



**TENDULKAR'S SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION: A CRITIQUE
ON SOCIAL HYPOCRISY**

Mahendra S. Chhangani

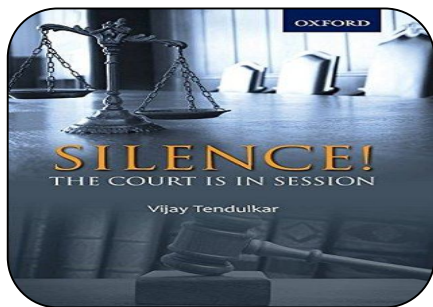
Associate Professor & Head , Department of English,
Smt. Kesharbai Lahoti Mahavidyalaya, Amravati.

ABSTRACT :

On the basis of social status the human society can broadly be divided into three groups--the Rich or the Upper Class, the Semi-Rich, Middle Class and the Poor or Lower Class. Out of these three classes, the burden of maintaining social and ethical values in society rests with the Middle Class. The Upper Class, which lives in its ivory tower, is totally detached from the ground realities of the human world and pooh-poohs the social and ethical values. The lower class is so pre-occupied with its struggle to make both ends meet that the high sounding words like human values, ethics appear irrelevant to him. Thus, it is left with the Middle Class to carry the albatross of social customs and traditions and also of maintaining moral values in society. Middle class had a cultural and contextual specificity, it meant people living in a similar urban situation in close proximity, living by an unwritten yet easily understood code of behaviour. No external power imposed any added responsibility on it, but the middle class on its own decided to maintain ethical culture in society.

In Pygmalion, George Bernard Shaw mockingly comments on the hypocritical nature of our society when Eliza Doolittle says, "I have to live for others, not for myself; that's middle class morality". The male community of this class constantly endeavors to find an escape from the cobweb of complexity of life and in the attempt unconsciously transfers the burden to his female counterpart, but in the process he makes her life more vulnerable to social exploitation and the cruel world inflicts physical, mental, emotional and psychological injuries on her. The woman community tolerates the injustice inflicted on her up to a certain extent and beyond that she tries to revolt against the set norms in an attempt to establish her individuality. But unfortunately she has to pay heavy price for it as the influential personalities of the patriarchal society ruthlessly castigates her and ultimately she succumbs to character assassination. The things do not stop here as no one dares to sympathise with her and it is expected from her to accept every injustice either in the name of morality or destiny. She, thus, is left with no option but to suffer in silence. Tendulkar's play Silence! The Court Is In Session exposes hypocritical attitude of our society towards the matters pertaining to morality and ethics.

KEYWORDS : Ivory tower, pooh-pooh, ethical, inflict, cruel, exploitation.



INTRODUCTION-

Leela Benare, The protagonist of the play *Silence! The Court Is In Session* is a bright and talented, young school teacher in her mid 30s. But these are not the only assets that she possesses as she is also crafty, practical and shrewd at times, well versed in manipulative techniques. Tendulkar has portrayed Leela Benare as a frank woman who is rebellious, extrovert and assertive.

In the play Tendulkar has presented typical female psyche by dramatizing the emotional and psychological conflict. The struggle within becomes so intense, disturbing and burdensome for her that she almost collapses under its pressure. Consequently a young and talented lady shows signs of some sort of personality disorder as she displays emotional and behavioural reactions as diverse as discontent and agreement, condemnation and adoration, abhorrence and kindness, denial and acceptance. All these shades of forced behaviour come to fore when she is summoned as a convict in the court of law on the charge of violating moral code meant strictly for women. The moral norms established by the patriarchal society suggest deceitful designs of male community who gain devilish pleasure by showing dominance over their female counterpart. The masculine mind is so conditioned that it always likes to see woman play second fiddle to him. Leela Banare, the protagonist of Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court Is In Session* can be best appreciated if we treat her as subject signifying both freedom and servitude, a woman who would act freely but whose freedom is shaped and limited by social bonds. As a result she is both liberal and conservative in her utterances and actions.

MORALITY AND SOCIAL HYPOCRISY:

Leela Benare can be described as representative of contemporary Indian women who become the victims of circumstances. She is tied down by the oppressive constraints of the double standard of society pertaining to morality. Several restrictions are imposed on her by the self-styled guardians of society even as she tries to lead her life on her own terms. The fact that she makes a desperate attempt to assert what may be called her personal philosophy of life implies her fear that her dream of freedom may never be realized. Indeed, there is a duality in her character. She is both -- a person bearing the pangs of repressive social norms as well as a subject trying to break open the gates of restrictions and spread her wings in the open sky.

Leela Benare's is going to be an unwed mother. For the moral watchdogs of society it is the ultimate immoral act which a woman can indulge in. It so happens that she was highly impressed with Professor Damle's intellect and fallen in love with him. He was a much older and married man with five children. Damle, however, exploits her physically and discards her when she asks him to help her. Explaining her relationship with Prof. Damle she says, "This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It isn't love at all--its worship! I offered my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went his way. He wasnt god. He was a man for whom everything was of the body, for the body. That's all". (Five Plays, 118) Tendulkar has not portrayed Benare as an innocent lady who is pure at heart. She is manipulative and relentless in her pursuit of what she wants.

Benare's infatuation with Damle suggests her ambivalent relationship with authority figures. As the situation demands she either spurns or admires high profile people, whether it is Damle, Kashikar, or Samant or anyone else. For her Damle is worthy of respect not simply because of his age but for his intellectual and professional abilities also. He is thus in a perfect position to exploit her emotionally as well as physically. He is actually the second man in her life who has exercised his powers to take undue advantage of her femininity and exploit her physically. On earlier occasion she became the victim of domestic violence when her maternal uncle coerced her to indulge in incest act when she was an innocent child of thirteen years only. He too is now the object of her hatred and scorn. This ambivalent relationship of love/hatred and respect/scorn can also be seen in her attitude towards the authority of the mock-trial court, particularly as represented by the Kashikars and Sukhatme. She despises them, yet she cannot refuse to stand as a convict before them. She protests their attitude but at the same time yields to their authority.

During the trial all the witnesses and authorities turn hostile towards Miss Benare. While pronouncing the judgment Mr. Kashikar, the judge, declares that Miss Benare is 'Public enemy number one' and child in her womb must be destroyed. Miss Benare becomes the victim of patriarchy which has finally silenced her. He orders the school authority to terminate her from the service as she is guilty of engaging in the 'incest act'. Assessing her situation she finds herself "more sinned against than sinning." She finds an analogy between herself and sparrow, the meekest of the birds whose nest has been stolen by crow. The crow symbolises the self-styled member of the patriarchal society.

The parrot to the sparrow said, "why, of why, are your eyes so red?" Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say?" Oh my dear friend, What shall I say? Someone has stolen my nest away, sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow 'oh brother crow, oh, brother crow, were you there? Did you see it go?" No, don't know. I didn't see, what are your troubles to do with me? Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow". (Five Plays – 74)

The climax of the play highlights the apathetic wickedness and ruthlessness of the androcentric society that can mercilessly crush and pulverise deviant voices, particularly the screams of women folk. The play throws light on the double-edged weapon of the popular discourses of motherhood, honour, nationalism and social responsibility. Commenting on this aspect Robert J.C. Young remarks:

The ideal of the nation is often imaged as a woman, and the ideology of nationalism often invests the nation's core identity upon a idealized, patriarchal image of ideal womanhood. (Young, 63)

These discourses are supposed to empower women but contrary to it men often use such rhetoric to suppress women's interests. Woman always carries the burden of maintaining the dignity and honour of motherhood. And the responsibility of preserving the ancient cultural traditions of the country also lies with her. In practice, however, instead of empowering her, these discourses compel her to compromise her freedom for the sake of preserving human values and social ethics, the pillars on which humanity rests comfortably. The vague and questionable notions of morality and motherhood are used to curtail Miss Benare's freedom during the trial. According to Sukhatme:

The woman who is an accused has made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood. Her conduct has blackened all social and moral values. If such socially destructive tendencies are encouraged to flourish, this country and its culture will be totally destroyed... Woman is not fit for independence... (Five Plays, 114-115)

The influential people of the patriarchal society promote a rationale for which they offer no ground. So this discourse is presumed to be self-legitimizing. Their irrational attitude is once again confirmed when Kashikar supports the custom of child-marriage, and bats for its revival. The most irritating aspect is that the opposition to progressive ideas and institutions of social progress is expressed in the guise of preserving national culture. During the trial we find two diagonally opposite thought processes taking place in the victim's mind and both are at war against each other to take possession of Leela's self-identity. On the one hand she is unable to shake off influence of these patriarchal, subjugating discourses, while on the other she vehemently asserts her individuality, defends her personal freedom and the rights of the body.

I despise this body – and I love it! I hate it! – but it's all you have in the end, isn't it? It will be there. It will be yours. Where will it go without you? And where will you go if you reject it? Don't be ungrateful. It was your body that once burnt and gave you a moment so beautiful, so blissful, so near to heaven!... (Five Plays, 118)

The ambivalence and complexity of Leela's attitude are duly articulated by the playwright and probably indicate that no any easy solution can be found to the age-old problem concerning female morality. The conflict between the claims for freedom as an independent person and the restraints of the society reveal the self as an embattled territory. Leela Benare wants to lead the life on her own terms, independent, assertive and alive to the senses. She wishes to be the same person as she was before the trial but society

wants her to be submissive and a slave to the rules of pseudo morality created by it. The selective and biased attitude of society makes her what she is post-trial. Her real self undergoes a terrible change during the process of trial. And she reluctantly accepts the new self that society has imposed on her. She is accustomed to the patriarchal ways of the society that she lives in. She does not agree with it or like it but she is conditioned to put up with it.

At times Leela Benare suffers from the psychological burden of the misdeed of her life and frankly accepts her 'sin'. "It's true. I did commit a sin" (Five Plays, 118). It hangs like albatross in her life. She is well aware of the fact that the male dominated society will not let her go scot free.

She concurs with the unanimous opinion of the people of patriarchal society that she herself is responsible for the dismal situation in which she finds herself. It is entirely of her own doing. The crime perpetrated by her on 'self' is unpardonable. There is no escape from it, at least in the world in which she is living. She therefore resigns to her fate and takes every disgusting humiliation in her stride and thus conforms to the image of feminine mystique. Quoting Betty Friedan here would help in understanding Benare's psyche in particular and that of womankind in general. "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our life as woman and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique. Initially she tries to show some strength and unyielding frame of mind but her resolute responses later turn out to be the submissive protests of the weak and marginalised. However, it is not her fault as her personality has been shaped by conservative mindset, which has inculcated in her a sense of inevitable conformity to the patriarchal discourse."

The reason for apparent contrariness in her lies in the subconscious mind which is conditioned for similar situations. Her state of mind is analysed sharply by Tendulkar in her soliloquy in the Third Act where she says that her son,

"must have mother a father to call his own – a house to
be looked after He must have a good name".

Thus it is clear that the motherly sensitivity and her anxiety for the well being of her child provoke her to implore Samant and other men for the marriage. Here Tendulkar has, with masterly skill, used the dramatic technique of split personality. The oscillation of rebellious and relinquishing feelings in Benare's heart is suggestive of the pathetic condition of women in the male-oriented and male dominated society. Through the characters of the play Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy prevalent in our society specially about the moral conduct of the individuals. The coterie of the influential persons forms the self-styled vigilantes and starts bullying the vulnerable ones in the name of moral policing, but turns a blind eye towards the immoral conduct of the high profile people.

REFERENCES:

- 1) Alpana Saini – Negotiating the Ethical Crisis – A view of Contemporary Indian
- 2) Friedan, Betty: The Feminine mystique. Penguin Books. Harmonds worth 1971.
- 3) Salil Trapathi – Here, There, Everywhere – Email Print del. Icio. Us.
- 4) Satish Barabuddhe: Imposed Silence in 'Silence: The court is in session', The plays of Vijay Tendulkar Critical Exploration – Sarup & Sons, New Delhi.
- 5) Sharma, Dr. Ram – The Trial between the Humanists and Anti Humanists in Vijay Tendulkar's play 'Silence: The Court is in Session'. The play of Vijay Tendulkar Critical Exploration – Sarup & Sons, New Delhi.
- 6) Tendulkar- Collected plays in Translation, New Delhi: Oxford University.
- 7) Tendulkar, Vijay – Five plays, Oxford University press, 1992.
- 8) Young, Robert J.C. Post Colonialism: A very short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2003.