



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.3.,2016 (July-Sept.)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

"SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION" - A RE READING OF THE TEXT FROM THE GAME
THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

A game is a play between two individuals, between two players, two communities or between two countries based on a certain formulated strategy. A game clearly ends in win or loss for one player and the other. But sometimes a group emerges as a single player to wage a war against an individual to accomplish certain vested interest. In the play *Silence! the court is in session* by Vijay Tendulkar the male society plays a deliberate game to trap the heroine of the play Leela Benare in its own web through a subtle tactic. Mrs. Leela Benare a self made and free girl suffers under various male characters in the play. But in the mock trial the male characters through a brilliantly and cunningly crafted strategy made the sinned the sinner. The various games played at different level in the drama offers us an opportunity to read the text from Game theory perspective.

Key Words: Game, De-construction, Unconscious of the text

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INTRODUCTION

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar, a leading contemporary Indian Experimental and satirical playwright, a political journalist and a social critic has been in the vanguard of the Indian Theatre for nearly five decades and most of his plays contain a latent critique of modern male dominated Indian society and the middle class hypocrisy. He took a disinterested look and exposed the exploitation of woman both sexually and physically in male centered world. He successfully ventures into unveiling the social turpitude and the holocaust in which the interests of the fairer sex are almost strangled. In a hectic decade of avant-gardism (1960s), when the impact of the 'absurd' was heavy on the theatrical scenario of India, Tendulkar's *Silence! The court is in Session* brought in need strategies of postmodernism. Yet, the play retains most of the illusive features of proscenium realism shunning the temptations of existentialism. The proposed paper intends to deal with *Silence! The court is in Session*, one of his theatrically most successful plays from a new perspective. The play within a play structure provides us scope to analyze and anatomize the play from the recently developed theory –the game theory.

In the play the male dominated society or patriarchal society used the strategy of game as a potential tool to trap Leela Benare in the web created by the different male players who played as a group to defeat the

lonely and single player Leela Benare who is as depicted in the play lives on her own term in a world designed and crafted by her, "My life is my own-I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own."The game that emerges is an enchanting and enthralling one in which two groups of players are involved in a rational battle. The different male members are failures in their respective profession and field. They came together as a group to play an irrational game in a seemingly rational way to outwit the opposition who is a lone player in the complicated and subtle game of dishonoring and encaging a free bird.

Over the years there has been an evolution of myriad theories and many are evolving that have enlightened and brought in new ways of reading a particular literary work. Game theory is one of such theoretical tools which has handed over to the critics and theoreticians a fresh and new tool to read a particular text, Application of game theory to the humanities have grown over the years in such disciplines as history, philosophy, religion and linguistics. Ethical issues in business and law have also been analyzed using game-theoretic models. It is fiction that has proved to be the most fertile for humanistic application of game theory, novels, short stories, plays, opera librettos, a narrative poem – all have been subject to game theoretic exegesis, as have stories in the Hebrew bible. Game theory may also provide a parsimonious frame work and an important set of tools for the literary analyst. Although there are no rigorous tests to determine what the 'right' interpretation of a work of fiction is, some interpretation are more tenable than others. Game theory has proved useful in explicating the strategic choices of characters by making tighter the linkage between motives and actions in plot construction.

The Game theory started with the publication *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour (1944)* by John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern at the height of World War II. It was written to interpret the war mathematically. By the 1950 we began to see a better understanding of Game theories and different countries started using game strategy to win them war. It is applies in social science, Mathematics, Economics and Biology to study the competition between different species. Of late it is used in humanities particularly in literature, history, philosophy, religion and theology. Its application in literature is enchanting as it opens up a new vista in analyzing and anatomizing the different tactics used in order to win the players their desired goals. Who can forget the strategy used by Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. Life is a game, a complicated game and every individual is a player in life's game. As the great Greek philosopher stated that human beings by nature is political, a different version of game.

A game is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible with a concealed motivation or more colloquially a series of moves with a snare or 'gimmick'. Games are clearly differentiates from procedures, rituals and pastimes by two chief characteristics (i) their ulterior quality and (ii) payoff. Procedure may be successful, rituals effective and pastimes profitable but all of them by definition are candid; they may involve contest but not conflict and the ending may be sensational but it is not dramatic. Every game on the other hand, is basically dishonest and the outcome has a dramatic as distinct from merely exciting quality. A game looks like a set of operations, but after the payoff it becomes apparent that the operations were really maneuvers; not honest but motives in the game.

Eric Berne in his book *Games People Play* has dissected human psyche into three phases' stimulus hunger, recognition hunger and structure hunger. In the phase structure hunger people structure their time. The operational aspect of time structuring is called programming. It has three aspects material, social and individual. He further stated:

As people become better acquainted more and more individual programming creeps in, so that 'incidents' begin to occur. This incident specifically appears adventitious, and may be so described by the parties concerned, but careful scrutiny reveals that they tend to follow definite pattern which are amenable to sorting and classification and that the sequence is circumscribed by unspoken rules and regulation: these regulation remain latent as long as the amities or hostilities proceed, but they become manifest if an illegal move is made, giving rise to symbolic, verbal or legal cry of foul such sequences, which in contrast to pastimes are based more individual than on social programming may be called Games.(page 5)

Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* assumes a significant role under the above mentioned quote where the different members of the group played a deliberate game with rules and regulations formulated and devised by the members and any objection by Mrs. Benare to those self-crafted rule is instantaneously overruled with the banging of the gavel. She is circumscribed by unspoken rules and regulations. This is where the game starts. Tendulkar intentionally drew our attention to the nature of the game as Peter Hutchinson, in his book *Games Authors Play*, states "Another characteristic of literary play is its self-conscious nature: in order to function as a game, the play must draw attention to itself". The of the playwright is to channelize the reader/spectators' attention to a reality which always remain dormant in our objective world. This intention of Tendulkar is axiomatic by the fact that he mentions the word 'game' as many as 18 times or so in the play.

Therefore the question remains why Tendulkar wanted the reader or the spectator to focus on this aspect of the paly. Johan Huizinga in his famous article *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* asserts that:

Playfulness in literature as the game that has the quality of tension, the power of madding, absorption, a quality of clear element of eagerness. The game creates a second level of real life. The second level is supralogic level, it is different from first level of reality, the everyday reality: 'play is not ordinary or real life'. Rather it represents a stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. What does not happen in the first level, happens in the second level. The second level of reality breaks with the logic in the first level. In other words, it breaks the logic, the structure or the boundaries to create a new logic, a new structure or boundaries. It is supra-logic because it transgresses everyday reality'.

Jacques Derrida in his article *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* avers that the game disrupts or breaks down the present structure and signifiers. Derrida attacks the concept of the centre which allows for a certain structure or organization. He insists that we must break with the structure's points of reference in order to obtain or enter into the game. In other words, disrupt the centre. He defines centre or structure as a 'point of presence', a fixed origin that is governed by a set rules, 'the function of the centre' was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit any deviations or prohibit anything outside the centre or we might call free play of the structure. Generally 'drama' means action. As Aristotle puts it drama is an 'imitation of action'. But in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, we understand that the play is not an imitation of action, rather it is a game of word play, The whole play is verbal rather than a spectacle of action. In the play in Act I Karnik comments:

Will someone please tell me what Modern Theatre is supposed to be? People just play with words without knowing what they mean

The de-constructionist reading of a play instructs us to read between the lines and excavate the unconscious of a text. If we read this text from this perspective, then we can categorically avers that the unconscious of the text reveals the social structure and stereotyping of woman. Though the whole play pivots around Benare and the game, but the unconscious of the text accentuates the dichotomy between male/female, freedom/bound, tradition / modernity, progressive / regressive, professionalism / amateurism, motherhood / womanhood, law/human spirit and justice/injustice. And it is clear from the way the whole game is played that the later part of the dichotomy is marginalized, disparaged and sub-ordinated to the first part. The left is on the centre while the right is on the periphery.

Shantata the play and its structure revolve wholly round the idea of a game and include the essential ingredient of reversal. Benare, who is on the offensive in the beginning, finds herself trapped at the close of the play. The claustrophobic atmosphere inside the hall provides a kind of setting. The setting helps to transport us into the second level or the unconscious of the text which is the real one. When the charges which were based partly on conjecture and partly on hearsay were brought against her, "Benare looks stunned. All are silent for the moment. The atmosphere is extraordinarily somber". Suddenly the ambience is changed. From cheerful and candid atmosphere, it shifted into a somber and grave atmosphere. There has

been transportation from the reality to the superreality. As if we are being transported from the present to the suprapresent.

In the act I, we find that in the sub-conscious mind of the players, there was already the seed of playing a game was already sown;

Sukhatme: ...Shall I tell you what's going through your mind right now? This hall, you are thinking, is ideal for Intimate Theatre-in other words, for those plays of yours for a tiny audience.

Rawte's sickness and to teach Samant the proceeding of court and their willingness to kill the time before the actual performance give them their golden opportunity to play the game and thereby trap Benare and have some fun which is an intrinsic part of game. Mrs. Kashikar who had repressed hatred and jealousy for Benare, since Mrs. Kashikar is not as much educated and free like Benare and does not have financial independence and above all she is infertile, unable to produce children unlike Benare and she continually lives under the dominance of Mr. Kashikar.

Mrs.Kashikar: ...That's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying. They just want comfort. They couldn't care about responsibility....It's the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong.

Mrs. Kashikar: ...Should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a man? An unmarried woman?

And it was Mrs.Kashikar who first proposed for a rehearsal and suggested that there must be a change in the accused. Even during their discussion as to who should be the accused, a latent and hidden game being played.

Karnik: ... [Aside to Ponkshe, who has reached him]Do you know something Ponkshe?

Ponkshe: What?

Karnik: [Indicating inner room] About her? About Miss Benare.Rokde told me.

Kashikar: Whispers some plan to them, gesticulating every now and then, he points to the room where Benare is.

Finally Miss Leela Benare was charged with the crime of infanticide under section No.302 of the Indian Penal Code. Later in the play Kashikar confessed that he deliberately picked the charge labeled against Benare

Kashikar: The question of infanticide is one of great social significance. That's why I deliberately picked it.

Mrs. Kashikar: ...There is nothing wrong with the present charge.

The court procedure started with oath taking. Rokde forgot to bring the Geeta or Bible. They used the Oxford English Dictionary. This clearly refers to the fact that this going to be a game of words. The whole procedure could be termed as 'Publicization of private life' and 'privatization of public life'. One after another self-made and fabricated witnesses are given to game with Benare.

Ponkshe: ...She runs after men too much.

Ponkshe: ...Once she tried to arrange a marriage.

The statements are clearly made to show her hyper activity with men. As the procedure goes on, the mock trial started taking shape of real trial;

Sukhatme: What is your opinion of the prisoner conduct?

Karnik: Do you mean, in this mock trial, or in real life.

Sukhatme: In real life, of course.

Karnik passed the buck to Rokde.Rokde out of rage gave the evidence that he once found Leela Benare at night with Professor Damle at his home. The greatest blow comes from none other but the simple, honest and innocent Raghunath Bhikaji Samant. He unintentionally got implicated in the whole game. He proves to be a master card in the whole game. His witness seems to be the turning point in the game. He read out from magazine which co-incidentally has a connection to Benare's life. He picked the thread where Rokde left. While taking oath Samanth stated that;

Samant: ...What's true for the trial is quite false really.

Ponkshe quickly rebuts that 'Only the accused is real!'

Samant reports from the magazine which has significant repercussion on the whole game. He gave the account of an imaginary conversation between Leela Benare and Prof Damle;

Samant: [Hurriedly looking at a book in his hand] 'if you abandon me in this condition. where shall I go'?

Samant: Where should you go is entirely your problem. I feel great sympathy for you .But I can do nothing .I must protect my reputation.

Samant: 'If you abandon me, I shall have no choice but to take my life. 'Then do that I shall have no choice'.

Samant: 'But this threat will not make me budge an inch from my considered course of action, 'he said. She replied, 'bear it in mind that you will not escape the guilt of murdering two'

Benare: It's all a lie. A complete lie.

Karnik: Even if it is a lie, it's an effective one!

Benare: Yo've all deliberately ganged up on me! You have plotted against me.

One of the key features for a game is other players take fun and enjoyment at the humiliation of the opponent or the targeted person."Peculiar and cautious excitement breaks out on each face".

Kashikar: [Picking his ear] it's all become quite unexpectedly enjoyable.

"A peculiar enjoyment begins to show on everyone's face but Samant" when Benare fails to get out of the locked room. Now Benare is completely trapped. Mrs.Kashikar starts pulling Benare along forcibly,"Benare's face reveals the terror of a trapped animal. The metaphor used is important because it reveals the animality and cruelty of thought of other players. In the midst of excitement Rokde came out with another fatal witness that eight day ago Mrs.Benare held his hand during a show at Dombivili and he slapped her, which later in the play Karnik corroborates too. At the whole thing the prosecution Lawyer commented;

Sukhatme: Milord this means that the accused committed an outrage in lonely spot on a boy like Rokde, much younger than her ...Not only that, but she threatened him with consequences if the matter came to life. She tried to cover up her sinful deed.

But the evidence from Ponshe was a final nail on the coffin, He said that Benare carries with her a deadly poison to commit suicide and Mrs.Benare also offered to marry him.

Ponshe: She made known her desire to marry me.

Ponshe: But she told me she was pregnant.

And he also said to the court that Benare confessed to him that "It's only for the child she wants to go on living and get married"

In order to prove the point that she bears an immoral character and she really wishes to commit the suicide, Mr.Karnik provides a testimony to the court saying that "the accused attempted suicide because of a disappointment in love .She fell in love at the age of fifteen ,with her own maternal uncle, That's what ended in disappointment" .In this game the tradition of the court has been set aside.Mr Kashikar the so called socialist and the judge in the Living Law court shun his duty of the judge in order to give a testimony to the court that once he overheard a conversation between Nanasaheb Shinde, a leader and Benare. And from Shinde he came to know that Mrs.Benare wanted Education Society's High School should drop an enquiry against her.

Now the game is over and now the cat is really out of the bag.The game in the name of Visual Enactment has brought Benare's private life into public and her public life has also been privatized. Now the free bird does not want to live"A small bottle is in Benare's hand. Just as she is about to put it to her mouth, Karnik dashes forward and strikes it away"

The real face of the trial comes out when the witnesses for the accused are announced and deliberately the names of those persons who were missing were announced one after another. Professor Damle, Nanasaheb Shinde and Mr.Rawte all were absent. The sentence is announced against Mrs.Benare that she would be sacked from her job, the only source of income and she would live but "the child in your womb shall be destroyed".

This is quite ironical that the trial started with the charge of 'infanticide' i.e abortion but when the verdict came, we are shocked so as Benare that the child would be killed. The name of the drama troop is 'The Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association's Mock Law' but their mindset and thought is quite regressive. This is quite a travesty of justice. This clearly focuses on the fact that how legal system which is a part of civilized society commits injustice in the name of justice .There is no sentence for the intellectual Prof. Damle who is in fact allowed to go scot free and it is he who is the main culprit. In an enchanting soliloquy she reveals that she only knows about men who profess love but in fact, only hungry for the flesh. The soliloquy appears to be self-justification than knowledge of self.

The game is quite apparent and the game ends by transforming us to the second level reality, which remains hidden beneath the surfaced meaning. In regard to the present text the second level is the failure of the civilized society in meting out justice to a lonely woman who is all self-made .As Huizinga states;

Whether in myth or the lyric, drama or epic, the legend of remote past or a modern novel, the writer's aim conscious or unconscious, is to create a tension that will enchant the reader and hold him spell bound.

His theory is based on two realities, real life and a new reality (second level).

As Derrida explains that the game and free play are always caught up in a tension because on the one hand, the game has the appearance of an original system with its rules and guidelines, reflecting society. On the other hand it differs; the way it differs is by means of substituting reality.

To conclude in this play, the reader or spectator is not fixed on a particular meaning; rather the game of the play provides the reader/spectator to decipher the totalizing theme or idea within the play. The structure of the play and the open ending nature of the text offer us an opportunity to do away with the centre. The reader has the opportunity to freely play in the text and rejoice the multiplicity of the literary game, meaning, and the connotations also hands over to us a tool to subvert the overt and implicit reality and go deep into the sub-conscious strata of the text. In conclusion the game breaks with symmetry and causes transformation and entropy in the textual space. The play offers us a scope for a practical application of Game theory.

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