and is always silenced by her patriarchal dramatic troupe.

Despite the mischieves, Tendulkar points out how Benare is bold enough to accept her faults. She hasn't been a hypocrite and has done what she wanted. She has been denied to marry her maternal uncle, despite him emotionally and sexually abused her. Such traumas make her an ideal woman, who developed bravery when her life became burden due to her love. As Beauvoir remarks, "Marriage alone permits a woman [not only] to keep her social dignity intact [but also] to find fulfillment as loved one [as a wife and mother]" (71-72), Benare accepts the legality of marriage. She becomes strong, educated and independent enough to take care of her life. She escapes her internal conflicts by studying hard and becomes a teacher, doing social works and being a part of theatre group, so that she can be very busy.

Mrs. Kashikar has always been praised and respected as she bows down to patriarchal standards and diktats, unlike Benare. She becomes a tool of patriarchal society, hurling forth hideous questions during the mock trial that is conducted to know about Benare's life. Mrs. Kashikar and Benare shares a hypocritical relationship, in which it is clear that there can be no relationship between them, after the heart-rending mock trial. Even though, Benare is an educated woman who lives on her own, it is Mrs. Kashikar, who has societal acceptance, as she has the wife trophy and grovel down to the Indian womanhood of being the unquestioning housewife.

Professor Damle, is a respected professor who is invited to preside over the mock trial organized by a cultural group. The play symbolizes the male dominated societal norms and the hypocrisy that often exists within them. He is portrayed an arrogant, insensitive towards female protagonist Leela Benare, he belittles and judges her harshly. Through his character Tendulkar explores the theme of gender dynamics, power struggles and complexities of societal attitudes towards women who makes Benare fall for him, makes her pregnant and leaves her when she approaches him for marriage. He uses the credulity of Benare, gives her fanciful hope and leaves her at her own fate. On the other hand, Benare dreams of getting a life, only to know that she has been cheated beyond recognition. She realizes for the second time she has fallen in love with a wrong man, who has impregnated her and made her feel disgrace with the charges of infanticide imposed on her as a person and mother. She becomes a bane to the society, due her affair with a married man and an "unwed motherhood". Despite all her struggles in her life, falling in love and becoming a mother, she is denied to be the second wife of professor Damle legally.

It is evident that physically and sexually abused women profoundly impacts their psycho-sexual well-being by stimulating "long-term negative consequences", such as alcohol abuse, several psychopathologies, overt sexual dysfunction and in an extreme level, suicide. Moreover, it is well known that "about 49% of women who experienced sexual abuse in childhood also experience sexual abuse in adulthood" (Erika Limoncin). In the play, initially Benare shows some interest in getting closer to Samant by questioning him regarding his personal life, asking him to do some queer activities. Only at the end of the drama, one can understand it is the false mortality of the society that forced Benare to "run after men" (33) to seek a man who is prepared to "take a broad view of things for the sake of humanity and accept the child along with the mother" (60) – for she wants to bring up that "tender little bud" (75).

Leela who is unmarried and pregnant, uses the mock trial scenario to turn the tables on the men who have judged her. She capitalizes on their guilt, shame, and fear of societal backlash to compel them into a corner where marriage seems like the only honorable solution. Leela's action can be seen as subversion of traditional gender roles and power dynamics. By forcing the men to confront the consequences of their actions and take responsibilities for her pregnancy, she challenges the notion that women should bear the burden of shame and stigma alone. Her action also highlights the limitations and hypocrisy of patriarchal society in which she lives, where women's bodies are often policed and their choices are restricted.

Through the play, Tendulkar shows how women are silenced by oppressive patriarchal society, since power hierarchies belongs only to men. As Devi Remarks, “Gender egalitarianism is an elusive dream not only for Leela Benare but also for Mrs. Kashikar, as they are caught up and silenced in the rigmarole of the patriarchal world” (184). Moreover, he shows how notion of a patriarchal woman differs from an independent woman through the character Mrs. Kashikar. The play underscores the urgent need for a reexamination of traditional roles and creation of spaces where women can assert their agency.

As a work of Gynocriticism this paper has highlighted the importance of centering women’s experience and perspectives in literature. By foregrounding the voice of women characters and examining their roles in the play one can get the deeper understanding of the ways in which literature reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards gender. *Silence! The Court is in Session* stands as a compelling example of feminist literature that continue to resonate with audience, urging them to break the silence and confront the injustices that women face in this society.

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