

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Reviving Indian Ethos: An Appraisal of Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* through Rasa Theory

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the pioneering playwrights in the contemporary Indian drama. His thought-provoking play Silence! The Court is in Session can be analysed from the perspective of Rasa Theory. The theory of 'Rasa' is an Indian concept. The present paper tends to focus on the different kinds of Rasas prevalent in the play. In Natyasastra Bharat Muni describes eight kinds of Rasas like Srungaram (erotic), Hasyam (comic), Raudram (furious), Karunyam (compassion), Bibhatsam (repulsive), Bhayanakam (fearful), Veeram (heroic) and Adbhutam (marvellous). In the play the principal Rasas used are Bhayanakam, Bibhatsam, Raudram and Hasyam. As a consummate artist, Tendulkar beautifully represents various bhavas like rati (love), jugupsa (disgust), soka (sorrow) and bhaya (terror). The coalescence and coexistence of these Rasas along with different bhavas make the play highly rich and interesting. Here the dramatist presents the enactment of a mock trial in such a magnificent way as to arouse emotions in the heart of the readers. In the play he establishes the truth that even the most repugnant feelings can provide 'rasa' if they are represented in a brilliant manner.

Keywords: Rasa Theory, bhavas, Srungaram, Hasyam, Raudram, Bibhatsam, Bhayankaram, Adbhutam

1. Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) has been a front runner among the avant-garde playwrights. He is one of the greatest playwrights in contemporary Indian theatre. As a playwright he was much ahead of his time. He was a versatile writer. He wrote thirty full length plays and twenty three one act plays. He was originally a Marathi playwright. But his plays have universal appeal and therefore they have been translated into many Indian languages. Like Mohan Rakesh, Mahesh Dattani and Badal Sircar, he has occupied a permanent place in the heart of the devotees and has made an indelible mark through his thought-provoking plays like Kamala, Sakharam Binder, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland, Ghashiram Kotwal, Kanyadaan and Silence! The Court is in Session. All these plays deal with the complicated nature of human relationships and are concerned with the sordid aspects of modern society. The focus of the present paper is to revive the Eastern ethos, thereby evaluating Silence! The Court is in Session in the light of the Rasa Theory.

2. Analysis

Whereas in the presentation of drama action holds a pride of place in the Western concept, in Indian context it is the psychic condition that occupies a vital position. If the primary concern of the Western dramatists is to concentrate on the purgation of emotions or what is better known as Catharsis, the Indian playwrights aim at representing emotions or rasas. Rasa is actually a Sanskrit term that means 'essence'. The word 'rasa' literally connotes 'flavour'. It was Bharata Muni who was the originator of the concept of 'rasa theory'. In Natyasastra which is a remarkable work of dramatic theory, Bharata Muni describes the Rasas. They are Srungaram (the erotic), Hasyam (the comic), Raudram (the furious), Karunyam (piteous), Bibhatsam (the repulsive), Bhayanakam (fearful), Veeram (heroic mood) and Adbhutam (astonishment). J. A. Cuddon enumerates the term rasa in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory as a "Sanskrit term for one of the nine so-called flavours of a work of art. The desirable nine are: the erotic, heroic, furious, piteous, comic, fearful, repulsive, marvellous and peaceful". (p. 725)

Apart from these rasas there are Santam (peace) and vatsalya (parental affection). Rasa theory is a humanistic theory. It is basically an aesthetic theory as it is used to refer to the sublime creation of art. Although it is a Sanskrit literary theory, it has now become an umbrella term. In the celebrated work Natyasastra Bharat Muni also describes thirty three 'vyabhicharins' like greed, anxiety, irritation, discouragement, arrogance, sadness, trance, irritation, depression, recollection, contentment, terror, shame, unsteadiness, arguments, crossness, fierceness, temporary insanity etc. Further, there are eight bhavas or moods – Rati, Hasya, Soka, Krodha, Utsaha, Bhaya, Jugupsa and Vismaya.

Vijay Tendulkar's Silence! The Court is in Session originally entitled Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe is replete with different kinds of rasas. In the play the theatre group – 'Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association' – comes to a village to stage a play entitled 'The Trial of President Lyndon B. Johnson'. At first Benare the central protagonist of the play arrives accompanied by a local

villager Samant. Having entered the hall where the play would be enacted, she attempts to form an amorous relationship with the innocent villager. Benare's words and gestures are imbued with eroticism or Srungaram:

BENARE. You're very nice indeed. And shall I tell you something? You are a very pure and good person. I like you.

SAMANT [incredulously]. Me?

... [She makes it an excuse to get even closer to him. For a moment or two, she is keenly aware of his nearness to her. But he is not.] (p. 2-3).

Being an ignorant villager, Samant is very much astonished at Benare's overtures towards him. This is an expression of Adbhutam. After a short while when other characters are about to arrive, Benare shouts 'Boo' in a harsh tone as a result of which they become fearful. Balu is at awe when Benare utters some memorable lines that were written on the first page of a new book. Benare apparently shows compassion and pity (Karunyam) towards Mrs. Kashikar who despite being uneducated is full of life. Mr. Kashikar and Mrs. Kashikar mutual affection makes Benare amazed. When Karnik, the spokesman of 'Intimate Theatre' suspects their love or Rati, Rokde, the foster child of the Kashikars gets angry which is an expression of Raudram:

ROKDE [rather angrily]. That's the effect of modern theatre! (p. 12)

Further Samant is awed by the sahib-like appearance of Ponshe who is an inter-failed scientist. This is a source of mirth and joy, that is, Hasyam. Samant is also dumbfounded when he hears the name of President Johnson. When Samant's name is declared as the 'fourth witness' because of the absence of two characters named Damle and Rawte, he starts for a moment for he is not habituated to this sort of performance. He himself acknowledges that the mention of a court is threatening to him. In the play the city bred coterie decides to enact a mock trial so as to while away their time. They want to make Benare perform the role of the accused. When they accuse her of the crime of infanticide, Benare is dumbfounded. This is a splendid expression of Adbhutam. Apart from the expression of wonder, there is also the bhava of jugupsa or disgust. Karnik riles at Rokde as he always make a mess of something. Ponshe is annoyed when Benare imitates his gesture. Benare bewrays her aversion (Bibhatsam) when Mrs Kashikar tries to sympathize Benare by buying a garland. Mr. Kashikar is terribly annoyed at his wife's showy attitude. In his attitude towards his wife Tendulkar tries to capture Raudram and Bibhatsam. Kashikar expresses his krodha (anger) when she tries to exert herself:

MRS KASHIKAR. Shall I do it? I will if you like.

KASHIKAR. No!

[Mrs Kashikar falls silent.]

She can't get among a few people without wanting to show off! Shows off all the time! (p.22)

Thus Mr Kashikar shows Jugupsa and Raudram towards his wife. Again during the court proceedings, Kashikar reprimands his wife and shows disgust when she is seen talking with Samant.

Princy Sunil in "Rasa in Sanskrit Drama" magnificently points out the meaning of the term 'Rasa' - "Rasa' is one of those words in Sanskrit whose precise significance is as indefinite as its usage is widespread...poetic creation is an expression of the aesthetic experience of the poet, and in this, Rasa represents the ultimate emotive experience evoked by the literary work" (p. 1).

Tendulkar is a playwright of Hasyam. In the play he provides laughter and gleefulness. One cannot but laugh when Kashikar, the judge of the mock trial proclaims that he will play the part of the accused. The pan-spitting episode is a source of immeasurable joy. Sukhatme's definition of motherhood - 'Motherhood is a sacred thing' (p.31) - provokes fun among the readers. Benare's description of her co-partners serves as a purpose of amusement. She describes Mrs Kashikar as the 'Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle' owing to her inability to give birth to a child. Sukhatme is cynically called an expert in law who has 'such an authority on the subject, even a desperate client won't go anywhere near him! He just sits alone in the barristers' room at court, swatting flies with legal precedents! And in his tenement, he sits alone killing houseflies!' (p.6)

Ponshe is dubbed a world famous scientist despite his failure as a student. Karnik's definition of motherhood is also ridiculous. According to his philosophy, even a bitch can be a mother since it gives birth to pups. All the characters are highly pleased when they smack of Benare's erotic nature.

Under the veneer of mock-trial, the members of the city bred coterie ultimately pin her down, dissect her and, what is most tormenting, kill her inner self. In the name of social justice, they meddle into her private life. When their accusations against her reach the topmost level, Benare becomes furious - "Holding a trail, are you? Suspicious, indeed. You don't even understand the meaning of simple words!" (p.40)

Mrs Kashikar is also contemptuous of Benare's liaison. She believes that a woman should be married of before puberty. Apart from Bibhatsam there are also elements of Bhayanakam. Rokde is miserable and irritated when his foster father accuses him of forgetfulness. He is tensed after knowing that Professor Damle will not come. He immediately reminds his mother figure that it was not his fault as he dropped a postcard to him as usual. His condition becomes worse when he discovers that he has forgotten to bring the Geeta. He is embarrassed when he is summoned to the witness box to elongate the proceedings of the court. He is so fearful of Mr Kashikar that begins to tremble. Disturbed, he swallows convulsively. As soon as Mr Kashikar blurts out that Benare wanted to take Rokde into confidence by making overtures to him, Rokde gives a start. Here Srungaram is turned into Bibhatsam. In Santarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics (1969) Masson and Patwardhan says that "Bibhatsa-rasa arises from seeing something one does not like from unpleasant smells, tastes, physical contacts, words and from many violent trembling of the body". (p. 55)

Mrs Kashikar expresses her krodha or anger when she finds out that her 'son' has told her a lie. In the play Rokde constantly betrays his terror or bhaya.

In the play Benare is represented as an unredeemable criminal. Although she is in the nadir of helplessness, there is nobody to rescue her from the mire of wretchedness. Her colleagues do not sympathize her broken and shaken, hopeless and hapless state. Even if she makes a pertinent point that it is Damle who deserves to be killed for his ungentlemanly and unwanted demeanour, the pseudo

conscience keepers of the society do not pay heed to her heartfelt remonstrations. She desperately searches for the identity of her yet to be born child. In spite of her high educational status, she insinuates Ponshe to be her husband, shows affection towards the coward Rokde. But the wolves do not have mercy (Karunyam) towards the 'poor little sparrow' (Benare). Having been duped by her blood relatives, she turns to a person of unusual intellect and offers her Bhakti or spiritual devotion towards her god. But her Rati turns into failure as the 'intellectual god' only gives Soka in turn. Her search for a husband is only for the sake of her 'tender little bud' in her womb, only for a lisping, laughing child. But she does not get any emotional sustenance for her struggle for life. Dejected and broken hearted she rails at the hypocritical attitude of her colleagues in scathing language – "These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look! Their lips are full worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires". (p.74)

Benare does not find any sympathetic 'parrot' that can console her, soothe her seething soul. The co-actors derive immense pleasure from the suffering of Benare. Although Kashikar objects that the charge of infanticide is 'getting on too personal a level' (p.39), he himself chastises her for committing promiscuity. She has become an object of contempt. In the eyes of society motherhood without marriage is sacrilegious. Sukhatme, the lawyer and the devotee of morality ventilates her Bhaya that if Benare's fatal conduct is encouraged the whole rubric and fabric of society will be endangered. Hence they decide to kill the child in her womb. What is far more tragic is that she is deprived of her job of a school teacher. Shailaja B. Wadikar blurts out in Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer Playwright - "Her tragedy reveals that too much of innocence is unpardonable even in the so-called cultured society. Innocence is punished and cruelty is set free and, quite ironically, the play concludes with the words: "The show must go on"" (p.16)

3. Conclusion

Thus, Tendulkar's play Silence! The Court is in Session is an amalgamation and coalescence of different types of Rasas. A consummate artist that he is, Tendulkar presents events in such a way as to arouse bhavas or feelings in the readers. The readers derive aesthetic pleasure because of the artistic representation of events. As Shubha Tiwary evaluates in Contemporary Indian Dramatists – "The task of a dramatist is the most difficult one, since he has to present a piece of work, which is audible as well as visible. The function of drama is not merely entertainment but it also serves the purpose of instruction. Unlike the Western tradition, drama aims at the depiction and presentation of emotions to the audience" (p.2). In the play the principal Rasas used are Bibhatsam, Bhayankaram, Raudram and Hasyam. Tendulkar very meticulously handles different feelings such as krodha (anger), bhaya (terror), jugupsa (disgust) and soka (sorrow). Usually, 'Rasa' is a fountainhead of joy and recreation, immeasurable delight and refreshment. But it is significant to note that 'Rasa' is not only associated with pleasurable things but also with contempt, grievance and dread. Tendulkar exposes the fact that even the most abominable and loathsome feelings can provide 'rasa' if be represented in an artistic and majestic manner. Thus an evaluation of Tendulkar's famous play from the perspective of 'Rasa Theory' can make the reading highly interesting and illuminating.

4. References

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