

CHAPTER 4

“CRUEL GAME OF SILENCE TO
SUPPRESS WOMEN’S SEXUAL DESIRE”

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‘The central idea and life depicted in this play belongs here only’ Vijay Tendulkar.¹

This statement is written in preface of the play which shows that ‘Silence the court is in session’ depicts the life of Indian society. The Play ‘Shantata Court Chalu Ahe’ is based on a program of mock court. A mock court is always based on incidents of day to day life with a thread of humour. Of course there is intellectual discussions, satire, is always there in the performance but the prime focus is entertainment of the spectators. It is one kind of fixed improvisation so mock court has its liveliness.

‘Silence! The Court is in Session’ is a play which somehow spontaneously turns into a cruel mock-trial. ‘Silence! The Court is in Session’ is a three-act play. A group of around ten people arrive at village from diverse backgrounds. They all are members of “The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association (SMTPA). Their main intention is to create awareness by enacting a mock trial. For this particular

evening, the group is meeting to perform a mock trial protesting against President Johnson's production of atomic weapons.

The action takes place in a hall near a village. As the setting remains the same throughout the play and there is not much lapse of time, there are no scene divisions of the acts in the play. Through the dialogue between Leela Benare, the protagonist of the play and Samant, a villager, Tendulkar provides the background information to the reader-audience. First act is of introduction of the salient features of different characters of the play. Tendulkar introduces the character sketch through routine talk and general gossip between the characters. The performance of mock court is scheduled at evening so they have to kill the time. Here Tendulkar skillfully articulates intricacies and nuances of characterization through routine talk between the members of the group.

The characters are as follows. Raghu Samant is a mild-mannered and friendly young man of that village. Leela Benare is a school teacher of eight years standing. She is independent and bold. She has good sense of humour. She has been charged for having illicit relationship with professor Damle and for infanticide. Sukhatme is introduced as a lawyer in the stage directions. Balu Rokde is a young boy, he was given shelter by the

Kashikars, who fed, clothed and educated him. He accompanies them and takes orders from them. Ponkshe is a Science student. He has failed his intermediate examinations. He smokes a pipe and works as a clerk at the Central Telegraph office. Mrs. Kashikar is wife of Mr. Kashikar. Her husband is very rude towards her, puts her down on every occasion. Mr. Kashikar is the dominant husband to his wife. He is referred to as the chairman of the group by Benare. Karnik is an experimental theatre actor, shown as habituated to chewing pan. Benare tells Samant and the viewers more about the other characters than she lets on about herself.

Benare is quite unprepared when she is approached by Kashikar as she comes out of the washroom, singing. She is accused of the crime of infanticide, the killing of the new born child or infant. This is a crime that despite being punishable by the law often surfaces in modern India. The first act ends with everyone looking serious and Benare in a stunned condition with her being accused of the crime of infanticide. Suddenly, play acting moves into a more real world of intrigue, suspicion, crime and recrimination. The first act of the play concludes on a note of great tension. While Act I allowed Benare to modulate our responses to all the other characters, Act II reveals to us new aspects of Benare's life.

At the beginning of Act II After a few false starts, slapstick and comic in nature, Benare who is charged with the crime of infanticide denies it. This is followed by the argument of the prosecution, represented by Sukhatme. Sukhatme preaches on the significance of motherhood and highlights the glorification and deification of the role of the mother in Indian culture. Kashikar adds to this, quoting from the Sanskrit and reiterates the high status of the mother and the motherland, both of which supersede even that of heaven. Such glorious elevations of women as mothers are part of the history of the nationalist movements. At that time women's identities were fixed within the domestic procreative space around notion of the motherland. After declaring that the status of a mother is sanctified, the court proceeds to cross-examine Benare.

Now sudden shift comes in the play. The play or mock trial moves from the question of infanticide to an exploration of personal relationships in Benare's case. A great deal of shocking pleasure and smugness is displayed by all the characters who offer gossipy details of their exchanges with Benare. This is really the private secret that is slowly unveiling itself in Act II and will finally be made public in Act III, namely how men view women and how the very mention of women conjures up certain stereotypical roles and identities for women.

Act III is longer, the most intense and most serious of all the three acts. The cross-examination now is firm and harsh. She does not answer any of the questions that are directed at her. The characters go on how this is only a mock trial. The entire focus of Act III shifts from an investigation of the possibility of infanticide to a gradually constructed narrative of Benare's illicit relationship, her immorality and an indictment of her very presence which is seen as a "canker in society."

Benare breaks her silence in Act III and communes with the audience, with her soliloquy. Benare's soliloquy allows the audience to view her situation from a different perspective. Yet, literally and metaphorically, the characters in the play who represent the community she lives in do not hear her. Her version falls on deaf ears and frozen hearts and brains. Kashikar, the judge announces the verdict of the mock trial. Benare is seen as attempting to short-circuit all social codes and mores. She is accused of having committed a terrible crime and she is informed that the child in her womb will be destroyed. The last image on the stage is that of a Benare who struggles to move, but cannot. The play ends with a song of a grieving sparrow whose secure world has been destroyed by predators. The play ends here.

When play starts we can see a room with useless things spread all over and two doors, one is to go outside and second one is entrance. When Entrance door opens, audience is able to see a man holding a lock and a parrot made by green cloth in his hands. His first dialogue is “This is it. Come in. This is the hall. They seem to have cleaned it up a bit this morning – because of the show.” (Pg. 55) clearly depicts that he is a newcomer to this place.

Now very interestingly we find a detailed description ² of physical gestures of that newcomer and a woman named accordingly Samant and Benare. Benare holding her finger into her lips and physical movement of Samant depicts that he is a simple and shy person.

Now conversation starts. Samant tells specialty of the entrance door. Due to some defect it has become a trap door which opens only from outside. If someone closes the door strongly from inside it will stuck from outside and the person is trapped inside. Now audience realizes that Samant is not a newcomer. He added the story how his finger got jammed in the stopper and how he had suffered.

Benare says “Goodness! I am feeling marvellous. I got down at the station with all the others, and suddenly, after many days, I felt wonderful! I

felt even more wonderful coming here with you. I'm so glad the others fell behind! We rushed ahead, didn't we? Let's leave everyone behind, I thought, and go somewhere far, far away with you!" (Pg -55)

What does these dialogues reflects? Childishness? Dreamy state of mind? Or a desire to start a new life with a new man? Desire to live a new natural life? Or all of these? Benare looks cheerful and carefree like a child. She is free of hypocrisy that characterizes the rest of the group.

Tendulkar portrays all these intricacies very well. This artistic depiction is the specialty of Tendulkar. He plays with the intellectuality and emotions of the spectator. The 'truth' behind 'mock' is significant. He symbolizes each and every aspect of central character. For 'Silence! The Court is in Session', Tendulkar got inspiration from a real-life incident. As he says:

"I met an amateur group that was on its way to stage a mock trial in Vile-Parle, a suburb of Mumbai. While overhearing their conversation, the outline of the play began to take shape in my mind, and the ultimate result of it was the birth and creation of the play." ³

The original Marathi play was written for the Rangayan at the instance of Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande in 1967, and was first performed

in its English version in 1971, in Chennai, and was directed by Ammu Mathew.

Expression of Ms. Benare creates confusion for Samant. He says “With me? You’re very nice indeed. And shall I tell you something? You are a very pure and good person. I like you.” (Pg. 55/56) This depicts that he is spellbound by Benare. And Benare enjoyed playing with his innocence and asks many questions which he reply with energetic innocent answers. This conversation and words like ‘Mohinividhya’, ‘Jadu che prayog’ (Magic Shows), ‘Dhrashtibhram’ etc. creates humour.

In reply Benare expresses so many things. Here, she falls into past. She talks about her personality, her discipline, dedication, spontaneity, etc, but her words like snatching blood and run away like coward, character investigation, and low level of colleagues are impossible to understand by Samant, so he continues with his own thoughts. It creates humour beneath seriousness. Here, Tendulkar skillfully portray Benare’s characterization.

Here, we have two people in front of us, ‘Benare’, in her trance, and ‘Samant’ in his confused state of mind. After generous questioning by Samant, Benare comes out from trance and behaves as a normal being humming an English song. Song used by Tendulkar is also symbolic, which

depicts inner reality of Benare. Suddenly she gets diverted to another thing which depicts her unstable psychological condition.

This type of scene is specialty of Tendulkar's writing. The silence between the dialogues, silence between physical actions is clearly instructed in text of the play by Tendulkar.

Though dialogues between Samant and Benare are sort of comic touch and blurred, the entire conversation is connected to Benare's life. Tendulkar is one of the writers who use each and every word with precaution. Tendulkar never uses a single word meaninglessly. His characters are unique in action and every character has its own language of expression. We never find implantation of Tendulkar's language on His characters.

As Tendulkar says:

"The one characteristic of my plays, which I can legitimately boast of is characterization. My character are not cardboard characters; they do not speak my language; rather I do not speak my language through them; they are not my mouth-pieces; but each of them has his or her own separate existence and expression" ⁴

While conversing with Samant, Benare introduces other characters sarcastically, as per her words: “There’s Mrs. Hand-that- Rocks –the – Cradle. I mean Mrs. Kashikar. What an excellent housewife the poor woman is! A real Hand-that-Rocks-the cradle type! Balu Rokde. Who else? 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 barristers’ room at court, swatting flies with legal precedents! And in his tenement, he sits alone killing houseflies! And there’s a ‘hmm!’ with us! (Puts an imaginary pipe in her mouth.) Hmm! Sci-en-tist! Inter-failed! And we have an Intellectual too. That means someone who prides himself on his book learning. But when there’s a real life problem, away he runs! Hides his head” (Pg. 59/60) reflects humour as well as internal anger of Leela Benare. Reaction of Samant, accumulate humour but seriousness beneath loneliness of Benare, discomforts the audience.

Other characters of the play come into the hall and after some normal activity they all discuss about each other. Though it will not help the play to get motion, Tendulkar subtly emphasizes on the relationship of the characters with each other, all people are snatching each other but here, Tendulkar makes situations in comic way. At this level of the play audience is not aware about what is going to happen in next level of the play.

A gentle discussion is going on between the people gathered there about how to kill the time till show. The play is scheduled to be performed in the evening. The group has nothing to do before that. Bored, the members hit upon a plan. They would enact improvised trial. The proposal is ironically, made spontaneously by Benare. All agree to rehearse a fake trial with a fake charge on someone. Motive of the rehearsal is to show Samant, procedure of mock court but something is rotten in the state of mind of all characters except Benare so the others find in it an opportunity to dig up Benare's past 'sins'. They get an opportunity to humiliate and punish her publically and establish them for being the conscience keepers of society. And a sudden announcement takes place:

"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?" (Pg-74) Suddenly situation changes... Benare is stunned. Audience is shocked and first act drops with an interval Second act starts with above mention announcement.

The mock trial exposes the real functioning of the judicial process which is supposed to deliver justice. Leela Benare's sin in the society's view is that she is an unwed mother and including this sin she got abortion and

killed that unborn child. She has been in love with Professor Damle. She must be mesmerized with Damle's intellect capacity. Damle is a Married man, with five children. Damle exploits Benare physically and discards her when she asks him to help her. Later on she says: "He wasn't a god. He was man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body! That's all! (Pg. 118)

Damle is the second elderly man in Benare's life who used her physically and then cast her off. The first person who exploited her was her maternal uncle who physically abused her when she was an innocent child of thirteen years only. It is very interesting portrayal of internalization of violence inside a woman. The hesitant relationship of love-hatred and admiration-contempt can easily locate in her attitude towards the authority of the mock-trial court, particularly as represented by Kashikar and Sukhatme. She wants to refuse them but can't bring herself to refuse to stand trial before them. She simultaneously protests and accepts their authority.

The society remains silent; this authority remains silent and never wanted to punish Damle for his sin to exploit a woman who wants to fulfill her emotional desire. Damle's absence does not invite any punishment or even criticism from the court. He is the absent centre of Leela's destiny. The

power he wields even in his absence hints at the hidden power of the discourses that lie behind the cruelty of gender discrimination in society. In his absence, he appears to wield the authority of the Freudian father figure, which Leela at once rebels against and is fascinated by. It is the same authority, embodied in Kashikar, the judge and Sukhatme, the public prosecutor that enchants and paralyses Leela when her sins are being recounted and judged.

The judicial process aims at exposing the victim's sins. The prosecutors of Leela Benare find it a most pleasurable thing to do since it satisfies their sadistic impulses: the more the victim is tormented, the greater is their pleasure. If the victim refuses to be a part of the process by refusing to answer their questions, the persecutors feel frustrated and powerless. They accuse her of spoiling the game. Sukhatme says: "Why are you so grave all of a sudden? After all, it's a game. Just a game, that's all. Why are you so serious?" (Pg-75) Tendulkar uses the word "game" which is significant. Though it is an improvised mock trial, game has begun internally. It is the game of silence and its core is cruelty. People like Kashikar, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Rokde and Karnik represent the herd instinct of the failed and the powerless who try to cover up their weakness and failure under the guise of morality. Anyone who does not confront to the herd morality must be shown

the way and normalize with the process of torture and sacrifice. It is the false mask of morality which subjugate to a woman who has her own desires. And reality is, these people are weak and hypocrite and just trying to behave like strong.

This is the thing Nietzsche discusses in his book on Genealogy of Morals. Like he says:

“The so called ideals are an excuse of the weak for not being like the strong.”⁵

In second act of the play starts with the freezing point of first act and as the play within the play unfolds, we witness the performance of the trial. Yes it is a performance because a real trial is not possible; the crime is not fit in the parameter of judicial rules of law. The trial is conducted on the basis of rules of morality. But, though it is very clear that this trial is a performance, it is not a farce. The trial achieves goal of the offender-victim's punishment and the victimizers' self-gratification. Here victimizer's target is victim's innocence, spontaneity and brilliance not only because of gender bias but these qualities of victim make others feel smaller and inferior. We can also notice the naturalness with which all the characters perform their improvisational roles, which shows the genuineness of their

prejudices which are against a woman who wishes to be free, who chooses the way to fulfill her sexual-emotional desire. Benare's persecutors are very natural in their self-conduct, almost childishly innocent, ignorant in their cruelty, yet they are treacherously destructive.

It is obvious thing that the cruel game begins. We can say it never stops. This game of silence to suppress a woman's sexual desire is infinite. From old age civilization we, the society embed the rules of morality and it is obvious that desires always rebel against so called rules of the society. Society considers these rebels as a different human being.

Here, Leela Benare is different, and this is what makes her the target of her persecutor's rage. This game is about the wish to normalize, to eliminate any difference, to bring every individual in to ideal structure of society. The group tried to implicate that the powerful motive behind the mock-trial is establishment of moral values but truth is different. They tried to settle the score with Benare. Reliable and hard working teacher like her is superior to others is unacceptable to others: "But my teaching's perfect. I've put my whole life into it—I've worn myself to a shadow in this job!" (Pg. 58)



She is also aware of her accomplishment as a reliable teacher: “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 lessons! Exercises corrected on time, too! Not a bit of room disapproval – I don’t give an inch of it to anyone!” (Pg. 57) But we cannot fail to notice that her extremely accurate attitude towards her work indicates the internalization of an extremely powerful and demanding father figure. It is the desire which leads her in to this type of accuracy into her work. Her desire is to be a leader, desire is to get attention which she could not get these years, and desire is to be taken care by a masculine intellect personality. These all desire leads her in to a relationship where she doesn’t want more but only emotional support. She gets support from Prof. Damle in terms of physical relationship.

Her satisfaction invites the jealousy of her to less fortunate and less successful colleagues and makes them to find out one or other fault with her moral conduct. The mock trial is the only opportunity they get to settle their imaginary scores with her. As a result, they crouch down as low as anyone can in order to degrade her and to show that she is morally inferior to them. This cruel game of silence is their way of proving their own superiority to her.

The play also throws light on the double edged weapon of the popular debate of motherhood, nationalism, honour, social responsibilities. These discourses are supposed to empower woman but often used against women's desire. People of the society blend desire with ethics. Women are held responsible for the dignity and honour of motherhood and through that for preserving the ancient cultural tradition of the country. Practically speaking, instead of empowering them these discourses crush their freedom in the name of responsibility and the process of squashing is silently running and no one wants to confront about this process. The vague and unjustified notions of morality and motherhood are used to restrict Leela Benare's freedom during trial.

Here Tendulkar puts words into the dialogues of characters like Kashikar, Sukhatme which are very significant. It reflects inner reality of the hypocrite society. Mr. Kashikar calls her "A sinful canker on the body of the society." (Pg. 112), the words suggesting a utopian dream of recovering some lost organic purity of woman. In the words of Nanasaheb: "It is a sin to be pregnant before marriage. It would be still more immoral to let such a woman teach in such a condition!" (Pg. 113)

Miss Leela Benare tries to defend herself through a long soliloquy. "The parrot to the sparrow said, "Why, of why, are your eyes so red?" 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, I don't know I didn't see, what are your troubles to do with me? O sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow."(Pg. 121)

But Sukhatme neglects and says :

"The woman who is an accused has made monstrous blot on the scared 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..." (Pg. 114-115). Here crushing of woman's freedom is important. A woman has no right to fulfill her desire, and if a man wishes to fulfill his desire, he can have so many ways and no one even talks about that.

Men are portrayed and delineated as embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery. Men like Kashikar, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik whose words and deeds expose their inherent malice and hypocrisy.

Women, on the other hand, are portrayed as helpless victims of the conspiracies hatched by men. Benare of 'Silence! The Court is in Session' is being mercilessly harassed by a cruel game played innocently by co-actors.

The anti-rational attitude is confirmed when Kashikar supports the custom of child-marriage, wishing, that it should be revived. Here the most interesting thing is Tendulkar's specialty of putting the opposition of ideas and social progress in the excuse of preservation of national culture. In contrast to this, there is Leela Benare's passionate declaration of individuality, her defence of personal freedom and her expression of 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!" (Pg. 118)

Woman has always been the subaltern across cultural boundaries. Men need her, love her, adore her and write about her; but they do so in relation to their own lives. In patriarchy, male privilege is marked as having control over protection and representation of pleasure. Cultural

representations have been designed to accommodate male preferences and patterns of gratification. Women's pleasures have been reduced in importance to implanted morality.

Here Benare's expression is not only an expression of a character in a play, but, it is an expression of a primitive woman whose freedom was crushed in the process of civilization. The ambivalence and complexity of Leela's attitude to the body is duly articulated by the playwright and seems to indicate the absence of any solution. Similarly, Benare asserts her right to give birth to her child, the product of the ruined union, and her right to live her life in her own way: "I'll decide what to do with myself; everyone should be able to! That can't be anyone else's business; understand? Everyone has a bent, a manner, an aim in life. What's anyone else to do with these?" (Pg. 117).

But it is also clear that she is a victim of an imbalanced and distorted man-woman relationship which places woman in subjugation to man and society. Her playful overtures to Samant, her turbulent relationship with Damle, her unhappy infatuation with and exploitation by her maternal uncle and her marriage proposals to Ponkshe and Rokde, all these are used against her during the mock-trial to discipline and subjugate her. To these are added

the narratives of various witnesses which are then used to fabricate a pseudo-reality. For example, Rokde accuses Benare of holding his hand and trying to take advantage of him. Ponkshe accuses her of proposing to him.

Tendulkar skillfully presents the mentality of so called moral values. The meaning between the lines presented in the play applies to our lives which cherish the illusion of freedom, lives which itself is in the process of illusionistic liberalism and idealism.

How far our lives are shaped by narratives is made stunningly clear through the interplay of fiction and reality in the play. The make-believe narratives are accepted by others as true. When called upon to act as a witness, Samant reads out his "statement" from a novel he happens to be reading. The testimony is accepted to be true simply because Samant's story-out-of-the-novel seems to fit in well with the already half-cooked narrative of Leela's moral transgressions. The mock judge knows well that Samant's story has nothing to do with Leela. When Samant protests against the outcome of his testimony, Sukhatme say, "Mr. Samant, for the sake of the trial, we're taking some things for granted," (Pg. 90) at which Karnik says, "The crime itself is imaginary. What more do you want? It's all

imaginary... that's all what it is" (Pg. 90) And Ponkshe remarks, "Only the accused is real" (Pg. 90).

Similarly, in the incidents narrated by Rokde and Ponkshe, reality and fiction intermesh. The power of story-telling is so overwhelming that people accept these stories as history because they seem to provide the missing links in the narrative of a person's life. The witnesses conjure an imaginary picture of Leela's objectionable behaviour and, through their stories, succeed in constructing a make-believe reality. The Leela of their stories is as much a construction as the events told in the stories are. Gradually, even she loses the ability to see herself as distinct from the stories that are told about her. In fact, every character in the role of witness comes to believe in the imaginary "truth" of his or her stories.

The mock-trial, thus, turns out to be an improvised performance within which various characters construct their own as well as others' identities. It becomes a kind of mirror of the society constructing identities through performances, which is obviously one of the major concerns of the play. The once exuberant Leela's reduction to a half-dead person is thus significant. The mock-trial divides Leela's life into two phases, pre-trial and post-trial. She is a confident, assertive and sensuous woman before the trial:

“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 --” (Pg. 61).

She knows what she is doing and what she wants out of life, and she thinks it is nobody’s business to interfere with her life or decide about it. But she is an altogether different woman after the mock-trial. Her attitude towards others in the group undergoes a complete change as the trial progresses. Earlier she had a mocking, jeering attitude towards all other members of the group. As she speaks:

“Kashikar can’t take a step without a prime objective! Besides him, there’s Mrs. Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle. I mean Mrs. Kashikar. What an excellent housewife the poor woman is! A real Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle type! But what’s the use? Mr. Prime Objective is tied up with uplifting the masses. And poor Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle has no cradle to rock!” (Pg. 59)

About Sukhatme and Ponkshe respectively, she has this to say: “He just sits alone in the barristers’ room at court, swatting flies with legal precedents! . . . And there’s a ‘Hmm!’ with us! Hmm! Scientist! Inter-failed!” (Pg. 59).

Her observations are very perceptive. Hence it is ironic that the same Kashikar, Sukhatme and Ponkshe should make such a song and dance about her behaviour. Slowly, in the course of the trial, her attitude changes and she becomes tolerant, docile and submissive. At the beginning of the trial, she showed traces of a mocking humour: “Thanks, for that, a masala pan is hereby issued to you” (Pg. 78), she says when Sukhatme warns her against showing contempt towards the court, she says pointing towards the washroom, “The court has gone into that room. So how can contempt of it be committed in this one?” (Pg. 81-82).

Her powerful humour slowly transforms into rage before she finally sinks into helplessness and submission, “I’ll smash up all this! I’ll smash it all to bits – into little bits!” (Pg. 93), and “You’ve all deliberately ganged up on me! You’ve plotted against me!” (Pg. 93)

By the end of the trial, she is a half-dead woman: “No, no! Don’t leave me alone! I’m scared of them... (Terrified, she hides her face and trembles) It’s true I did commit a sin” (Pg. 117), and “Life is very dreadful thing. Life must be hanged” (116).

She is no longer the proud, self-assertive and confident woman she was at the beginning of the mock-trial. The mock-trial continues until the

qualities which the others disapproved of in her are extinguished one by one and she has become an altogether different person. She loses her previous self and becomes another person – the morality-conscious, submissive self of a sinner. Her old and new states are symbolically suggested by the toy-parrot that is presented to her by Samant; the toy evokes her old, childlike innocence, but it is also an inarticulate piece of craft.

So, even as it indicates her loss of innocence through the death of the child in her, it also reflects her treatment as a plaything of social forces and collective psychological motivations. The conflict between the claims for freedom as an autonomous person and the demands made by society reveal an embattled territory. Leela Benare wants to be independent, assertive and alive to the senses, to be the person that she was before the trial, but society wants her to be submissive and a slave to its norms of morality.

The demands of society make her what she is post-trial. Her 'self' undergoes a terrible change during the process of the trial. But she only reluctantly accepts the new 'self' that others have forced on her. The mock-trial is thus indicative of the killing of her real 'self' and its replacement by a socially appropriate 'self' imposed on her. Tendulkar makes her condition

evident through direct intervention in the form of specific stage directions:

“She looks half dead” (Pg. 109), and the following:

“There she sits down, half fainting. Then in paroxysms of torment, she collapses with her head on the table, motionless” (Pg. 119).

The play can be seen as deconstructing the stereotype of the Indian woman as Devi or Shakti: it demonstrates that there is no ideal Indian woman as such, apart from the real flesh-and-blood women. The identity of a woman is socially and culturally constructed, and the constructions serve certain socio-political and personal ends. Leela Benare is the example of a woman who, though antagonistic to socially acceptable codes of morality, appears to be an idealist; Mrs. Kashikar is the example of another kind of woman who is ostensibly respectable and morally superior yet proves to be spiteful, vengeful, unsuccessful, frustrated and jealous. Mrs. Kashikar would also like to be independent and strong-willed like Leela Benare, but since she lacks what it takes to be Leela Benare, she instead chooses to disgrace her publicly, “It’s the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That’s how promiscuity has spread throughout our society” (Pg. 100), and “Free! Free! She’s free alright – in everything!” (Pg. 100) Mrs. Kashikar herself is a product of her economic dependence and

carries the stamp of her husband's relentlessly degrading attitude towards her.

We thus witness in the play a conflict between two subject positions, the real 'self' and performed 'self' through what the people in the amateur theatre group really are, what they would like to be, what they present themselves to be, and how the implicit and explicit social codes determine their identities. There is a kind of duplicity in the identities of almost all members of the group, including Leela Benare, of which they themselves may not be aware. This duplicity can be clearly grasped if we regard it in the light of the concept of subjectivity. Though Leela is different from others in not deceiving herself about her motives and intentions, yet she is helpless before the so-called system of morality. It is for this reason that she so desperately looks for someone who would lend to her unborn child his name as father: "He must have a mother... a father to call his own – a house – to be looked after – must have a good name!" (Pg. 118)

The society, with its moral codes and restrictions, is therefore already settled in Leela's consciousness. That is why the mock-trial hurts her so much. If she were above the society's normative codes, she would not have been hurt at all, or at least not so much. It appears that there is a distinction

between how others in the group see her and how she sees herself, but near the end of the play, when she cries out that she has committed a sin, these distinctions fade away. On the other hand, the authorities representing the law themselves are seen to be implicated in the violation of the law.

In the person of Damle, the law first seduces its subject to violate it and then pronounces judgment on her and punishes her. The inside and the outside are thus revealed as only convenient distinctions, behind which deeper complexities lie concealed. The play can thus be explored to reveal the construction of a woman's prejudice under the twin discourses of patriarchy and individualism. Whereas patriarchy oppresses and tames a woman into subjugation, the discourse of individualism makes her challenge and defies patriarchal norms.

The woman is, thus, caught in a web of multiple discourses pulling and tearing her apart. On the other hand, the play also looks into the bias of the oppressors as to what makes them so cruel, intolerant and unreasonable. That is the reason M. Sarat Babu quotes this:

“The play, (Silence the court is in session) exposes the inhuman violence in its verbal form of the patriarchal society against woman”⁶

Here, M. Sarat Babu's statement clearly indicates that there is existence of a silence towards this type of violence and it is exposed in the play. The society never allows a feminine gender to live free. Though we are talking about woman empowerment we are not ready to accept free form of freedom. It is a constant scenario that will be changed or not is a big question.

When a reporter asks Tendulkar after performance of his play "Sakharam Binder" in Tendulkar festival arranged by 'Ank' Mumbai, about the effectiveness and mirror image of contemporary society, he says:

"It is very sad that my play is contemporary... I wish we can raise a society where questions raised by me become outdated... I never wish for immortality of my play, but I always wish fatality of the problems in our society. But I mention we will never able to throw away the animal quality and hence problems remain constant." ⁷

There are so many critics discussed about this play. So many scholars say different opinions but suppression of desire is common among all. If we talk about issue of gender, it is a fact that we are born whole human beings, but gender based division of labour breaks us into male and female fragments. Each fragment retains only half of human potential. The retained

part overgrows to compensate for the other part that remains underdeveloped. These two polarized, deformed fragments are called men and women. These gender deformities are thus caused and gradually canonized by socio-cultural programming of sex roles. They are glorified and children trained to attain them through socialization since their birth. Hogie Wyckoff writes:

“As women and men we are socialized to develop certain parts of personalities while suppressing development of other parts. This programming promotes a predetermined, stilted, and repetitive way of acting life”⁸

As per fundamental of psychology, every human has the potential for nurturing, controlling, rationality, intuition, spontaneity and adaption. To be masculine, men develop the faculties of controlling and rationality and to be feminine, women develop the faculties of nurturing and intuition. A game of suppression occurred in the process of civilization. Civilization suppresses the faculties of nurturing and intuition into masculine gender and it suppresses the faculties of controlling and rationalities into feminine gender. Development of adaptation is occurred in terms of culture, but not in nature. Means it is not developed by default natural process but it gradually

developed by culture, civilization. But in this process both gender lost their faculty of spontaneity and neither enjoys life.

The faculties of nurturing and intuition help women perform their culturally allotted function, child-rearing and house-keeping while control and rationality help men to perform their culturally allotted function, bread-earning. These differences cause alienation and antagonism between men and women. These alienation and antagonism leads to games to suppress each other and hence with the ownership of faculties of controlling and rationality masculine gender rules the society. So, the game of suppression of feminine desires prominently takes place in our society.

The 'Silence! Court is in Session' reflects everlastingness of the game. And it shows that when a character specifically a woman has natural qualities of liveliness and spontaneity the game starts. Leela Benare has a strong desire to enjoy life without being suffocated by the hegemony of culture. She is an embodiment of Nature's innocence and spontaneity. When her behaviour is classified as childish behaviour she says: "Why, in the classroom, I'm the soul of seriousness! But I don't see why one should go around all the time with a long face. Or a square face! Like that Ponkshe! 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 any one! I mean it. When your life is over, do you think anyone will give you a bit of theirs?" (Pg. 60-61)

Benare's lively nature and innocent beauty that are not distorted by culture attracts philanderers and thus lands her in danger several times. She withstands the violence and continues living joyfully. In her teens, she is seduced and sexually exploited by her own uncle. He does not marry her and is supported by her own mother. Benare overcomes this shock and completes her education. She becomes a teacher and earns a good reputation as a teacher. Her academic interest takes her to Prof. Damle whom she respects for his scholarship and intelligence. Though married, he exploits her sexually and betrays her. She request Rokde and Ponkshe to marry her. They refuse. Benare ridicules their diffidence and hypocrisy. Benare is very frank and open minded woman. She exposes the hypocrisy of people and laughs at their errors.

Benare is interested in drama, acting. So she becomes a member of drama troupe of amateur artists. Other than Benare all people of this group failed in life try to gratify their unfulfilled wishes through drama. Benare ridicules them. Here, quite interesting thing is the characterization developed

by Tendulkar. Rokde studies law but no client dares to go near him and he is going to play role of the lawyer in the mock trial. Ponkshe who failed in intermediate is going to play scientist in the mock trial. Prof. Damle who is absent today's mock trial but Tendulkar explores his characteristics through dialogues of other people. And we can see that Prof. Damle is a great hero of books but runs away when the real problem arises. In our society we find ourselves confused about freedom. Instructions made by parents in childhood are deep rooted in our mind. So, we never ever dare to break the laws of society, laws of morality and laws of culture. In different way we can say that if we can't do it, we will never allow anyone to do it. It is a vicious circle created by process of development of culture.

So, here in this play all the people who don't get satisfaction, gather and try to take satisfaction through running a cruel game to suppress Benare's desire through tools of morality and idealism. All these people plan to vanquish her and settle the debt of mockery did by her. In the name of mock trial they play a game and expose her private life, humiliate her, and hurt her heart. They do not find fault of Prof. Damle, in fact no body discussed it. At first they accuse her of infanticide for trying to abort her fetus. Later, they accused her of becoming pregnant without marriage. All the people vanishes the arguments which made by Benare in her self-

defence. Concluding the trial, Sukhatme, the public prosecutor in the mock-trial, says to Mr. Kashikar, the judge: "Milord, the nature of the charge against the accused, Miss Leela Benare is truly dreadful. The woman who is an accused has made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood – which is purer than heaven. For that any punishment, however great that the law may give her will be too mild. The character of the accused is appalling. It is bankrupt of morality. Not only that, 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 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. Woman bears the grave responsibility of building the high values of the society. 'Na Stri Swatantrayamarhati' 'Woman is not fit for independence'... That is the rule laid down for us by tradition. (Pg. 114-115)

Though men commit worst sexual crimes, people still say that women spoil the society. As Jandhyala Kameshwari argues, men are tacitly permitted to seek extra marital sexual pleasure while women's sexuality is limited to motherhood within the marriage. Leela Benare strongly protests against these unjust patriarchal values and demands not only freedom but also the right over her body and to live in the way she likes. Benare says:

“Who are these people to say what I 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 (Pg. 58)

Here Benare expresses her desire and her right to fulfill them. Still as play conveys we find that though she believe in her rights she wants recognition from the people around. She wants identification for her rights to fulfill desires which shows how the concepts of moral deeply rooted within a woman. She wants to prove truthfulness of what she is doing or did. This is the irony of our society. The victim of the game wants acceptance from the victimizer. This is the effect occur in the process of culturalization. So, we can see a woman can oppress a woman in the name of morality.

Here, even, Mrs. Kashikar joins the men in attacking Benare without any compassion. Like most of the women, she supports patriarchal values in spite of their being harmful to women. That is why the cynics of feminism declare that women are the enemies of women. But as we discussed as above, this happens due to the fact that woman urged for their survival to absorb, observe and propagate patriarchal culture. As argued by Srilata Batliwala in her brilliant article, “Why do women oppress women?”⁹ Same argument is made by M. Sarat Babu in his introduction. As he compares this play with Girish Karnad’s “Nagamandal” and Mohan Rakesh’s ‘Ashadh Ka

Ek Din' he finds the exposure of the gender biased value system of the patriarchal society in above mention plays.¹⁰

At the very beginning of the play, we find Benare as a lively, emotional but a self-assertive woman. She is deeply committed to her profession. But there are latent hints of her suppressed sufferings—"They're holding an enquiry, if you please! But my teaching's perfect. I've put my whole life into it—I've worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slander, what can they do to me?" (Pg. 58) and "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" (Pg. 58). This voice of self-assertion, this voice of individuality endows Benare with the identity of 'a new woman' emerging against the coercive attacks of patriarchy.

In this connection, Smita Paul comments in her book Theatre of Power:

"The women characters in Tendulkar's theatre undergo a series of sufferings and tortures as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. In the male- dominated theatre-world they are constantly being 'other-ed'. In Silence! The focal point of interest lies is the struggle between women like Benare and her

antagonists headed by the orthodox Kashikar and his associates.”¹¹

As mentioned in play we can see that Benare undergo a series of suffering throughout her life. We can easily see that there are latent hints of her suppressed sufferings in her dialogues. This voice of self-assertion, this voice of individuality endows Benare with the identity of ‘a new woman’ emerging against the coercive attacks of patriarchy.

Before passing the final verdict on Benare, she is given ten seconds to defend her case. Now the motionless Benare stands up erect and says, “Yes, I have a lot to say” (Pg. 116) Then follows a long monologue in which Benare expresses her zest for life and tells how she is deprived of her wishes:

“My life was a burden to me. (Heaving a great sigh) But when you can’t lose it, you realize the value of it... There’s great joy in a suicide that’s failed. It’s greater even than the pain of living... I swallowed that poison, but didn’t even let a drop of it touch them! ... I cried inside, and I made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair, and I taught them hope. (Pg. 116-117) Benare hurls her denigrating attack against patriarchy in this monologue: “These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the 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.” (Pg. 117)

In the final verdict Benare is equated with ‘criminals and sinners’ and the court orders that she should live but the child in her womb should be destroyed. Writhing in pain, Benare, at first strongly resists and then stifled sobs come from her. In this context, L. Rahman in his book Tendulkar’s ‘Silence! The Court is in Session’ comments:

“Once Benare finds her voice couched in questioned language does make no truth-effect, she begins to sob with the idea in mind that though the field be lost, all is not lost; she has a mind which remains and will remain unconquered by the oppressive patriarchal ideology.”¹²

Though Benare desperately fights her lone battle and clamours that her life and her choices are her own; her voice is silenced by the destructive agencies of patriarchal institution.

It is well-known that ‘Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe’ was written under great pressure with the performance date hanging over Tendulkar’s head. Scenes went into rehearsal as and when they were written. Tendulkar finished writing the play just a few days ahead of the show. Despite the

impossible shortness of time, Arvind Deshpande, the director, insisted that it was incomplete without a statement by Benare at the end. She couldn't simply accept the terrible verdict pronounced against her and say nothing in her own defence. Tendulkar argued stubbornly against such a statement. As per Tendulkar, Benare, the character he had created, would never make it and the impact of the brutal verdict would in fact be reduced by its presence. He is against such monologue or statement.

But, finally, however, Deshpande won the round. Tendulkar allowed himself to be literally locked up in to a room to write the speech. His craft then comes into play and, instead of a speech, he wrote a kind of internal monologue which could be taken as speech in self defence but was actually and articulation of all that she had ever thought, felt and lived through.

Sulabha Deshpande refers to Tendulkar's doubts about the artistic validity of this dramatic monologue in her essay on doing Benare.¹³ She writes about the young girls who come to her for guidance in speaking this monologue for college competitions. None of them read the full play, yet those who have some initiative skills may even won the prizes for this monologue. Then a question rose that was the monologue that was forced out of Tendulkar against his wishes, indeed an external imposition on the

play? Sulabha Deshpande's answer to this question is negative. She argues that the monologue is so full of Benare's internal turbulence, her world view, her rebelliousness, her rage against a society that is happy to live in a rut without aim or purpose, her bitterness at the harassment she has suffered at its hands, she says:

“The resulting helplessness, her yearning for the laughing, romping, dancing life that is soon to be hers, her determination to bear it”¹⁴

This monologue has a strong impact, words are concentrated, and it reveals intricacies and nuances of Benare's suppressed emotions. It is obvious that this monologue can't be written reluctantly. Though Tendulkar was forced to write the monologue we can see clearly that Benare's internal thought are revealed forcefully. There is always discussion about whether Benare would have revealed so much of herself in the presence of the very people who would be the last to understand her feelings. As per Shanta Gokhale justified Tendulkar's point of view she writes:

“Benare, as Tendulkar has drawn her, never speaks directly. She needs so much to hide the pain in her from the crass and intensive world around her, that practically every remark she makes is tangential, devised to glance off the centre of her pain, to deflect attention from it. She is deliberately jocose, almost

frivolous, erratic in her responses, teasing, and mocking her colleagues. However, as the mock trial proceeds and quite accidentally stumbles on this inner arena of profound pain, she is numbed by its viciousness into silence. This is why Tendulkar felt that a long statement at the end would be out of character.”

15

Benare remains completely silent during the dissection of her personal life by her fellow actors during mock-trial. Even if she tries to speak, she is silenced by them. She is given a chance of defending herself at the end of the trial. Tendulkar mentions that all the characters remain in a frozen state during her long reply. The playwright wants to contradict two symbols. One is Benare who wants acceptance of her freedom and second symbol is deaf ears of society which never accepts her freedom. Tendulkar suggests that her reply falls on deaf ears. Benare must have to accept the Court's verdict and she must have to live in social structure. Tendulkar clearly depict about Benare's condition in his stage directions at the end of the play "Benare feebly stirs a little... then gives up the efforts..." (Pg. 120)

Director's point of view about this monologue can be justified through a simple argument made by Sulabha Deshpande:

“The play would have completely collapsed if the audience had felt, even for one moment, that the punishment Benare was

awarded was justified since she had committed the “crimes’ of falling in love with her uncle and attempting suicide at the age of fourteen, and, conducting an ‘illicit’ relationship with a married man, insisting on having his illegitimate baby and still asking to be permitted to face her impressionable students at school as if she had done no wrong”¹⁶

But we can clearly see that, Tendulkar though writes the monologues, he cleverly creates an internal expression made by Benare as a statement. As per one interpretation it will never be able to express her vibrant speech in reality but expressed as internal thought expressed through a monologue. And a woman remains silent as a result of a cruel game.

We can understand this game of silence through a story, that is:

There is a function in a house. So many children have come for the occasion. Children are playing in a room. One kid opens the window and suddenly a little sparrow comes from the window, enters in the room. All children are shouting. They are happy because they get a live toy for playing. All of them start playing with the little one. They want to catch her. Sparrow is enjoying the game. She only can fly. She is flying through fan, going in-out through window.

Children are happy, sparrow is happy. A naughty child closes the window. Now there is little fear in sparrow's mind, but still she is enjoying the show. She comes near the kids. All are happy. They start touching her. Little one doesn't mind. She knows children are innocent. Then what happens? And innocent child pulls a wing of her. She hurts, but is assured about innocence of children. Then another kid repeats the action, and one by one pulls wings of sparrow. It is the slaughter of innocence. Blood spreads, victim stands on the edge of die.

Suddenly a voice comes from kitchen "Food is ready". All kids run towards kitchen. Subjugated sparrow is alone, she isn't dead. She must have to experience extreme pain and sorrow. Children are in kitchen. They find Gulabjamun in plate. All of them forgot the sparrow. All are happy. They never able to know what happened in that closed room.

Society is like this room and the people of the society are like the children. After a long span of civilization we never understood the starting point of the cruel game. This game is nowhere else but it is within us. When a woman want to live free, when a woman wants something different than conventional reality, game starts and it is an endless process.

As a result of 'the cruel game of silence to suppress woman's sexual desire' we find a great, thrusting torch bearer play "Shantata Court Chalu Ahe". "Silence The Court is in Session."

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