

## Chapter - II

### **Silence! The court is in session**

**Silence! The court is in session** (1967), the first Tendulkar's play to become part of the New Indian Drama phenomenon of the sixties and the first significant modern Indian play in any language to centre on woman as protagonist and victim. With its production Tendulkar became the center of a general controversy. He had already acquired the epithet of "the angry young man" of Marathi theatre but now he was definitely marked out as a rebel against the established values of fundamentally orthodox society.

The play is the milestone in dramatic career of Vijay Tendulkar and so **Mr. N.S. Dharan** in his article "**Vijay Tendulkar : A unique writer**" writes –

"Vijay Tendulkar's plays can be said to fall into two distinct groups, namely, Pre-silence plays and Post-silence plays. In the plays that Tendulkar wrote prior to **Silence!** The focus, by and large, is on the sufferings of the middle class man living in an urbanized, industrialized

society.....Silence!, however, marks a change in Tendulkar's attitude towards his favourite subject, that is, the middle class man. For the first time in his dramatic career he began to look into the psyche of his subject and focus his attention on the ugliness he detected therein.”

Most of Tendulkar's plays have had their original in his own personal experience. Silence! took shape in his mind during the journey he undertook along with his troupe to Vile Parle, a suburb in Bombay. The conversation among the actors and actresses gave him the much needed impetus to write the play.

Leela Benare, the central character of the play possesses a natural lust for life and a spontaneous joie de vivre, who ignores social norms and dictates. Being different from the others she is easily isolated and made the victim of a cruel game cunningly planned by her co-actors. During the course of this so-called “game” which is meaningfully set in the form of a mock-trial, Miss Benare's private life is exposed and publically dissected, revealing her illicit love affair with professor Damle, a married man with a family, which has resulted in her pregnancy. Professor Damle is significantly absent at the trial denoting his total withdrawal of responsibility, either social or moral, for the whole situation into which

he had landed Miss Benare. During the trial he is summoned merely as a witness while Benare remains the prime accused as the unwed mother of his illegitimate child. Interestingly, the accusation brought against her at the beginning of the trial – that of infanticide – turns into the verdict at the conclusion.

Vijay Tendulkar, who is known for his concern for burning social problems of Indian society, through this play tries to explore certain issues of contemporary society like

- (1) Disillusionment in search for individuality by a woman
- (2) The concept of modern woman V\ s traditional woman
- (3) Middle class mentality and its pettiness
- (4) The degeneration of dramatic activity

## **Disillusionment in search of individuality by a woman**

One **Chinese Proverb** says-

“If you want to plant a plant,  
You must sow seeds.  
If you want to plant a tree,  
You must plant a plant, But  
If you want to plant civilization,  
You must plant a woman”

But unfortunately the status of women remains secondary in this world. She is still considered secondary or weaker sex. An Ideal woman is she who confines herself within the four walls of the house and rears up the children and looks after the family. In India, it is believed God dwells, where women are worshipped but she is exploited more due to patriarchy society. In this play Tendulkar tries to explore the world of woman in which a woman, the heroine gives up the role of an ideal woman and behaves according to her own wishes and as usual the society cannot accept her as an individual and she becomes the object of criticism only.

**Mr. N. S. Dharan** in his article **“Gyno - centrism in silence! The court is in Session”** writes

“Tendulkar though not a self-acknowledged feminist, treats his women characters with understanding and compassion while pitting them against men who are selfish, hypocritical and brutally ambitious.” It is significant that most of Tendulkar’s plays are Gyno-centric. Moreover, as a playwright, he seems often to be on the side of feminists, for, he projects women as victim of chauvinistic oppression. The male figuring in his art emerge as purile creatures, for he portrays them as embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery. Women are portrayed as helpless victims of the conspiracies hatched by men. Thus we find Benare being mercilessly harassed by her own co-actors.”

**Subha Tiwari** in her article **“Silence! The court is in Session. A strong social commentary”** states

“The whole responsibility of morally upright behaviour is bulldozed on women. Men are by nature considered to be willful, wild, childish, innocent and mischievous. Their sins are no sins at all. The society has a very light parental and pampering sort of attitude when it comes to sexual offences of men. In case of women the iron rod gets hot and hotter. No punishment is actually enough for such a woman. There is no respite, no

shade and no soothing cushion for a sinning woman. She must be stained and abandoned. Her femininity, her needs, her very existence must be ignored or rather destroyed. She must be cornered and brutally killed- both in physical and psychological senses. This play is about the pathetic position of women in the male dominated Indian world.”

Leela Benare is a school teacher who is as sprightly, rebellious and assertive as the heroines of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies, as some critics have already observed. She is sexually alive and she needs to fulfill her desires and for that she is not ashamed of her instinct. She is conscientious in her work and commands the love and respect of all her pupils. She is also an enlightened activist being a member of the amateur theatre group called “The sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) progressive Association”. The other members of this amateur theatre are the Kashikars, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, professor Damle and Rawte, who all belong to the urban middle class of Bombay.

Benare enters the play with her aggressive, even at times mischievously, seductive, streak in evidence – in her initial interaction with Samant the innocent, compassionate observer in the play. As a teacher Benare is proud of herself she says-

“In school, when the first bell rings, my foot’s already on the threshold. I haven’t heard a single reproach for not being on time these past eight years. Nor about my teaching. I’m never behindhand with my lesson.”

She is very popular among the students and so she praises them as she does not find them hypocrites as compared to the lot of teachers. According to her they do not have the blind pride of thinking that they know everything. She thinks that the community of teachers are escapists. They consider themselves intellectuals. They pride on their book learning. But when there is a real life problem, they run away.

Leela Benare possesses a natural lust for life and a spontaneous joie de vivre, as she states

“We should laugh, we should play. We should sing, if we can and if they’ll let us, we should dance too. Shouldn’t have any false modesty or dignity. Or care for anyone! I mean it, when your life’s over, do you think anyone will give you a bit of theirs?”

She firmly believes in this principle and it is not just an ideology for her but she puts it into practice also she says –

“I, Leela Benare, a living woman, I say it from my own experience. 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 it is precious.”

Thus, she is not ready to be imprisoned in the cage prepared by the society for women. She considers herself as an individual and not merely a woman. Like Rousseau she believes “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chain”. And she, as an individual does not want to bind herself in the established conventions of the society. Perhaps due to this search for individuality as a human being she suffers and becomes an object of criticism in the society. She rejects all boundaries \ limitations that are set for a woman. But in her search for individuality she faces only treachery, hypocrisy, shallowness and vanity of the people.

Her journey from a woman to an individual is clearly brought out in the mock trial in the play. Being an actress in an amateur drama- troupe she arrives at one village to perform one drama with other group members. They are going to perform a mock trial in which they will present a case against president Johnson for producing atomic weapons. The play starts in an empty hall and Benare’s entry on the stage suggests significance. Her finger gets caught in the bolt and Samant informs her that in this hall



the opening door is problematic as while opening the door if the bolt stays out just a little bit, the door gets shut and one is locked up inside the hall and symbolically Benare is also locked up in this hall where her personal life will be tried.

The members of the theatre group arrive – Mr. & Mrs. Kashikar, Sukhatme, Rokde, karnik, Ponkshe but one (minor character) subordinate actor, Rawte is sick so he does not turn up and they decide to take a local man for his role and Samant, the active boy of the village who is in the charge of the hall is selected for the role. Since he has never seen a court, they decide to perform the court seen totally imaginary so that Samant gets acquainted with the procedure of the court. So they all agree for the visual enactment of the imaginary case against someone. Sukhatme proposes that Miss Benare will be the accused and all the members agree. The trial on Miss Benare begins. Mr. Kashikar seats himself on the judge's chair and says –

“Prisoner Miss Benare, under section No 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime?”

Benare is stunned, at once but suddenly becomes normal and replies

“I just got a bit serious to create the right atmosphere. For the court, that’s all. Why should I be afraid of a trial like this?”

Miss Benare is very vocal, very open and frank in her attack on male chauvinism and false concepts of masculinity. So to pay her back in the same coin, the actors plan to expose and humiliate her through this trial. She gets into the trap. Once the trial begins, there is no shelter for poor Benare. She is labeled by all dirty adjectives. Her private life is exposed and publicly dissected, revealing her illicit love affair with Prof. Damle, a married man with a family, which has resulted in her pregnancy. Prof. Damle is significantly absent at the trial, denoting his total withdrawal of responsibility-either social or moral for the whole situation into which he has landed Miss Benare. During the trial, he is summoned merely as a witness while Benare remains the prime accused as the unwed mother of his illegitimate child.

During the trial Sukhatme tries to present the value of Motherhood by saying-

“Woman is a wife for a moment, but a mother for ever”

So it's unfair on Miss Benare's part to take the life of the delicate bundle of joy she has borne. Mr. Pongshe is called as the first witness. He is asked about the social status of Miss Benare and he gives ambiguous answer that to the public eye, Miss Benare is unmarried but to the private eye... He is also asked about the moral conduct of Miss Benare and he replies that she runs after men too much Mr. Rokde & Mr. Karnik are called as second witnesses. They are asked whether they have seen Miss Benare in a compromising situation .Rokde replies that once during the time of night, when he went to Prof. Damle's house, Miss Benare was with Mr. Damle He was not allowed to come in the room. It is concluded that Miss Benare's behaviour is certainly suspicious. Even Samant is called as a witness and he gives imaginary answers to the questions which proves to be correct regarding the private life of Miss Benare. He says that once during the night he has seen Miss Benare in Prof. Damle's house and she was crying and saying

“If you abandon me in this condition where shall I go.”

and Prof. Damle said

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

With this clarification, which is totally imaginary, tears flow from Miss Benare's eyes. She tries to run away from the dock and goes to the doorway and she tries to unbolt it but it is locked from outside. She is trapped symbolically.

Miss Benare is called and she is asked to take an oath but she remains silent. They discuss about her age and unmarried state, the reasons for her preference to remain single. Actually this discussion reflects the contemporary burning issue-the trend to remain single among women; May be a woman wants to maintain her individuality, does not desire to follow others' command or take up the responsibility. It remains a curiosity for all the members that how an educated, well brought up, earning girl like Miss Benare remains unmarried till at the age of thirty four. Mrs. Kashikar satirically remarks that-

That's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying. They just want comfort. They could not care less about responsibility! It's sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That's how promiscuity has spread throughout our society.

Miss Benare never likes to bind herself with the so called rules and regulations established by the society. She, as an individual, behaves as one human being greets another without bothering, about the limitations of sexes. But this very free nature is criticised by the society, No one is ready to accept Miss Benare's new concept of life as Mrs. Kashikar says "Free! Free! she's free all right – in everything! Should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a man? An unmarried woman? No matter how well she knows him? Look how loudly she laughs! How she sings, dances, cracks jokes! And wandering alone with how many men, day in and day out!"

To the orthodox society she should value the limitations of woman's life. Even the two witnesses Rokde and Ponkshe present totally negative picture of Miss Benare. They try to present her as an immoral woman Rokde, informs, Once while coming back from the performance, on the way, during night Miss Benare held his hand but he didnot encourage her. Ponkshe also gives witness about her immoral living, He was invited by Miss Benare in the Udipi Restaurant. There she revealed that she was pregnant, In order to give father's name to her child she wanted to marry Ponkshe. She wanted to bring up the child. It's only for the child she wanted to go on living and get married. She did not criticise the culprit

man. Everyone guesses that he must be Prof. Damle. Mr. Karnik also admits that the accused had very bad past. The accused Miss Benare attempted suicide because of disappointment in love with her own maternal uncle, This revelation shocks everyone and they all exclaim “what an immoral relationship!”

Mr. Kashikar says, “Miss Benare is in education field, so such immoral life of a teacher can corrupt the younger mind.” Nanasahab, the chairman of the education society has decided to dismiss such a lady from the job who is pregnant before marriage. Sukhatme pleads for the punishment to Miss Benare and strongly puts forward his argument-

“The woman who is an accused has made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood – which is purer than heaven itself. For that, any punishment, however great, that the law may give her, will be too mild for her. The character of the accused is appalling. It is bankrupt of morality. Not only that but also her conduct has blackened all social and moral values. The accused is public enemy number one. If such socially destructive tendencies are encouraged to flourish, this country and its culture will be totally destroyed therefore, I say the court must take a very stern, inexorable view of the prisoner’s crime without being trapped in any sentiment. The charge against the accused is one of infanticide. But

the accused has committed a far more serious crime. I mean unmarried motherhood. Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our religion and our traditions, Moreover, if intention of the accused bringing up the offspring of this unlawful maternity is carried to completion I have a dreadful fear that the very existence of society will be in danger. There will be no such thing as moral values left. Milord, infanticide is a dreadful act. But bringing up the child of an illegal union is certainly more horrifying. If it is encouraged, there will be no such thing as the institution of marriage left. Immorality will flourish. Before our eyes our beautiful dream of a society governed by tradition will crumble into dust..... I make a powerful plea “Na Miss Benare Swatantryamarhati” “Miss Benare is not fit for independence’ with the urgent plea that the court should show no mercy to the accused, but give her the greatest and severest punishment for her terrible crime.”

So, contemporary Indian society, with its roots grounded firmly in reactionary ideas cannot allow the birth of a child without wedlock. So Benare is accused of immorality, sin, promiscuity, over-sexuality and so on. The situation of Miss Benare suggests that women are to be used, stained forever and then thrown away. The man responsible for it does not have the courage to accept the act. He has performed. He can not bear

the responsibility attached to romantic liaisons. The significant presence in the play is the absence of Damle. It is as though the woman has got pregnant all by herself, the male counterpart has no role, no responsibility in the matter.

Against all such charges Miss Benare tries to defend herself and it is represented through her long soliloquy, which has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theatre. “It is important to note here that Tendulkar leaves us in doubt as to whether or not Benare at all delivers the soliloquy, thus suggesting that in all probability what she has to say for herself is swallowed up by the silence imposed upon her by the authorities. In fact, during the court proceedings on several occasions, her objections and protestations are drowned by the judge’s cry of “Silence!” and the banging of the gavel,. Benare’s monologue is reminiscent of Nora’s declaration of Independence but lacks the note of protest that characterizes the speech of Ibsen’s heroine. It is more a self – justification than an attack on society’s hypocrisies. It is poignant and sensitive and highlights, the vulnerability of women in our society.



So, Benare's inner frame stirs a little to communicate to us what she knows about men who profess love but, in fact only hunger for the flesh. She says.

“Yes, I have a lot to say. For so many years. I haven't said a word. Chances came, and chances went. Storms raged, one after another about my throat.”

She says the very word “life” gives a pang of joy. To live is life. To sing, to feel to experiment, to enjoy, to dance, to breathe, to travel, to know, to explore – all this is life. But when you do all this, the society labels you as “evil” and gives a verdict that hangs you. This is the paradox of life – to live or not to live.

“Life is like this life is so and so Life is such and such. Life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a drudgery. Life is a something that's nothing or a nothing that's something..... Milord life is a dreadful thing. Life must be hanged.... Life is not worthy of life. Hold an inquiry against life. Sack it from its job.”

And it signifies that she is disillusioned with life. Through her experiences she has learnt that Only one thing in life is important that is body. She reveals, that the beginning of her exploitation begins with her

maternal uncle who had exploited her sexually in her teen age. She confesses that it was a sin but she was helpless. In her strict house, only her maternal uncle was close to her, who used to praise her bloom of youth. She was only 14 and did not understand the ways of the world, In his company she got the whole meaning of life and she insisted on marriage. So that she could enjoy her beautiful dream openly. Her mother too, failed to understand her and support her. The uncle turned tail and ran. She attempted suicide by throwing herself off from the parapet of the house but she did not die. Her body did not die nor did her emotions.

She started her life again, studied and finally settled into a teaching job. As a teacher she comes in contact with Prof. Damle whom she considers quite intelligent, and academically bright. Again she fell in love. This love is intelligent It is not love but it is worship she says –

“It isn’t love at all – it’s worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went his way. He didn’t want my mind, or my devotion – he didn’t care about them! He wasn’t a god. He was a man for whom everything was of the body, for the body! That’s all again, the body.”

It is little wonder that Benare's monologue towards the end of the play is directed against men in general , and professor Damle in particular. Here, she becomes the playwrights mouthpiece.

She is in dilemma whether to hate or to love her body, But she overcomes the dilemma and says where she will go if she rejects body. She should not be ungrateful to her body. It has given her beautiful moments and right now she is carrying within it the witness of that time – A tender little bud. She says-

“My son – my whole existence! I want my body now for him – for him alone. He must have a mother..... a father to call his own – a house – to be looked after – he must have a good name!

After listening to Miss Benare's justification the court pronounces the verdict. Mr. Kashikar gives the judgement that her sin can not be forgiven. It must be expiated. Social customs should be observed and marriage is the very foundation of the stability of society. Motherhood must be sacred and pure and Miss Benare has tried to dynamite all these. She is a teacher and the future of posterity is entrusted to her. The authority of the school has decided to dismiss her from the job and he pronounces the verdict –

“No memento of your sin should remain for future generations therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed.”

Thus, the accusation brought against her at the beginning of the trial that of infanticide- turns into the verdict at the conclusion. Principally because the orthodox Indian society cannot accept the birth of a child born without socially approved marriage.

So the play dramatizes extreme form of powerlessness for a woman. A woman can never live as an Individual. A woman is either “devi” or “devil”. A woman who enjoys sex is something odd and dirty. In this patriarchal society, pleasure is considered to be the sole domain of males. The society does not accept women as normal human beings who have vices as well as virtues. Subha Tiwari in her article “Silence! The court is in session : A strong social commentary” writes –

“At a deeper level, the play is a comment on lack of individual importance in life, the meaninglessness of life, and the absurdity of various human situations, In philosophical terms, this play is a blow to all those who seek meaning out of this mundane, bizarre, ordinary human existence. To live is to be “exuberant” and “exuberant” one is not allowed

to be. How often we meet parents who teach their children to laugh mildly. Everyone is scared of being wild. And wildness is part and parcel of human nature. Socializing in this sense means living coyly and submissively. Life becomes death. The society compels one to live less and less. It forces one to live not life but death itself. This sort of life gives birth to all sorts of anomalies. We see abnormal people all around with “so sweet” faces but complex pervert’s mind as Miss Benare says – These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look. Their lips are full of lovely worn out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires.”

How true these comments are for contemporary men! Every man is a wolf wrapped in the skin of a lamb. He wants his “Pound of flesh” For him every woman is virtually her body – bones, flesh, curves! A woman is not identified with her intellect, her ability, her intelligence, her courage, or knowledge. A woman, whosoever she may be, is just her body. Even women themselves have internalized this vision about themselves. They see their own selves as bodies. That is why they are afraid and ashamed of old age, wrinkles and white hair. They view themselves primarily as sex objects. This is what patriarchy, has done to women – poisoned their self perception beyond repair.

Leela Benare is mercifully different. But difference and deviation are things Indian society does not give to its women. So Leela Benare pays the price of being different.”

### **Irony on the life of Traditional woman V\s “Free woman”**

**Shanta Gokhale**, a senior theatre critic, historian, playwright and director, writes in her article “For Tendulkar, the primary compulsion is and has always been humanistic. Man’s fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert or overt violence in woman beings, these are his abiding concerns. They appear in his plays in different forms.”

Tendulkar has created memorable male and female characters. But it is his women, on account of their unique position in society, who help to reveal his social conscience, and it is they who emerge as the columns and beams on which he builds his structures. In some of his plays, Tendulkar presents women in pairs. They are quite different from each

other in behavioral traits, class and character. But underneath these superficial difference lie lives that resemble each other in the ultimate truth of being commanded by men, for their pleasure and under their laws. The best example is Leela Benare and Mrs. Kashikar in “Silence! The court is in session.”

Leela Benare is young, single, unconventional, full of laughter, full of pride in her dedication to and skill in teaching and always happy to attack hypocritical facades and watch them crumble. In her view men aren't superior beings by definition. They must prove themselves so before they can command her respect. The man she has had a passionate relationship with and whose child she is carrying is one of the few men she respected for his fine mind and apparent integrity. However, she has now discovered his feet of clay. He does not have the strength to stand by her and own his child. She has made a desperate bid to get one or other of the unattached men in her group to marry her in order to give the coming child a name. Predictably not one has agreed to her proposal. It is in this delicate state of body and mind that she is trapped by her colleagues into being the accused in a mock trial.”

**Mr. N.S. Dharan** writes in **“The Tongue – in cheek in Silence and Kamala”**

“During the session of the entire “mock-trial” Mrs. Kashikar never misses an opportunity to insinuate her venomous comments directed at Benare as she is extremely envious of Benare’s boundless independence. Herself, suffering from a persecution complex on account of her barrenness, and her abject dependence on her husband. She is utterly spiteful of Benare. In the closing act, Tendulkar gives Mrs. Kashikar ample opportunity to torture Benare with a view to exposing a discontented woman’s irrepressible malevolence against a superior, successful being. For instance, she stops Benare getting out of the torture “where do you think you’re going? The door’s locked! Sit down!

This is a fine instance where Tendulkar satirizes, woman to woman relationship.”

Mrs. Kashikar on the other hand is middle aged, married housewife conventional and disapproving of “free women” like Benare. The most important thing about her is that she is childless. She is as much keen as the men to draw blood when Benare is put on trial. She has an obvious problem with Benare. She is the single free woman, the working woman, the one who is vying for equality with men in their own world. Her very



existence places a question mark against the emptiness of Mrs. Kashikar's life. That is why she offers her help with such alacrity when the men shy away from physically forcing Benare into the dock. They are all middle class men who must not be seen to harass a woman. Tearing her apart emotionally is perfectly permissible.

Mrs. Kashikar cannot have ever admitted, even to herself, that it is on account of the sacrosanct institution of marriage that she is open to Mr. Kashikar's constant insults and snubs. He has an automatic right to do so by virtue of being a man, Subha Tiwari in her article – "Silence! The court is in session: A strong social commentary" comments

"The duo of this husband – wife reminds one of Mamapapa in Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting. The couple is a super hypocrite, leading a false life that is devoid of any meaning. Tendulkar brings out the hollowness of their life so well. Mr. Kashikar buys flowers for wife. Mrs. Kashikar buys shirts for husband. They make a constant show of fondness in public. Their perpetual show of love becomes distasteful and repulsive. Mr. Kashikar, a male chauvinist does not let the wife speak at all"

When the group is considering names for the accused in the mock trial they wish to conduct as practice before the real thing, she offers herself. This is how the exchange goes –

Mrs. Kashikar : Shall I be the accused?

Mr. Kashikar : No (Mrs. Kashikar falls silent) The minute there's half a chance to butt in, you're right there, pushing yourself forward.

Mrs. Kashikar : (Embarrassed) enough, so I won't be the accused I hope that pleases you.

Sukhatme : Let's forget all of you. Kashikar, let's make someone else altogether the accused. That's best. Our Miss Benare will be the accused well Ponkshe, how's that for a choice?

Ponkshe : Good enough.

Sukhatme : There should be no argument about that, eh! Mrs. Kashikar?

Mrs. Kashikar : Fine if you so. And at least will get to see how a trial against a woman is conducted (Turus to Mr. Kashikar by habit). Isn't that right? It's good to see these things.

Mr. Kashikar : (Sarcastically) oh yes! You'd think they're  
going to appoint you judge in the supreme court.

Mrs. Kashikar : That's not what I meant.

Mrs. Kashikar does not take such suppression of her mind and spirit quietly. She mutters angrily. One suspects that, had she had the economic power that Benare has, she might have protested more actively. However, the way things are, there is no choice for her but to be a participant in the patriarchal system. She chooses to be an enthusiastic one because, if she is to retain a shread of self-esteem, the least she must do is to glorify her own state. That is why her testimony against Benare is such a bitter diatribe, but brazenly parading as sociological observation, when she is asked why Miss Benare has remained single till such an "advanced" age, her response is very melicious.

One cannot help feeling a twinge of compassion for this bitter woman who will let down her own kind to establish herself on the right side of man made social codes. Benare on the other hand, has our sympathy from the moment she becomes prey to the group's bloodthirsty instincts despite the fact that neither her sin nor reported behaviour makes her a particularly sympathetic person, she is not a true rebel, for she is not

conscious enough of the politics of gender to be that. She is not a true victim because she is not innocent or good-natured enough to command all our sympathy. She is not consistently principled for, on the one hand she is contemptuous of the men of her group and on the other hand she has asked two of them to marry her after her rejection by her lover, Damle. Her reason for, doing so is also oddly conservative. She wants her baby to have a name.”

Tendulkar has made Mrs. Kashikar ridiculous and dangerous in an insidious way. But he has also made it possible for us to sympathize with her. He has not idealized Benare, but forces us to sympathize with her. In this way he allows women their foibles and weaknesses without forfeiting any part of the human goodwill he wants us to have towards them.

### **Satire on Middle class mentality and its pettiness.**

**Mr. N.S.Dharan** rightly states in his paper **“The tongue-in-cheek in Silence! And Kamala”**

“Tendulkar’s plays Silence! And Kamala are nothing if not satirical, which direct their barbs mainly against the urban middle class. In Silence!

Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy, selfishness, sham, moral standards and the sadism latent in the immediate colleagues of the buoyant but belligerent Benare.

“The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) progressive Association” an amateur theatre troupe belongs to the urban middle class society of Bombay. This “experimental theatre” has Mr. Kashikar, a self-styled, social reformer, as its chairman. As for the other artists in the troupe, Balu, Rokde is a helpless student, dependent on the kashikars. Sukhatme is a pretentious lawyer, Ponkshe an inter-failed clerk, Karnik an “experimental theatre actor”, Benare, a school teacher and Damle a professor. Tendulkar brings them all together under the banner of an amateur theatre, in order to highlight the hypocrisy latent in this microscopic cross-section of the milieu of the metropolitan Bombay middle class.

Benare functions as the central consciousness in *Silence!* It is mainly through her ironic perception that the audience get an insight into the other character.....”

This play exactly describes middle class mentality and its pettiness. The theatre members are a bored, frustrated and repressed lot. The first one is

the president of the drama group Mr. Kashikar & his wife Mrs. Kashikar. They are childless. They just make a show of love and romance by caring for each other and giving gifts to each other and that too in public. But actually Mr. Kashikar is an orthodox husband who never allows his wife to argue with him or to express her wish. Being childless, they have adopted one boy named Balu. Miss Benare ruthlessly unravels their pettiness and plainly tells that they have adopted a boy in order to lessen the monotony of their lives. They have deprived that child of a separate identity and maturity. She says-

“- And that they shouldn’t die of boredom! – gave shelter to a young boy. They educated him. Made him toil away. Made a slave out of him.”

So they have adopted Balu Rokde, not out of generosity, but out of sheer need, “in order that nothing should happen to either of them in their bare, bare house – and that they shouldn’t die of boredom!

Each artist of the group represents an unfulfilled dream. Boredom pervades their lives. Leela Benare describes them sarcastically which brings out the failure of the individual in this sick-hurry and divided world. About Balu Rokde she says –

“Well, we have an expert on the Law. He’s such an authority on the subject, even a desperate client won’t go anywhere near him! He just sits alone in the barrister’s room at court, swatting flies with legal precedents! It shows Balu’s failure as a barrister.

About Ponkshe – she says

“And there’s a Hmm! With us sci-en-tist ! inter – failed !

So, it’s clear that Ponkshe fails to become a scientist.

Tendulkar turns the opening scene of silence into a marvellous piece of satire by pitting the self-consciously independent, vehemently assertive and immensely cheerful Benare against the utterly selfish hypocritical and malicious amateur artistes who she subjects to merciless psychical dissection in order to expose their real, seamy inner selves. On hearing Mrs. Kashikar’s supposed desire to buy a garland for her Benare retorts.

“The garland flew away- Pouf! Or did the dicky-bird take it? I never want garlands. If I did, couldn’t I afford to buy them? I earn my own living? You know. That’s why I never feel like buying garlands and things.”

Professor Damle’s inability to be present on the occasion of the staging of the Mock Law Court “Causes many a ripple amongst the amateur artistes. Tendulkar deftly utilises this suspenseful dramatic occasion to expose the

real natures of Kashikar and Sukhatme. They expose themselves through their own utterances. Kashikar's sense of social obligation, though a false one, is aroused when he says-

“How can I not worry? We owe something to the people, Sukhatme, A performance is no laughing matter.”

Sukhatme is quite inefficient as a lawyer. Karnik is a failure as an actor.

This petty lot finds in Benare a suitable enemy. Subha Tiwari writes

“Amongst themselves even they do not have anything but hatred for each other. Every uttering has a dual meaning for them. Even innocent remarks are taken as sexually loaded ones. These perverted people want to mentally replay the sexual encounters of Benare. They want to derive pleasure out of this crooked means”.

During the mock – trial of Miss Benare, the witnesses try to show her as immoral, but actually it represents their failure in establishing relations with Miss Benare. They would like to wander freely with Miss Benare and admire before her, her intelligence, sharpness, beauty as a woman. All of them want to keep secret relations, secret enjoyment with her but no one wants to be tied down with her in a way of marriage. For life partner, they all need “ideal woman”. They also feel humiliated that she



has rejected them as a companion and she has established relations with Prof. Damle. All these hollow mentality becomes clearly evident in the dock of the court. Balu Rokde, as a witness reveals that once he had seen during night Miss Benare alone at Prof. Damle's house and his sudden visit astonished them. But Miss Benare reminds him the expression on her face arisen as Prof. Damle snubbed Balu in front of her as he was insulted before her. Balu, must have entertained secret love for her, but it is not materialized due to his parents. And it becomes clear when he says that while accosting Miss Benare at night, she held his hand and he gave a slap to her. By revealing this he wants to prove himself as Pure man, who is not interested in such woman. But Mr. Karnik, as a witness says that the story is different. The accused Miss Benare, asked for marriage to Rokde, but he was not ready and said

“If I marry you when you're in this condition, the whole world'll sling, mud at me. No one in my family's done a thing like that - Don't depend on me”.

And Miss Benare gave him a slap. Even Ponkshe reveals that he was invited by Miss Benare in the Udipi restaurant where Miss Benare, revealed that she was pregnant and she desired to marry Mr. Ponkshe, But he rejected her. This very act of Mr. Ponkshe indicates that if he is really

an ideal man he must not have accepted Miss Benare's invitation to meet her alone. If she had not revealed this he must have enjoyed a cup of coffee with her. All these witnesses reveal the pettiness of human minds. The commencement of the 'mock-trial', which constitutes a 'play-within-the-play', offers Tendulkar ample scope to dissect and lay bare, the dormant ills of discontent in the psyche of these urban hypocrites. Though, they gang themselves up against a helpless Benare, for the time being, they have nothing but spite for one another. Kashikar, the mock – judge, banging the gavel, spitefully silences his wife "Silence must be observed while the court is in session, can't shut up at home can't shut up here! During the trial, Samant, an innocent villager, makes a passing remark "Miss Benare is really amazing". At this Ponkshe gives a deliberate twist to innocent remark "In many respects" Sukhatme, the counsel for the prosecution calls Ponkshe as his first witness in a tone soaked in sarcasm "My first witness is the world – famous scientist, Mr. Gopal Ponkshe.

They start dissecting Miss Benare's private life, - they talk about her age, the reasons for remaining single, her relations with Prof. Damle, her past affair with her maternal uncle, her attempt of suicide, her free life, her attempt to get married to give a name to her illegitimate child etc. They feel

pity on her and they criticize her as well. Their comments reveal that society has created very tight, rigid, suffocating rules for a woman. A woman must not be free. She must not laugh loudly. As Mrs. Kashikar says :

“Should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a woman? An unmarried woman? Look how loudly she laughs! How she sings, dances, cracks jokes! And wandering alone with how many men, day in and day out.”

While showing the contempt for this helpless woman, a fierce psychological violence becomes evident. The latent sadism of the characters of Sukhatme, of Mr. & Mrs. Kashikar, of Ponkshe, Karnik or even Rokde, surfaces during the process of the trial. In delineating these characters, Tendulkar has explored their psyches to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure pervading their lives – the inefficiency of Sukahtme as a lawyer, the childlessness of Mr. & Mrs. Kashikar, the non-fulfillment of Ponkshe’s dream to become a scientist, the vain attempt of Karnik to be a successful actor and the inability of Rokde to attain an independent, adult existence.

They all try to show their power as an individual. Since they are failure as an individual they feel jealous about Miss Benare who is economically and academically very much successful and has got the reputation as a teacher. No complaint about her teaching, or being late or absent on her job. Her professional life is not stained with any blame of corruption or mal-practice or un-fair means. Whereas her group-artists are unsuccessful on professional front in one way or the other way. It is but natural that they can derive pleasure by criticizing Miss Benare's personal life which according to them is very much contrary to social norms. Only on this front they find themselves superior as compared to Miss Benare, as they are leading their lives on this ground, according to social norms, they try to establish themselves superior and try to remind Miss Benare that though she is successful woman on professional level yet she can never consider herself above over others as her personal life is stained with immorality. They try to cut her down. But as Samik Bandyopadhyay in the Introduction of "Collected Plays in Translation" rightly writes –

"It is part of Tendulkar's dramatic strategy that Benare's immediate persecutors in the play are as powerless as she, and all their exertions to cut Benare down to size are more their striving after power than a real exercise of power. As a matter of fact, Tendulkar plays at considerable length on the individual and powerlessness of each of her assailants, each

of them grabbing every opportunity to expose and humiliate another, and ganging up only to attack Benare, in the process exposing their own powerlessness and their desperate need to assume a pretence of power in the collective! And yet the invisible presence of power ruling / dominating over all of them is subtly woven into the scheme with reference to the networking of forces and operations manoeuvring to throw Benare out of her job as punishment for her sin.

**Mr. N.S. Dharan** writes in **“The Tongue-in-cheek” in Silence! and Kamala**” writes –

“Samant, the innocent villager, an outsider to the rest of the group, through his utterances and actions becomes another powerful vehicle of satire against the hypocritical citywallahs. Tendulkar introduces Samant in the play not only to play a key-role in the mock-trial but also to highlight the gaping holes in the moral pretensions of his urban counterparts. On being asked by Sukhatme to recount before the mock-court, what he saw in professor Damle’s hostel room, he with rustic innocence and ignorance replies,

“where, No, No, why that room’s in Bombay! And I was in this village Hardly! It’s silly – I don’t know your professor Damle from Adam. How could I get to his room: isn’t that right.”

To quote further **Mr. N.S.Dharan** “The Kashikars, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik of Silence emerge as individuals belonging to the middle class who prove to be ineffectual and discontented. Their words and actions prove, beyond any doubt, that they are neurotic, sadistic, conspiratorial and even treacherous. It is not out of genuine love for drama that they have turned to theatre activity but out of a sheer sense of their own personal failures in real life. Dejected, discontented and still daring, they can only behave cruelly towards one another.”

So Tendulkar, excellently satirizes the modern middle class mentality through the members of “The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association” – An amateur theatre group.

### **The dramatic techniques of the play :-**

The play has a naturalistic appearance, but being the presentation of a game, becomes an allegory where make-believe can easily blend with reality.

**Mr. N.S.Dharan** writes –

“Vijay Tendulkar’s “Silence....., consisting of middle – class characters, is in the nature of “discussion play.” The social issues discussed in it are not quite organically integrated into its plot, “but expounded in the dramatic give and take of a sustained debate among the characters. Its setting is the city and the atmosphere is tense throughout. It has three acts designed in the mode of the popular dramatic construct of the present century. There are no scene divisions of the acts.”

The title itself is suggestive. Before the ‘Mock-trial’, Benare is active, in a sense. She makes comments on the behaviour of her fellow-characters, as well as sings. But silence descends on her when ‘Mock-trial’ begins with Kashikar’s sudden interrogative statement – prisoner “Miss Benare, under section No 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime.” Benare is dumbfounded. As the trial proceeds her attempt at protest are callously drowned in Kashikar, the Mock judge’s imposition: “silence!” In such a helpless, hostile situation, Benare has no other choice but to remain Silent, as no language can come to her rescue.

The court pronouncing “Silence” itself is a mechanism to silence the natural human drive and truth under the code of the legal legitimate.

However, Banare breaks her silence at last towards the close of the play when she burst forth into long and brilliant monologue.

**Samik Bandopadhyay** comments,

“Benare’s long monologue extends to ten minutes and to a different dramatic mode altogether, to give the play a lift from the farcic plane which it has occupied for so long, with only the occasional bursts of tension growing around Benare from time to time from point to point for departure. The Benare speech was added to the play as an afterthought when the “entire play was ready to be staged in the competition (the annual Maharashtra State Drama Competition) and it was discovered that it fell short by ten minutes of the stipulated time limits and thus was likely to be rejected by the examining panel. Tendulkar initially resisted director Arvind Deshpande’s suggestion “to increase the length by ten minutes” somehow. Tendulkar about this writes –

“A woman of few words generally, came to the rescue. She suggested that the central character of the play Miss Benare, must open up somewhere, especially at the end of the last act. She could express her



pent-up feelings by way of a monologue. Without Benare's articulation, the play would remain less communicative. I was of the opinion that Benare would not open up before the others in the play. That was not in her character. I refused ..... I was compelled to write. So I made Benare fly into fantasy and made her recite a prolonged Monologue."

The way the monologue is framed / presented in the play with the music "from some where in the background", the change of light and the whole court "freezing" and the sharp stylistic break in tone, the spoken is really a projection of the unspoken and naturally unheard by the other players. At the same time, Tendulkar the astute craftsman that he is, draws on a series of similar but shorter barely heard asides earlier in the play, so typical of Benare, so vulnerable and yet so determined to play her game through. The most moving of these comes in Act II, when Samant notices –

"She seems to have fallen asleep, Miss Benare, I mean"

And Benare replies –

" 'her eyes shut' – I'm awake. I can never, never sleep just when I want to. Never."

Tendulkar makes use of certain dramatic symbols in the play. The door bolt that hurts Benare's finger at the very outset, physically locks her into the hall where her tormentors persecute her. This incident in itself is an externalization of the 'no escape' plight in which she finds herself in real life. There is also the green cloth, parrot and the sad lullaby Benare sings. Both assume symbolic significance at the resolution of the play"

Structurally, the songs Tendulkar assigns to Benare are of great dramatic significance, For instance, take the song she sings in the opening scene:

Oh, I've got a sweetheart  
Who carries all my books,  
He plays in my doll house,  
And says he likes my books.  
I'll tell you a secret –  
He wants to marry me.  
But mummy says, I'm too little  
To have such thoughts as these (SC SS-S9).

The song carries dramatic significance, as it anticipates Karnik's disclosure of Benare's fruitless love for her maternal uncle in the third Act.

The second song, a nursery-rhyme, also appears in the very same scene:

The grass is green  
The rose is red  
The book is mine  
Till I am dead (SC 62).

The lines are again significant in that Benare realizes, in the course of the play, that she can have nothing that she can call her own.

More important than these two compositions in verse is the one which she recites in the opening scene:

Our feet tread upon unknown  
And dangerous pathways evermore,  
.....  
And the wound that's born to bleed  
Bleeds on for ever, faithfully

There is a battle sometimes, where  
Defeat is destined as the end.  
Some experiences are meant  
To taste, then just to waste and spend (SC 63).

It is from the above Marathi poem by Mrs. Shirish Pai that Tendulkar has conceived Benare, the central character in *Silence!* In accordance with the above aphoristic kind of verse, Benare feels that she is destined to be defeated in the end.

Another ballad-like verse favoured by Benare is:

The parrot to the sparrow said,  
'Why, oh why are your eyes so red?'  
'Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say?  
Someone has stolen my nest away.'  
..... (SC 74).

Benare sings it to herself towards the end of Act I and repeats it again at the end of Act III where it supposedly emerges from an indistinct source in Benare's voice. The 'parrot' in the play is suggestive of Samant and the

'nest' may refer to her chastity which she is deprived of by Professor Damle and 'the crow' too seems to be none other than the callous and selfish Professor himself.

Indeed, with the use of new dramatic devices, Tendulkar has made the drama innovative.