

**Sexual Temptation As A Vulnerable Heel Of The Woman Achilles: A Study Of  
Leela Benare, A Single Woman In Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court Is In  
Session***

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**Abstract**

A woman as a weaker gender is vulnerable to temptations of different kinds. Sex is one of the greatest temptations to which she becomes an easy prey. As such, her inherent desire for sexual relationship turns out to be her Achilles heel, inborn weakness. A woman may voluntarily give herself to her lover for the enjoyment of sex before her marriage. She may do it with the hope that she will become his life partner through marriage. If it does not happen as she expects, she loses her chastity, feels wounded and never thinks of marital life again with any other man because her first moral violation will continue to haunt her. She will become determined to remain single, pursue a profession and lead an independent life without any hitches. If she is a married woman and if she gives herself to another man for extra sexual pleasure, her act is nothing but an adulterous affair. She pursues it stealthily besides her conjugal relationship. If a man indulges in adultery, the society will ignore his part but it will find fault only with the woman for her part. It will also treat her as a disgrace to entire womanhood. She is also publically humiliated and socially marginalized. Even after becoming a single woman, and as an independent woman, if she develops sexual relationship either with an unmarried or married man for her personal enjoyment of life, society will not allow her to live in peace and it will try to expose her immoral ways of life. If such a woman happens to be a teacher who is expected to be a woman of an exemplary character, all and sundry will start assassinating her character as if they were all completely virtuous and as though she were the only one, who is immorally very bad in their midst. These are the attitudes of members of an amateur dramatic troupe displayed towards their fellow artist Miss. Leela Benare, a single woman when they come to know of her adultery with one of their male artists. This article "Sexual Temptation as a Vulnerable Heel of the Woman's Achilles" has been pursued on Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* to drive home the universal truth that the man is always the tempter cum tormentor of a woman whereas the woman is the helpless victim to his sexual temptation and betrayal of her trust.

**KEYWORDS:** Morality; Single woman; Temptation; Adultery; Humiliation; Ignorance; Societal Attitude

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**ANALYSIS:**

The root cause of all types of tensions in human relationship is nothing but illegal sexual relationship among men and women. For yielding to sexual temptation in a given situation is an Achilles heel inherent in the character of every gender. Though a woman is

more sinned than sinning when she is sexually abused, she is a sinner too because of her indulgent in amoral life for sexual satisfaction. However, both the genders who are involved in adultery are roused to sex in a different way. Women become irrational when they are attracted to men, because “their attraction is based on the attractive body and attractive face of men” (Saad, 15 Apr. 2014 n.pag.). Men always want to have sex with women not on the basis of their personalities but on the evaluation of the sexual appeal of their bodily assets. This is what Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* has confirmed:

Men are visually aroused by women and her bodies but they are not very sensitive to their arousal by women's personalities . . . But women are less visually aroused and more emotionally aroused . . . Men look at women's bodies, evaluate, move on; their own bodies are not looked at, evaluated, and taken or passed over. (qtd.in Amalraj, *Sex Knows No Castep*. 42)

Living conditions of human beings have changed but the attitudes of men treating women as sexual objects have not changed. Women have established their individual identity and independence through their education and profession. They become equal and sometimes more than equal to their men in professional status. Yet, physical, verbal and emotional persecutions meted out to women have not stopped. Women are made to dance to the tunes of their men both during day and night. During day, they are expected to attend on their men and cater to their needs. During night, they are to sexually satisfy their men as they like. Most of the women look helpless and think that they are in existence only to cater to all types of needs of men. According to Francis Bacon, women are treated as “as young men’s mistresses if they are wives, as middle aged men’s companions [if they become older in age too] and [till the last day of their earthly life] they become nurses to old men (qtd.in Oxford Quotations and Proverbs p.298).

Every man enjoys all the rights as an individual and independent human being. Similarly, every woman should have her rights to enjoy individuality and independence. Some women who get married to their men through arranged marriage fail to voice their predicament and remain as they are, accepting their discriminatory status without any complainthowever they are treated. Some women try to establish their independence through education and profession, and choose their own marital life themselves. Some even assert their individuality in order to escape from the ordeals of discrimination through marriage. They happily lead their life as single women with independent professions of their own for their livelihood:

As single women, they feel better [and happier] in life than the married ones. [If married] they find maintaining cordial relationships with their men as a hard work. By remaining single, they can dedicate their time to social activities more, and they can also have more friends compared to those who are married. They can turn to their close friends in times of need. (Hosie, *Independent* 13 Nov. 2017)

They need not be answerable to any one nor do they have any necessity to get permission to do anything as they like within the cultural limits prescribed for them. Vijay Tendulkar, being a social realist, has made the lower and middle class women as the characters of his plays and as such his plays have become the voices of the women such as married women, single women, and dominated women for being helpless:

Tendulkar's female characters are mainly from the lower and middle classes. They are housewives, teachers, mistresses, daughters, film extras, slaves and servants. They bring not just a variety of social stations but also a broad range of emotions into the plays. They are often composites of contradictory personalities such as struggling between emotions and intellect, espoused values and conflicting actions, seeking independence and yet remaining submissive, struggling between physical desires and conscience. (Gokhale p.81)

Miss. Leela Benare is one of such female characters of Vijay Tendulkar and she is the female protagonist of his play *Silence! The Court is in Session*. She is against her marital life with anyone after her sexual experience with her maternal uncle at the age of fourteen and after he has refused to marry her. Since then, she has been leading a life of a single woman as a teacher. She has become one of the amateur artists of a dramatic troupe known as The Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association. All except Miss Leela Benare and Mrs. Kashikar are male artists, pursuing different professions. They are Prof. Damle, the married man, Mr. Kashikar, a social worker, his wife and their adopted son Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, a lawyer, Ponkshe, a clerk, Karnik, and Samant. They used to stage social drams in the villages during their free time in order to create awareness in the minds of the ignorant villagers about the laws and the functioning of the courts.

All the artists become friends for the occasion and they meet only for rehearsal and staging dramas. For the rest of the days, each one minds his or her business without bothering about others and their business. This is the status of the members of the dramatic troupe. Hence, Leela Benare does not have any inkling that they are the plotters to expose her personal love life with Prof. Damle. Neither is she aware that the other artists indulge in mind-reading activities to know more about the private life of Leela Benare and her close intimacy with Prof. Damle. Since her fellow artists feel that something fishy in her closeness with Prof. Damle and they have become successful to find out what it is. As a teacher, Miss Leela Benare should be an exemplary personality for her students to emulate later in their life but she is not. She has had sexual experience even at her young age and experienced bitterness when she has been ditched by her uncle. Since then, she has decided to live as a single woman for her independence. She is a woman of Achilles heel and her weakness lies in her unabated thirst for sexual relationship with a man of her choice. She has chosen Prof. Damle and continued her sexual relationship with him secretly. But unfortunately for her, her fellow artists have come to know of her relationship. She is also in the dark not knowing that they are waiting for an opportunity to expose her adultery with Prof. Damle.

If any human being had been blessed with the ability to read the thoughts of others about him or her, he or she would have mended his or her ways and escape criticism and bad name. Luckily God has not bestowed that virtue on the human beings. Annie Murphy Paul, therapist, in her article "Mind Reading" has correctly observed that that no human being is able to read the thoughts of others:

We [people of both the genders] do not have [the natural] ability to read the mind of others [in given situations] and yet, we are all street-corner psychics. Without that special aptitude to divine other's thoughts and feelings, we could not handle the

simplest social situations or achieve true intimacy with others [whom we call friends or relatives]. (*Psychology Today*, 9 June 2016).

Miss Leela Benare is no exception and she does not know the conspiracy of her fellow artists to expose her weakness for sex and her relationship with Prof. Damle. She has failed to learn a lesson when her maternal uncle has ditched her after he has enjoyed her sexually. She should have thought that she should not have sexual relationship with any man but she did not. As a teacher, she should not have belittled her gender and her individual identity through her adulterous affair but she did not. She should have realized that her fellow artists would think badly of her character when they came to know of her affair but she did not. It is her Achilles heel that has spiritually blinded her eyes to see the reality. She looks like more concerned with her affair than bothering about what others will think of her and her affair. She feels that it is her personal life and that no one has any right to dictate terms to her to mend her personal life for her good and that of her students.

Fellow artists do not have any guts to ask her openly about her relationship with Prof. Damle. Even if they ask her about it and advise her to mend her ways because she is a teacher and she must be a role model for her students, she may look least bothered about it because she is very assertive of her independence and individuality. However, the school in which she is working has come to know of a scandal involving her, they have conducted enquiry whether the scandal is true or not. Even after the enquiry at the school about her conduct, she bursts out in anger saying:

Who are these people to say what can or can't do? 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. No one can kill those-no one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life . . . Life is not meant for anyone else. It is your own life. It must be. It's a very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious. (Tendulkar; act1.58-61)

This is her nature and knowing it, all artists keep planning secretly to expose her and hide their plot behind their smiles whenever they move with her. All look forward to the day on which she can be pinned down as the accused. All the artists may have their own secret and personal interests but they do not get their personal life expressed in their deeds explicitly. Leela Benare is an exception in their midst.

Leela Benare's relationship with Prof. Damle gets exposed when she becomes pregnant. She never thinks that her personal life will not be given as much importance as anything else when her co-artists expose her in the form of a rehearsal. She is forced to act as an accused in the rehearsal within the room. All the artists one after another testify against her and the artists acting as the judge finds her guilty. He delivers his judgment that she should abort the unborn baby. This is what happens when all other artists humiliate her. Had she loved any eligible man and married, they would not have made her affair a great social issue. They have done it because she has had relationship with the married man. In doing so, she has not only spoiled her name but also the life of another woman who is the legal wife of Prof. Damle. They also come to know that even as a single woman, she wants to "drink / Life to the lees" (Tennyson, *Ulysses* ll. 6-7). Seeing

herself cornered without any escape route, she accepts her guilt and silently goes through her humiliation.

Leela Benare is a woman of individuality and independence. She follows the dictates of her heart in establishing sexual relationship with a married man. Just because all her men co-artists do not like her ways of living, they should not have used her as their tool for oppression but they have done. They should have avoided her as their fellow artist under some pretext or other but they have not done it. Since they have carried out their attack on her, their friendship with her has lost its sanctity. If men artists do not like such behaviour in a woman, they should not show it explicitly and if they do, they become unnecessary intruders into the personal life of a woman. By doing so, they overstep the limits of decency and decorum in their attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, they have no right to subjugate a woman in the presence of all just because she is single and she has an illicit intimacy with a married man. She is also forced to confess to her first sexual relationship with her maternal uncle and her inability to marry him. Had she not been targeted for her relationship with Prof. Damle, she would not have revealed her sexual relationship that she had had at the age of fourteen.

As a grown up woman, Leela Benare has shown her desire for Prof. Damle, the married man. If Prof. Damle had not accepted her, she would not have established her relationship with him. He has taken advantage of her Achilles heel, enjoyed sex with her and made her pregnant. He has refused to marry her because his name is more important than the humiliation of his bed mate. Thus, Prof. Damle has betrayed her trust and love. He has also betrayed her wife and her trust in him by establishing his extra marital relationship. Instead of finding fault with both, fellow artists have tarnished her name and spoiled her peace of mind. After his betrayal and exposure, Leela Benare has pleaded with the eligible fellow artist to marry her by accepting the unborn child of the Professor as his. No eligible man among them has come forward to be her husband and the father of the unborn child of Prof. Damle.

Being sexually weaker, Miss. Leela Benare does not realize that her pleading is against the cultural habits of the society. She is only found fault with for her amoral life but not the man who is responsible for her plight. Thus the moral code of conduct is always meant only for a woman. The society and the patriarchy happily ignore the part of man who causes the loss of her chastity, name and job. All men should introspect that but for them, women would not have gone amiss in their moral conduct. Therefore, women alone need not be made a scapegoat for anything happening against morality and societal norms. One satisfying point in their exposure of Miss. Leela Benare is that every exposure of her personal life has been carried out within the room. As soon as the exposure of her weakness in sex has been completed in the form of the rehearsal, all become normal including Miss. Leela Benare and get ready to enact the drama before the villagers. It is a lesson to her that she should change and she should come out of her weakness as a matured woman.

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