Chapter II

SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION
THE THEME OF PLIGHT AND PREDICAMENT OF A WOMAN
New wave began in Marathi theatre with the production of Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Saktharam Binder and Ghashiram Kotwal. Our traditional function of theatre has been seen to amuse and divert the audience. But drama at its best, writes the author, does more; it disturbs the audience by raising unsettling questions about human relationships and human existence.

*Silence! The Court is in Session* in some respects is typical of Tendulkar's writing. The experience of the play, as is usual with him, stems not from a concept but a real incident. In this particular case the stimulus came from an amateur group on its way to stage a mock trial in a village near Bombay. In his earlier works *Shrimant* and *Mi Jinkalo Mi Harlo*, he had dwelt on the woes of middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment. The change was possibly the result of a deep personal experience. For on the one hand, it unleashed characters, Benare, Saktharam and Ghashiram in state of collision with accepted norms and on the other, it revealed ineffectual middle class types with an ugly vicious leer lurking under a smug surface.

Obviously audience were in a mood to listen to a playwright ready to fix a remorseless gaze on the contradictions within a personality, even the most insignificant one, a playwright who refused to offer easy legal remedies to social problems or to pin his faith on a change of heart in men. Acutely conscious of the violent impulses behind a respectable facade and of overwhelming compulsions of sex, he could place his discoveries within a recognizably Indian context, essentially middle class, and rooted. His long yielded dividends, he had taught him to mould his familiar material into dramatic shape.

The play is conceived as a game and the idea that all that is happening on the stage is part mock, part earnest gives it a 'theatrical edge'. The mock element is all pervasive. What we are witnessing is a mere enactment of what is a rehearsal of sorts of nothing more than a mock trial to be staged. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the play and its structure revolve wholly round the idea of a game and include the essential ingredient of reversal: Benare, who is on the offensive in the beginning, finds herself trapped at the close of the play.
The members of troupe enter the room in a village. At first enters Miss Leela Benare, who is talkative, moody. Samant is a villager and who is unknown to Miss Benare, when both enter that hall, Benare feels marvellous with Samant and says that she is glad the other members fall behind.

Benare : I thought, and go somewhere far, far away with you:
Samant : [in confusion] with me?
Benare : yes, I like you very much.
Samant : (terribly shy and embarrassed) tut-tut Ha ha!
I am hardly...
Benare : You are very nice indeed. And shall I do something?
You are a very pure and good person. I like you.

Benare wants to go far away because Samant does not know her private life. Benare tells Samant she is a school teacher, hard worker and honest to her job but she has burst out against the school management.

But what can they do to me? What can they do? However hard they try, what can they do? 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? Throw me out? Let them! I haven’t hurt anyone. Anyone at all? if I’ve hurt anybody, it’s been myself.

Benare is proud of her job and she never thinks that she is sold to the management to her job.

My life is my own - I haven’t sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those - no one! I’ll do what I like with myself and my life I’ll decide.

Benare is one of the members of the society. She is leading modern life. Her modern life is not private one but the life in the society. So her immoral relation with Professor Damle is not private but social.
Samant and Benare talk about the performance-a mock court. The prime objective behind the programme is spreading enlightenment. The trial is a case against president Johnson for producing atomic weapons. They had performed seven times at Bombay and now they are going to perform in a village. The judge of the trial is Mr. Kashikar who is a social worker and his wife Mrs. Kashikar is quite uneducated. Mr. Kashikar and Mrs. Kashikar, the hand that Rocks the Cradle, in order that nothing should happen to either of them in their bare house and that they shouldn’t die of boredom, gave shelter to a young boy Balu Rokde. Sukhatme is a very great barrister, an expert on the law. He is 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 files with legal precedents. And in his tenement, he sits alone, killing houseflies. First witness is Mr. Gopal Ponkshe who looks most impressive during the trial like the scientist in the witness box. No one would believe he has just taken Inter Science, for the second time and he is working as a clerk in the Central Telegraph Office. Second witness is Karnik and third Rokde. The fourth witness of this group is Mr. Rawte who is absent. The group thinks Samant will be the fourth witness. They will have a rehearsal for Samant. They will have an imaginary case. So Samant will understand how the court works. They will also pass the time more pleasantly.

Mrs. Kashikar suggests that the accused atleast be different and not president Johnson. Rokde tells Mrs. Kashikar that Professor Damle has not arrived. The character Damle who is never present on the stage is the main source of the play. After hearing the name of Professor Damle, Benare who had been talking to Mrs. Kashikar, suddenly falls silent and motionless. Ponkshe, in turn, jeers at Rokde for his total dependence on Kashikar. And the group unites to ridicule the absurd gestures of mutual devotion made by the couple and also their childlessness. The whole lot of them try to needle Benare but at least in the first half of the play she is able to outsmart them.

Benare takes a face towel and a cake of soap out of her basket. She comes out singing wiping her face on the towel. She looks very fresh. Ponkshe says:

Miss Leela Benare, you have been arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extremely grave nature and brought as a prisoner before the bar of this court.
The atmosphere is extraordinarily gloomy. Benare looks stunned and all are silent for a moment. All members plotted against Benare. The nature of the charge brought against the accused is a terrible one—the crime of killing a newborn child. Sukhatme is pleading the case.

Though Vijay Tendulkar wrote a number of one-act plays and full-length plays earlier, his first big hit was *Silence! The Court is in Session*! Even Sudhir Sonalkar, who attacked the theme of violence in Tendulkar’s other plays, admits that “a man who can write a play like *Silence! The Court is in Session* is no mean playwright” and that it is Tendulkar’s best play.

In this earlier works, Tendulkar had dwelt on the woes of the middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment. The change that *Silence! The Court is in Session* brought about was possibly the result of a deep personal experience. The members of a small theatre group one day accosted Tendulkar and requested to be escorted to a place where they were going to stage a mock-trial. The bits of conversation he heard as he guided them to their destination suggested the outline of the play. And, the play is conceived as a game. All that happens on the stage is part-mock and part-earnest. Frivolity and seriousness overlap.

To while away the drowsy afternoon and also to let one of the replacements, Samant, know the intricacies of the court procedure, the members of the drama troupe decide to improvise a new mock-trial other than the one that is to be staged in the evening. Rehearsal of the piece to be performed in the evening is rejected as the play has been performed several times earlier. While one of the actresses, Miss Benare, is away in the wash room, she is chosen as the accused, the charge being “infanticide.” The improvised mock-trial starts, haltingly and comically but before long things take a sinister turn. The “witnesses” become brazenly personal in their references to the “accused.” The distinction between the fictitious accused and the real-life Miss Benare becomes increasingly hard to maintain. She is crushed and trampled while proclaiming all through the play that it is just a game, only a game, sheer game. Thus the play shows “how even in our make-believe world we unconsciously project harsh, brutal reality that often may not be to our liking or edification.”
The first witness Ponkshe accuses Miss Benare of running after men "too much." The second witness Karnik passes the buck to Rokde to see that "the game's got to go on" and Rokde says that he has seen the accused in a compromising situation with Prof Damle in his room at the college hostel one evening. Benare has stiffened at this. Rokde adds that Prof Damle, without letting him come in as he used to do previously, got rid of him. From this evidence, the fourth witness Sukhatme draws the conclusion that her behaviour is "certainly suspicious" Even Samant gives "imaginary" evidence to the effect that he heard the cries of a woman from Prof Damle's room. Feeding his imagination with popular reading fare", Samant reads out a passage from a novel which fits Benare's case, she had a liaison with Prof. Damle who abandoned her after making her pregnant. And, this is included in the "charge-sheet."

Benare is furious at what is going on there in the name of the mock-trial. She says everything told against her is "made up! It's a lie!" and tries to run away. As she pulls the bolt the wrong way, the door does not open and it is locked from outside, "The innocuous latch shuts the group in and", as Kumud Mehta says, "the claustrophobic atmosphere inside becomes the kind of setting where social masks are Shed."5

Even the judge, putting aside the practice of the court, comes and stands in the witness-box to depose. He reveals that Benare is going to be dismissed from her job at the school as she is found to have committed the sin of becoming pregnant outside marriage. The school committee thought it would be immoral to let such a woman teach children. The views of this man, a social worker, sitting in holy judgment upon women like Benare, are certainly prejudiced against women. He does not care to think how the man who ruins Benare's life is protecting the institution of marriage by going out of wedlock for seducing women like Benare. He does not request the Chairman of the School Committee to drop the false case framed against Benare whose private life has nothing to do with her assignment at the school. As the leader of the troupe, he has neither found fault with Prof Damle, a member of the troupe, nor persuaded him to own the child of Benare. Nor has he advised someone else in the troupe to marry her to save her from agony.
His wife, who acts in the social plays advocating eradication of the evils of the society, also does not sympathize with the fallen woman but joins others to throw stones at her. Though she is a woman, she analyzes the problems of women from the “male” point of view only. She does not find fault with Prof Damle for seducing Benare.

Sukhatme, acting the role of the counsel for the accused, surrenders to the court when it does not allow him to cross examine the witnesses for the prosecution. Thus, as the defense lawyer, he represents those legal practitioners who, appearing for the accused, establish underhand dealings with the counsel for the prosecution. Strangely, he assumes the diametrically opposite role of the counsel for prosecution and prays the court to give Benare “the greatest and severest punishment as she has plotted to dynamite the very roots of our tradition, our pride in ourselves, our culture and our religion.” Again, as the defense counsel, while agreeing that the crime of the accused is very serious, he prays the court to have mercy on the accused as “her youth has led her astray.”

When the judge asks Benare to tell the court if she has anything to say about the charges that have been levelled against her, she attacks those who ruined her life and those who have accused her. She says that she has “shut her lips” tight all these years though “storms raged one after another” about her throat and “there was a wail-like death” in her heart. She admits that she was in love with her mother’s brother when she did not know “what sin—was.” He was the first hypocrite she met. He, after enjoying her company, went his way when she insisted on marriage. She tried to kill herself by jumping off the roof. But she did not die. She felt as if her feelings were dead. Her second experience with Prof Damle is still a bitter one. She fell in love, then as a grown-up woman, with “an unusual intellect.” In fact, it was not love again, it was worship. She became pregnant and Prof Damle refused even to own her child and this made her the target of bitter criticism at her place of work in particular and in society in general. She tried in vain to marry someone who was prepared “to take a broad view of things for the sake of humanity, and accept the child along with the mother.” Yet she did not attempt to die this time. She wants her body now for the “tender little bud,” her son. She loves her body now for him alone. She desires that he must
have a mother and a father to call his own. But the court “sentences” the child in her womb to be destroyed while allowing her to live. Benare, writhing, shouts while expressing her indignation at the judgment.

Thus, in the mock-trial, the judge comes down to give evidence as a witness for the prosecution. The counsel for prosecution and the counsel for the accused are rolled into one. The oath taking becomes a mere ritual as the witnesses take oath on a dictionary treating it as the Gita. Listening to the important witnesses is avoided. No cross-examination is attempted by the defense-lawyer. The judgment is based on half-truths and fictitious stories presented by the character-assassinators and scandal-mongers. While Benare loses her job at the school and is punished at the court also, her accomplice, Prof Damle, neither loses his job nor is punished otherwise. This seems to be in conformity with the utterings of the judge caricatured in a cartoon. The judge says to a woman in the court. “My lady, you must realize the constitution was founded by fathers and not mothers”.

Thus, Tendulkar seems to make fun of the judiciary as Bertolt Brecht has done in his play, Exception and the Rule, taking up a different situation. The word “Silence!” in the title of the play appears to be double entendre. While it entails the judge’s orders to maintain silence in the court, it, in fact, implies silencing the innocent party’s crying for justice. As Kumud Mehta points out, Tendulkar’s intention is not to offer easy legal remedies to social problems.

At the same time, the play, as Dyaneshwar Nadkarni aptly says, while switching expertly from the satirical to the tragic, exposes the moral hypocrisy of the orthodoxy. And, it is, as Sudhir Sonalkar puts it, not only about the suppressed sexual violence of our middle class,” but it is more than that. It is about the inner savagery in all of us, and above all, it is a kind of exercise in coming closer to a poetic truth, however ugly. It exposes the people whose “lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases” and whose “bellies are full of unsatisfied desires.”

And, Tendulkar proclaims himself to be morally impartial while depicting his characters and relationships between the exploiter and the exploited, the molester and the molested, the cheat and the cheated. As this so called “moral
impartiality" always errs at the exploiter's end. He is rightly accused of destroying his good, well-meaning characters like Benare of this play.

Also, his critics demand an explanation for the women of his plays and films who, they allege, are one of a kind - women who might have intelligence and the spark of revolt in them, but lose out in the end. They typify defeat. They are static though agitated. Tendulkar, however, does not consider them to be static or beaten:

When the members of my audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or sister in the woman’s position, and come up with a way of changing the situation to her advantage.\(^1\)

This, however, contradicts Kumud Mehta’s claim that Tendulkar refuses to "pin his faith on a change of heart in men."\(^11\)

In the light of this understanding, a consideration of the destiny to which Miss Benare is subjected to by Tendulkar in Silence! The Court is in Session reveals that she should not have been projected at the end of the play as one who sobs, and, in paroxysms of torment, collapses. Before that, she lashes out bravely against those who ruined her life and those who have found fault with her. When the mock-court mercilessly "sentences" the child in her womb to be destroyed, she writhing, protests against the "sentence" by declaring that she will not let it happen. But her strong determination to protect and bring up her "tender little bud," as dramatised in the end, is found at a low ebb. Her courage is displayed as one transformed into a feeble cry. One who, even when cornered altogether, fights against the accepted norms and values is said to catch the eye of Tendulkar\(^12\) but the character of Miss Benare does not exactly comply with this specification. She is shown defeated at the end though she is portrayed as one who is much more enlightened and rebellious than Champa of Tendulkar's another play, Sukharam Binder.

The opening up of the play witnesses the apparition of a bold and desperate Benare, who with a view to cozen the docile villager Samant into a prospective romance (and perhaps marriage), quite uninhibitedly makes audacious
and amatory overtures to him, the degree and frequency of which is further pleas
for emotional unison into rejection. This and many other examples reiterate the
fact of Benare's being inconsistent, freaky and illogical in her behaviour. Several
initial performances of the play were ensured by a hue and cry against the sudden
reversal in the attitude of the protagonist, from that of precocious brashness at the
beginning to servile submission at the end. The accommodation of characteristics
like meekness, flaccidity and flippancy to the vignette of Benare who, in the first
half of the play, is a law unto herself and who by the dint of her unyielding self
assurance and intellectual articulation vanquishes every barb at her kudos, appears
a bit improbable and incompatible with aesthetic coherence and virtuosity of
characterization. The fact which keeps on netting the credibility of the audience is
the total failure of Benare to put up a brave front and to exhibit tenacious
resoluteness to give birth to her offspring, though illegitimate, in the face of the
cacophony of the votaries of habitudes and customs. This seems a plausible
objection at a surface examination in as much as until the end of the second act,
Benare etches an image of being a maverick woman, single handedly turning her
litigants flank by the sleight of her truculence and intelligence, which are both
unusual and impressive. Her reclusive immiscibility, outsmarting eloquence and
the way of repudiating the raper thrusts of her assailants evinces and establishes
her intellectual superiority over others. But from the end of the second act her
intractability and determination are suddenly mollified into docility and courteous
subservience to her encroachers, leading her to mutely accept the invalidity of
verdict on her for the perpetration of the unpardonable crime. The sentence meted
out to her is savage: the infant in her womb must be destroyed; she must lose her
teaching job, her only source of livelihood. That Benare will silently obey the
verdict, is expressed symbolically by Tendulkar in the narration of her condition
at the end of the play. "Benare feebly stirs a little. Then gives up the effort. The
bright green cloth parrot is near her" (p.78)

The green cloth parrot is the symbol of the foetus taking human shape in
her womb but which she would be losing in the due course of time in deference to
the enjoinderment of the fustian value holders of society. An average reader does
have a right to disdain the lack of charisma and unflinching steadfastness in
Benare, but a verily perceptive reader would, in act, sympathize with Benare and
felicitate Tendulkar for his acuity in the cognition as well as effectual rendering of
Benare’s psyche in particular and that of womankind in general. Quoting Betty
Friendan here would definitely throw explanatory light on the problem:

There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our life as
women and the image to which we were trying to confirm, the
image that I came to call that feminine mystique.¹⁴

In her proclivity to take every odious humiliation lying down, Benare
conforms to the image of feminine mystique. Her initial assumption of unyielding
frame of mind and her bardliner responses are nothing but the subversive protests
of the week and marginalized. In fact her personality has been shaped by her
feminine experience in the patriarchal society and more importantly by the
experiences of her predecessors of the same species, which has inculcated in her a
sense of inevitability to the patriarchal discourse. The reason for apparent
contrariness in her lies in her unconscious, which is incessantly functioning and
conditioning her responses. Her adoption of flirtatious posture has got explanation
in her inveterate belief that maternity outside wedlock is deemed abysmal from
the social standpoint and that it can be legitimized only by trapping a man in the
bond of espousal, irrespective of his low brownness and crudity. Her state of mind
is dissected and analyzed with mathematical accuracy by Tendulkar in her
soliloquy in the third act where she says that her son,

... must have a mother, a father to call his own—a house to be
looked after he must have a good name. (p.75).

Thus what rouses Benare to beg for alms of marriage to Samant and the
other men present, as is sweared by them during the trial, is not actually
concupiscence or footloose waywardness but her motherly sensitivity and her
anxiety for the well being of her offspring, her consciousness that a little lisping
bud born of unlawful maternity would never be conceded effervescence in the
garden of insensate rocks. On the other hand her instantaneous and unheimlich
withdrawal springs from her intrinsic fear of undergoing caustic castigation, in
case her infringement gets publicized prior to or after her marriage. Here
Tendulkar has, with masterly skill, used the dramatic technique of split
personality, which has enabled him to show the schism yawning between the rifed heart of Benare, one half of which is fraught with abhorrence for her undoes and the other conversely ingratiating the same entities for succour. The oscillation of rebellious and relinquishing feeling in Benare’s heart instantiates the pathetic condition of women in male- oriented and male dominated society.

Let us peep into the past of her life in order to gauge the forces and factors, which contributed to the formation of her present self. Benare is portrayed as an epicurean, possessing an uncompromising independence of spirit and a natural alacrity for the fullness of living. We get an idea of her modus vivendi when we listen to her statement like:

We should laugh, we should play, we should sing ... Shouldn’t have any false modesty or dignity. Or care for anyone! mean it. 
When your life is over do you think anyone will give a bit of theirs? (p.8)

The gravest of the grave crime that Benare is said to have committed is that she has indiscretely ventured into pure love twice, formerly without endeavouring to know the name of the relationship and later without caring to give the relationship a name. In fact, if we get down to the bedrock of her temperament, we would realize that the stretch of her life following her age of recognition was punctuated by a ceaseless hungering for a cozy and love laden life, enshrouded by tepidity of emotion, mutual understanding and wholesome affection. Her fantastic desire is verbalized in her comment upon the relationship of the Kashikars.

.... They are both so full of life! I mean Mr. Kashikar buys garlands for Mrs. Kashikar. Mrs. Kashikar buys ready made bush shirts for Mr. Kashikar. It really makes one feel nice to see it. (p.12)
This spontaneous *joie de vivre* drove her to get enmeshed in liaison with her maternal uncle who came close to her in the prime of her unfolding youth, extolling her blossoming pulchritude to the sky and giving her fervid love. She reminisces her naivete.

How was I to know that if you feel like breaking yourself into bits and melting into one with someone—if you feel that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life—and if he was your uncle, it was a sin! Why I was hardly fourteen. (p.74)

She insisted on marriage so that she could live her "beautiful dreams openly". But how can this be carried Out in a blindly conservative society when her brave man turned tail and ran away. Out of sheer disconcertation she attempted to embrace death in order to obviate the stigma gradually ravaging her conscience, but the luring arms of life once again beckoned her. Life instinct preponderated over her death wish and it did not take her resurgent spirit long to sway her once again into an appreciably sacrosanct love relationship tantamount to worship of her ‘intellectual god!, Professor Damle. She offered her body on the altar of her worship, but much to her charging her lord took the offering and went his way after inseminating budding life in her. She wails:

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. (p.75)

Thus Damle turns out to be a lascivious wolf, masqueraded as human being whose squall of desire washes away the honour and self respect of poor Benare. And it is in appreciation of her silent suffering and her demure reluctance to fabricate spurious stories to make the circumstances operate in her favour and of her firm resolve to sanguinely walk down the thoroughfare of her future that she is saddled with inordinate penance. The irony of Benare’s life is that in spite of despising her body she could not reject it and in spite of loving it she could not accept it. It would definitely strike the minds of the discretionary that in both the cases Benare, a women is held responsible for the conjointly perpetrated act of social trespass, while the male counterparts are allowed to get away scot - free and
further gallivant with impunity. The submissive stance that she has embraced is the result of the age-old conditioning which women have interminably undergone and which has now assumed statutory gravity in that, now the women have come to indubitably believe in the axiomatic truth of the radiance that whatever is done by men is not a sin and it is in cowering under the peremptory patriarchs that their welfare lies.

Right from the post Vedic age women have been undergoing unremitting persuasion to fish out her well-being from sincere basking under the tutelage of superior males, none but who can be the mascots of their lives, capable of charting the itinerary of their definite salvation, as is echoed in the verse an Indian woman would recite at the first step of Saptapadi.

The sage Manu has also commodified the existence of women, imparting her a secondary moment on the score of her utility to the male which ultimately boils down to procreation and sexual gratification.

Procreation, upbringing the progeny and following the rituals of life, are directly contingent upon the women.15

Even the sapient like Kalidasa and his followers have bestowed to woman the status of a minion who is constantly required to magnify the competencies and to boost up his ego and conversely to diminish her skill and to smother her discreet sense of justice. in Abhijnanasakuntala didacticism of Kanka is revealing, “.... Do not comport in obstinate manner towards your husband, in a fit of anger, even if he insults you.”16

Thus the line of demarcation between the woman and marionette disappeared in the course of several ages and they became supplementary appendages to the lives of men, chock-a-block with activities, goals and destination, all of which became ignis fatuus for the woman. Deprived of the right of autonomy and self-governance, of scope and opportunities for development, she came to discover the significance of her life in cultivating her self, pursuant to the expectations, aspirations and decrees of men. All the above quoted injunctions and many more have egregiously steered the woman to deem the unconscionable
effigy carved out for her role as definitive and irrevocably correct. The impression has been so deeply engraved upon her mind that she literally fails to give her desire for remonstration a sharp edge of action even after taking umbrage at patriarchal discriminations; in fact it quite unwittingly casts her into the mould, congruent with masculine criteria. As a result of the impersonation of female psyche, the quintessential nature of the woman still borders on tenterhooks. Elizabeth Cady rightly remarked:

Thus far women have been mere echoes of men. Our laws and constitutions, our creeds and codes, and customs of social life are all of masculine origin. The true woman is yet a dream of future.¹⁷

Tendulkar casts light on the middle class life, where he puts his finger on their unconscious and well developed habits, inquisitive way of living, logical thinking power multifarious activities, middleclass mentality and self created problems. Quite minutely, he unfolds everything, like their addiction of pan, beedi and cigarette. He succeeds to bring out the middle class mentality in his dramatic narrative. His genuine concern for intensely examination originates from his better understanding of society. As a result he is strictly monitor of the peculiar idiosynrasy of human mind. The eternal essence of this play is the bewildering complexity of modern society.

As one would expect, this is a touching story about Leela Benare, a school teacher, who is at the centre of this play. This is about her life, her outspoken views and thoughtful attitude towards life and society. In fact this is remarkably similar to everyone. She is an ordinary woman, who belongs to middle class family. This familiar material, the playwright places in our hands in a dramatic way by his magic touch of human colours of pain and pleasure and by the pen of critic and censor. But this story is a conscious equilibrium of his deep experience. He keeps watch on the bread and butter by open eyes, ears and heart and puts before the audiences. But that raises the baffling issue of the unbearable suffering of Benare. This is a firm evidence of his genuine compassion towards the middle class.
As a result the playwright is incorporated in their present-day world. He sets apart "his direct import of sex, violence and other forms of crudity on the stage." He is consciously conscious of disturbing atmosphere, which pervades straightens out in their life. In an Introduction of the play Kumud Mehta observes, "Acutely conscious of the violent impulses behind a respectable facade and of the overwhelming compulsions of sex, he could place his discoveries within a recognizably Indian context, essentially middle class, and rooted."

Hence their world is bursting by ruthless suppression and monstrous injustice. All these matters cause to sound, in his plays like the uninterrupted continuity. His personal experiences get to be a great force. That is concerned with the twists and turns of human behaviour. Consequently this play is a sharp and strong criticism on the human mentality and society.

Benare, an innocent being holds a deep faith in human goodness. Consequently she easily turns into a helpless victim of the dignified mask of the society. She is a living embodiment of blameless purity. She has not mental courage to hurt anybody. She frankly admits, "If I’ve hurt anybody, it’s been myself" (p.5). She is a truly honest and significantly transparent, but sound firm on her tough decisions in life. She never asks for anything to anybody, because she is remarkably confident, to be able to walk on this planet without anybody’s direct or indirect assistance. As a result she discloses, "I earn my own living" (p.14). She breaks an arm to take a look around the true reality of her world by her endless effort. This is the peculiar characteristic of middle class that never moves out of track and whose life is fabricated by their daily activities and basic needs, so Benare’s.

The playwright places in our hands a beautiful character of Benare, who is a genuinely representative of middle class family life and an innocent victim of the cultured society of intellectuals and a galaxy of characters. "Being a journalist by profession, his plays have been inspired by just everything around him: real life experiences, hearsay, news items, films, other plays and literature in general". But basically he brings the character of Benare from the poem of Mrs Shirish Pai. In fact he projects Benare as an innocent and beautiful girl, who is translated into the basic cause of her utmost destruction. In our times, the
playwright serves to put forth a prominent display of the day-to-day affairs and profound influence of moral values or samskara for the better tomorrow.

The personal enquiries give rise to the burdensome existence of Benare in the cultured society, which recites the high-sounding creed in new morality. It gets to be immensely difficult to lead a normal life. Her world is turned into a horrid hell, where she is unable to carry her forward looking vision and optimistic attitude. This beautiful earth turns out in the dark room in her blooming age. Hence she attempts suicide. But the playwright meditates over the affair against the chaotic backdrop, in order to bring eternal peace, great solace and complete tranquility in life of human being, who is innocent as well ignorant.

Besides, a teacher by heart, Benare, who is leading her life in the maddening frustration. She opines:

My children will do anything for me. For I’d give the last drop of my blood to teach them ... That’s why people are jealous. Specially the other teachers and the management” (p.4)

This is the irritable state of quite sincere and truly honest teacher, of course human being.

The baseless charges against Benare are not based on the actual fact. Mr.Kashiokar, the judge, puts the serious charge of infanticide under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code. But everyone, including Sukhatme, the lawyer deals with making the blind eye towards the woman and her unfavourable circumstances. Sukhatme delivers a strongly worded speech in the court, which is the spontaneous reflection of male dominated society. He bursts, “infanticide is a dreadful act. But bring up the child of an illegal union is certainly more horrifying. Woman bears the grave responsibility of building up the high values of society. ‘Na stri swatantryamarhati’. ‘Woman is not fit for independence’... That is the rule laid down for us by tradition” (p.71).

The judge and the lawyer get the unique opportunity of disclosing their extensive knowledge due to the case of Benare. They monitor the true greatness of
motherhood, and how Benare is the dark stain on the motherhood. Sukhatme perceives:

Motherhood is pure. Moreover, there is a great-era great nobility in our concept of motherhood. We have acknowledged woman as the mother of mankind. Our culture enjoins us to perpetual worship of her. ‘Be thy mother as a god’ is what we teach our children from infancy. There is great responsibility devolving upon a mother. She weaves a magic circle with her whole existence in order to protect and preserve her little one (p.30).

Surprisingly Kashikar also recites the Sanskrit proverb about mother and motherland. This play sets forth true depiction of Indian motherhood. Here the playwright becomes an appreciator of human values and morality.

Accordingly the play moves around Benare. Actually it is the blood thirsty game, where herself traps her. But she turns out to be exceedingly grave, and breaks with the past that it is the game. But that harmonizes with potentially troublesome experience to her. This play regards carefully to the miserable plight of Benare and society is trusted towards the labyrinth. Hence the entire life is converted into the labyrinth of unexpected turns and twists, where she is reformed to the true philosopher of life. Her bitter experiences put her on the sardonic edge of life. She ruminates, “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 betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug. Life is drudgery. Life is a something that’s nothing-or a nothing that’s something” (p.33).

Benare brings into the open her hateful anger against life and the people, who are willing to throw into dustbin of malicious gossips. Her mounting aloneness is of the soul that precipitates her from crisis to crisis, which born within her. She institutes an enquiry: 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. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those - no one! do what I like with myself and my life! I’ll decide.... (p.5)
She is in widespread distress by the social atrocities and casts down all the man-made barriers laid down by society. She has a mighty passion for to be free like a bird, who wings its way in an open sky, in an open air. Henare commits herself her own way of life by spearheading it under her own steam. She proclaims, "I, Leela Henare, 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." (p.8) It gets forth that life is; for the sake of life that is the valuable asset of every individual. She entertains a deep-rooted belief; everybody is creator as well as destructor of their own life. This play is a close study of life led by an innocent.

Truly speaking, love and marriage bring to the fore active roles in everybody’s life, like Henare’s. Even Samant informs her, he is still unmarried. In the court Sukhatme beats his brain to convince that how she presses Rokde to marry her. But she was passionately eager to marry her maternal uncle, when she was in love. She was under the strong impression that marriage with maternal uncle contributes to “beautiful lovely dream openly” (p.74). But her family members were against that marriage. Even her maternal uncle also left her alone due to the enormous pressure of family members and society, without slight caring of her mind. As a result marriage builds up utter disgust in her mind. But everyone amuses her charming company for sake of her body.

As might be expected the pregnancy is also Henare’s unfortunate and unintentional but serious mistake that is committed unconsciously, in love. That brings into miserable existence “like a block of stone, drained of colour and totally desolate.” (p.60) It fades away the vibrant colour of life. Everyone files a strong bid to mock her in the court by their speculative imagination. All the basic charges and proved evidences are based on dark clouds of suspicion. The lawyer makes a reference to the names of those people, whom she was in close contact. It turns out the great joke. Henare ironically offers to give the list of those people, whom she met alone. It refers to that entire legal system exercises its adverse influence to humiliate her without concrete evidence. The playwright gets an unfavourable opinion of something in the lifelong interest of the society and is the curious explorer, who seeks to bring the new dawn.
Her life is translated into a heavy debt:

My life was a burden to me..... But when you can’t lose it, you realize the value of it. You realize the value of living. You see what happiness means. How new, how wonderful every moment is! Even you seem new to yourself. (p.72)

Benare knows all the ins and outs that the intellectuals in cultured society are morally bankrupt and passionate lovers of her body. Here sex gets in on the act a vital role that is born as modern love. She discloses the so-called “cultured men of the twentieth century” (p.74), whose “lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And, their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires” (p.74). Again she commits the same mistake by falling in love that strikes someone as everything to her. She is in a brown study this love will be essentially different one.

Again the references of Prof Damle and Nanasaheb Shinde add the needless suspicion about Benare, who confesses that her delicate relationship with her maternal uncle, who later escaped from the responsibilities. She holds “like smashing his face in public and spitting on it! (p.74). Lawyer Sukhatme convinces, her heinous act is a “blot on the sacred brow of motherhood-which is purer than heaven itself.” (p.70). He is of the biased opinion that it is “bankrupt of morality”(p.70-71) and her “conduct has blackened all social and moral values” (p.71), she is “public enemy number one” (p.71). He puts thoughts into words his childish fear that the society will be destroyed if it cannot control in time.

Through this play, the playwright throws light on the human mentality. Because everybody drives for to seduce Benare, but unfortunately no one cannot understand her. Even a person like Kashikar flings off regarding grown up unmarried girl, “... A sinful canker on the body of society.” (p.67-68) These are the intellectuals of the cultured society. But the playwright cherishes a belief in the equality of the sexes.
This play brings forward the emotional world of Beunre. The continuous stress and enormous strain set her on the edge and to the roots. When she is face to face with death in a unique spirit of profound meditation she concludes:

...life is no straightforward thing. People can be so cruel. Even your flesh and blood don't want to understand you. Only one thing in life is all-important the body! You may deny it, but it is true. Emotion is something people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. It was burning through me (p.73).

Tendulkar scans the entire human affairs and scrutinizes human nature. Every character in the play leads a life for sake of life. Samant, who cannot identify the difference between his finger and his thumb Mr Karnik, "a man of the modern theatre!" (p.15); Ponkshe, "the scientist in the witness-box!" (p.8) expresses positively; "In this scientific age, it's fun to get everything at the last minute, without effort." (p.13) Mrs Kashikar, "Mrs Hand that-Rocks-theCradle (p.6), is an excellent housewife. Mr. Kashikar brings her garlands for her, and she brings ready-made bush-shirt. That is what the life of these characters. The playwright watches like a hawk life as a realist, who corrects our tastes and tries to bring on the right track of humanity. This play is in serious vein, but we put our fingers on fun and comic humour.

To put the whole in view Tendulkar's dramatization bears the great authenticity of human beings genuine signature. He casts back labyrinthine complexities of contemporary life and puts in black and white agonizing torture and emotional trauma of human being. He marks out his multifaceted creativity from the middle class society with who he is in close touch. This play is not a running social commentary, but it is about a woman, who is in search of meaningful life. This play brings face to face a relentless imagination of a woman in metropolitan society, where she battles her way to sustain in an emotional equilibrium. This is a sensitive expression of the humanistic attitude as a social determinant. This play is a distinct product of metropolitan social scenario and is an almost endeavour of setting forth the metropolitan life of common persons with unprecedented predicament of modern man, who is burdened by affairs of the
society. The leit-motif of the story is placed in the butchering of the human sensibility. This play makes a clean breast of comprehensive expression of human experience. But all these facets designate Tendulkar is a visionary and innovative playwright. He is more than a critic, who has given priority to the supreme importance to human sensibility. He analyzes the courses of pleasurable pains and painful pleasures. His plays have shined again his moral sensibility with common people. As a result one would believe he is a critic and censor of the humanity of our times.

As a playwright, he has dwelt on all aspects of urban life in Indian cities. He has delineated the alienation of the modern individual, satirized contemporary politics, depicted social and individual tensions, portrayed the complexities of human character and exploited man-woman relationship. Significantly, the themes, which have engaged his most frequent attention, have been the plight of women in the male dominated urban middle-class society. Tendulkar's creative genius, sharpened by his keen observation and seasoned by his journalistic experience, has found explosive expression in his powerful plays which sensitize the reader-audience to the domestic-socio-political tensions in the Indian urban milieu. Gowri Ramanarayanan rightly observes, "With his exposure to Marathi theatre from childhood, and journalistic background, Vijay Tendulkar turned contemporary socio-political situations into explosive drama."

Vijay Tendulkar's plays can be divided into two categories-those that preceded Silence! The Court is in Session and those that followed it. In the plays that Tendulkar wrote prior to Silence! The Court is in Session the focus, by and large, is on the sufferings of middle class man living in an urban society. In these plays, Tendulkar treats his 'little big man', namely the average man of the middle class milieu, with compassion, and does not bother to subject him to a thorough psychological analysis. Referring to this fact, Kumud Mehta says, "In his earlier works he [Vijay Tendulkar] had dwelt on the woes of the middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment. Silence! The Court is in Session 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 his subject's psyche, and focus his attention on the ugliness he detected
therein. He has made every effort to carry on this psychological analysis of his characters, ever since.

In Tendulkar's plays, generally, women are at the centre. It is around women that most of the action revolves. The roles Tendulkar's female protagonists play eclipse those played by the men figuring in them. It is Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Sarita in *Kamala, Laxmi in Sakharum Binder*, and Vijaya in *Encounter in Umbagland*, who play the leading roles presenting a world apparently dominated by male chauvinists. And the dramatic action in these plays gain in intensity mainly because of the presence of women figuring in them. These women are efficient and refuse to be cowed down by men. We can see that 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. So all these plays can justifiably be defined as gynocentric.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a gynocentric play. Leela Benare of *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a school teacher who is as sprightly, rebellious and assertive as the heroines of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, as some critics have observed. 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" (p.59). 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. Mr. Kashikar is the chairman of the association while Mrs. Kashikar is a housewife who follows her husband like a meek shadow. Balu Rokde is a college student whose education is taken care of by the childless Kashikars. Sukhatme is a lawyer and Ponkshe is a clerk in the Central Telegraph Office. Karnik is an actor in the experimental theatre with pretensions of being an expert on 'Intimate Theatre'. Damle is a professor who plays a key-role in the action of the play, though not physically present.

Benare's conversation with Samant, the villager, centres round her career as a teacher who is "so much better than adults" (p.56) When she makes this
observation, she has Professor Damle in her mind— and the reader-audience realize this fact in the course of the play, especially when she says:

At least they don’t have the blind pride of thinking they know everything. There’s no nonsense stuffed in their heads. They don’t scratch you till you bleed, then run away like cowards. (p.57).

She goes on to tell him that the management of her school is holding an enquiry against her “just because of one bit of slander” (p.58), ignoring the fact that she is in the presence of a stranger, who is in no way connected with her present plight. She bursts out placing her hand on her swelling stomach and continues her trade:

Throw me out? Let them! I haven’t hurt anyone. Anyone at all! If I’ve hurt anybody, it’s been myself. But is that any kind of reason for throwing me out? 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. My Wishes are my own. No one can kill those - no one! (p.58).

Benare, now, begins to provide Samant with additional information about her co-actors. For instance, she sarcastically refers to Mr. Kashikar as “Mr. Prime Objective” (SC 59) and Mrs. Kashikar as “Mrs. Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle” (SC 59). She says: “Mr. Prime Objective is tied up with uplifting the masses. And poor Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle has no cradle to rock” (SC 59). Benare also informs Samant that the childless Kashikars have adopted Balu Rokde in order to escape their boredom in life, and in the process, have made a slave of the poor fellow:

Mr. Kashikar and the Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle, in order that nothing should happen to either of them in their bare, bare house and that they shouldn’t die of boredom gave shelter to a young boy. They educated him .... Made a slave out of him. (p.59).

Benare’s description of her colleagues is punctuated with shrewdness and sarcasm. She refers to Sukhatne as “an Expert on the law” (p.59). Ironically, “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!" (p.59). Ponkshe, to her, is "a ... Scientist: Intcr-failed!" (p.59). Benare, then prophesies that Professor Damle, one of the actors of the troupe, will not dare to come:

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. He's not here today. Won't be coming, either. He won't dare! (p.60).

Professor Damle's inability to join them on the occasion, and Rokde's absence due to his sudden illness, force them to accept Samant, the villager, as the fourth witness in the play, they propose to stage in Samant's village. Mrs. Kashikar suggests a rehearsal with Samant. Arrangements are now being made to stage a 'mock trial'. At Sukhatme's suggestion, they all decide to frame Benare as the accused in the 'mock trial'. At the end of act 1, to her shock Benare is suddenly and seriously accused of a grave crime, and Kashikar, the judge of the 'Mock Lawcourt' asks Benare: "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?" (p.74).

On hearing this sudden charge, Benare is stunned, and the entire atmosphere becomes extraordinarily somber and tense. Ironically enough, this so-called illusive 'mock-trial', 'the play-within-the-play', slowly but steadily, grows into a serious affair, with the promise of some enormously sadistic kind of pleasure to Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Balu Rokde and Mrs. Kashikar, as the audience are to realize later in the course of the play.

'The play within the play', namely, the 'mock-trial' is so conceived and executed that the 'make-believe' or 'illusion' itself assumes the garb of reality. The 'mock-trial' originally designed as a means to pass time, eventually, becomes a real trial at which Benare's private life is ruthlessly exposed, much to the malicious glee of her male tormentors. The introduction of Samant, the villager, in the play is an instance of Tendulkar's masterly stroke as a dramatic genius as Benar's presence, and role expose effortlessly the cruelty and violence in the
urbanites of Bombay, by throwing them into relief. During the mock trial Ponkshe admits that Benare is a woman who “runs after Men too much” (p.81). Further, Karnik, the next witness, is persuaded to confess the fact that Rokde has seen Benare in “a compromising situation” (p.85). Rokde tells Sukhatme that he saw Benare in Professor Damle’s hostel room.

Samant has been watching the scene intently out of sheer enthusiasm to play his role of the fourth witness. When called to depose, he, however, says: “Of course, what’s true for the trial is quite false really” (p.89). Samant answers Sukhatme’s questions, looking as a novel and assuming that all that occurs there is only a ‘mock-trial’. Ironically, what he reads from the book, a cheap novel he carries with him, fits in with what Benare has recently undergone in Professor Damle’s room on that fateful night, when the learned Professor refused to accept her despite knowing that he had been responsible for the pregnancy, for fear of losing his own reputation. A tense and stunned Benare, who has remained mute up to that moment, suddenly asks Samant to stop saying, “That’s enough.” (p.93) She says, “It’s all a lie! A complete lie!” (p.93). She turns around and accuses all of them saying “You’ve all deliberately upon me! You’ve plotted against me!” (p.93).

Evidence after evidence is piled up against Benare. Kashikar in his role as the ‘mock-judge’, asks Benare if she has anything to say in defense. And, the motionless Benare stands up erect and says: “Yes, I have a lot to say” (p.116). What follows is a fairly long monologue by Benare, wrongly referred to by some critics as ‘Soliloquy’, punctuated with her sighs, moans and groans.

Benare, in the monologue, accuses all men as ‘hypocrites’ whose only interest is in her body and not in her bleeding heart or agonized mind. Commenting on her co-actors, she observes:

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. (p.117)
Writhing in pain, Benare goes on to reveal that Professor Damle, the “unusual intellect” exploited her hero-worship and when she offered to him her own body on the altar of worship, “my intellectual god took the offering and went his way” (p.118). Benare mumbles feebly:

“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!” (p.118). Kashikar, the judge of the “mock-trial”, tells her that she has tried to “dynamite” (p.118) social customs and the sacredness of marriage and motherhood and, hence, deserves no mercy. Moreover, as a teacher, she has set a very bad example, by daring to conceive a child out of wedlock. Therefore, the sentence meted out to her by him is that she must destroy the foetus in her womb.

On hearing Kashikar’s cruel verdict, Benare writhes in intolerable pain and cries: "No! No! No! I won’t let you do it-I won’t let it happen-I won’t let it happen!” (p.119). She approaches the stool meant for the defense counsel, sits on it and collapses with her head on the table. Only stifled sobs emanate from her now. Silence reigns the room now.

The play is thus a satire on the conventions and hypocrisy of the middle-class male-dominated society which is concerned only with a farcical moral code. It is Benare’s fear of such a code that makes her crave for marriage and forces her to beg the inferior men around, one after another, to marry her in order to play the ‘role’ of a ‘father’ to her child. Benare’s final collapse is unexpected and it leaves the audience with a feeling of pity and horror.

It is significant that most of Tendulkar’s plays are gynocentric. Moreover, as a playwright, he seems often to be on the side of feminists, for, he projects women as victims of chauvinistic oppression. The males figuring in his art emerge as puerile creatures; for, he portrays them as embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery. Among them are people 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. Thus, we find Benare of Silence! The Court is in Session being mercilessly harassed by her own co-actors.
The central theme of Vijay Tendulkar's drama *Silence! The Court is in Session* is the plight and predicament of a woman whose bodily wealth is plundered by a gang of selfish men. It is the story of one Miss Leela Benare, a dutiful and punctual school teacher, who becomes the victim of the carnal lust of some men who seldom take care of her modesty and her ardent wish to live a peaceful and domestic life of the husband and wife. In technique, the play is artistically structured and contains almost all the features of a modern problem play. Some of the images and symbols of this book are highly suggestive. They speak volumes of things in a nutshell.

The play opens with the ridicules and banter of the characters of the actual play. The real play is scheduled to be staged in the night. The characters have a lot of time to kill. So, they want to rehearse the actual drama. A mock trial is staged in which a woman is put to trial for her offence of infanticide. Miss Benare has to perform the role of this woman. All the members of the troupe except Prof. Damle are present. At first the trial begins with humorous posture, ridicules, laughter and caricature. But in the third act, the play becomes more grave and critical. Miss Benare reveals her secret. She exposes the hypocrisy of some men who uprooted her plant of life. She tells how she was deflowered by her own maternal uncle at the age of fourteen:

Why, I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was I swear by my mother. I didn't! I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful dreams openly. Like anyone else! But all of them - my mother too - were against it. And my brave man turned tail and ran.

After this traumatic experience she felt like a fish out of water. She wanted to commit suicide, but she didn't. She searched for an identity of her own in an entirely adverse society where men have little love for women; where men are hungry for the bodily pleasures of women. In spite of her previous error, once again she falls in love with Prof. Damle. But now this love is not unconscious and ignorant as it was with her maternal uncle. But this new life again deserts her. She narrates:
Again I fell in love. As a grown woman, I threw all my heart into it. I thought this will be different. This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It is not love at all—its worship! But it was the same mistake, I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my god took the offering and went his way. He didn't want my mind, or my devotion—he didn't care about them! He was not a god. He was a man, for everything was the body, for the body! That is all.

Thus, this is a tragic story of the plight of a woman who is facing an identity crisis in a male dominated patriarchal framework where even women are not helpful to women rather they needle and pinpoint in the hour of critical juncture of the protagonist. This piteous predicament reminds us of Arundhati Roy’s Booker Prize winning book The God of Small Things in which Ammu; the protagonist, has to move from pillar to post and has to face various trials and tribulations, cares and anxieties without any rhyme or reason. It also reminds us of the various women characters of Shashi Deshpande who have to bear the brunt of silent suffering engendered by the cruel and callous society - mostly dominated by men.

The play also deals with the latent violence and prejudice towards women in the middle class psyche. Kashikar and Sukhatme in Silence! The Court is in Session, Jaisingh Jadav in Kamala, Ramakant and Umakant in The Vultures represent the violent and disgruntled characters. They turned violent and deviated because of their respective failure in the life. In the Silence! The Court is in Session, the worst sufferer is a woman, Miss Benare who has to be the victim of men’s lust and prejudice: Her incestuous relation with her maternal uncle creates a sense of life-long trauma in the psyche of the heroine. She recalls:

I was in love with my mother's brother. But in our strict house in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. He praised my bloom everyday. He gave me love...how was I to know... if you felt that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life and if he was your uncle, it was a sin! I did not even know what sin was.... I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dream openly. But the height of this tragedy lies in the cold attitude of the mother of the
protagonist who turned a deaf ear to the innocent and ignorant adolescent. This shows that the real enemy of a suffering woman in society is not only the social taboos, customs, rites and male chauvinism but also the indifferent and cold treatment of a woman towards a woman. The same type of gender discrimination of a woman towards a woman can be seen in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* in which Ammu, the female protagonist has to bear the brunt of the castigating remarks and acidic taunts of Baby Kochamma, the villainous female character. It also reminds us of so many woman characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desia, Shobha De, Manju Kapoor and a number of other women novelists in English.

Miss Leela Benare commits her incestuous relation in an ignorant stage charmed under a Juvenile frenzy. But when she comes of age she commits a conscious and adult bodily relation with Prof. Damle whom she worshipped as a god. But this god took the offering of her body and turned his back to her. This dissertation and humiliation was unbearable to a forsaken woman who is in the constant search of an identity of a married woman. In spite of all these unbearable physical and mental tortures and humiliations, she doesn’t surrender; rather wants to lead a life, a new life. But some men in society are jealous of her. They always taunt and jeer at her. In the very beginning of the play, we see their taunts and jeers. Even Mrs. Kashikar is not an exception. Being a woman she does not even help the helpless Benare. But Miss Benare is the perfect character who leads her life as a whole forgetting all her previous traumatic experiences:

Benare: Forget about the Sage Tukaram. I say it-I Leela Benare, a living woman, I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It is your own life. It must be It’s very, very important thing, every moment, every bit of it is precious.25

The story takes a serious turn in the last act in which we see how a helpless bird (Miss Leela Benare) is surrounded by the hungry vultures (the other characters). We also notice the manifestation of physical violence when Rokde is asked to conduct the accused, Miss Benare, to the witness box. Mrs. Kashikar drags her very roughly and rudely to the witness box. Benare, on the other hand is dumb-founded. She is unable to speak anything. This shows how a progressive
woman has to face several hazards and obstacles silently. Despite several unbecoming reprimands, she does not answer any of their rubbish question “Why is she unmarried?”

It is interesting to note here that Mrs. Kashikar represents here a traditional housewife who has nothing to do with the progressive and modern attitude of a young girl in the modern scientific world. She thinks that her whole life is the family in which she is brought up and for which happiness she has to lead a future life. But on the other hand, Miss Benare represents a progressive, educative and changing life. She wants to come out from the clutches of a patriarchal domination. She wants to lead a life of her own—a life which is free from the conservative norms of society. She is like Shelley’s ‘winged seeds’, that want to bloom and sprout; but they are covered with the ‘dead leaves’ or the ‘sapless foliage’. To change the metaphor, she is an ‘unextinguished hearth’ where the sparks of her attitude and wish to live a new married life has been subdued by the ashes of the rotten codes and norms of the society. And in this respect what hinders most in the smooth way of a progressive woman is no one but a woman in particular and other societal codes in general.

Except the protagonist of the play, almost all the other characters are suffering from sadism and inferiority complex. They are hedonistic ramblers. Sukhatme is a flop lawyer. Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar has no issues; they are childless. Ponkshe is an Inter failed scientist. So far Karnik is concerned, he is a failed actor. The same is the case with Rokde too, who failed to gain an independent existence. In other words, they have no identity of their own. Somehow or the other they live in a city by organizing a theatre group dedicated to the ideals and norms of society. But Benare is an earring woman who works as a school teacher and does her duty with devotion and discipline. She is the only one in the group who earns her own living. At one occasion she taunts Mr. Kashikar for her independence on her husband:

Benare: (laughing heartily) - The garland flew away—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?”
She also flings irony on the illiteracy and immaturity of Balu Rokde: "Speak Balu, speak. A-B-C" (p. 86). These taunts and jeers flung by a woman made the men folk angry and desperate. Consequently they gang up to humiliate Miss Benare through the garb of a mock stage play. They even go to the extent of dissecting her private life concerning her illicit relation, abortion and her lascivious temperament. Though a thorough study of the book shows that the protagonist Miss Benare is a perfect character—a character who does her duty well: a character who searches for her lost identity in male dominated adverse society; a woman who, though commits a blunder in her juvenile frenzy, wants to lead a life of a married couple. But there are some people both men and women in society who take interest in torturing her without any rhyme or reason. They want to treat her like an object. Their attitude to Miss Benare is very near to what Emilia in Shakespearean tragedy, Othello says:

It is not a year or two shows us a man they are all but stomachs, and we all but food. They eat us hungrily, and when they are full they belch us.28

Well, Miss Benare is a silent sufferer. She has a great patience to suffer. She is the embodiment of innocence and compassion. Though she is victimized at every step, she has done harm to none. If she did harm to anybody, it is her own self. Prof. Daniel has an illicit relation with her to shake her sexual thirst. But just after quenching his carnal desires and making her pregnant, he deserts her. But in spite of all these things, she has no ill-will against him. Mr. Ponkshe says:

No, first she said, 'Please don't call him a scoundrel. He may be a good man. He may be very great and wise.' She may have fallen short. She may not have been able to convince him how deeply she feels for him. The woman is not the crucial factor. It is the baby that comes first.29

The plight and plunder of a helpless woman has been best expressed in the apt placements of irony in the play. In this play, Miss Benare has been given the role of a prisoner. But truly speaking it is not Miss Benare who is the prisoner; she is free from the fear of society. She has her own will. But the other characters are
really prisoners as they are not free from their pretensions, hypocrisy, mental disorders, inferiority complexes, so on and so forth. The term 'silence' is itself ironic. At first it shows the silence of the court, which must be maintained at any cost as the decorum of the court demands. But one sees that the culprits are very vocal and impulsive while the protagonist is silent at first. But when the false speeches and untruthful impositions of the lawyers and other actors cross the limit of decorum and decency of a court and the private life of a woman, the rebellious woman in Benare explodes and does a great havoc making all the listeners dumb-founded. It is the last speech of her, which may be called the heart of the play. This speech has been very consciously and thoughtfully constructed by the skilled playwright. It has been woven into the fabric of art and literature, irony and pathos. She says:

But I was ignorant. I threw myself off a parapet of our house to embrace death. But I didn’t die. My body didn’t die! I felt as if feelings were dead— but they had not died either then.\(^a\)

The role of the judge in this play is itself ironic. A judge is generally free from prejudice and whimsical utterings. He is frank and candid. But here the case of the judge is just the otherwise. Kashikar, the Judge says a Sanskrit proverb: “Janani Janma Bhumishecha Svaragadapi Gariyasi.”. But here his speech has no correspondence with his deeds. It is a great irony that what he did as a judge is not to respect the motherhood but to abuse and insult a woman the embodiment of motherhood and innocence. It is also the mockery of the court that when Miss Benare wants to speak, she is prevented from doing so by the words of the judge “Silence” or “order, order.” It is a height of irony that her speech, though full of reality and truth is debarred while the other unbecoming and unwanted interruptions are overlooked and sometimes encouraged out of sadistic feelings. The harsh irony also lies in the fact that the main culprit must be present in the court so as to do proper justice. But Prof. Damle, who is the main culprit, is not present in the court, which shows his serious involvement in the case.

Thus, this brief survey of the play shows that the play is beset with various examples of plights and plunders deliberately engendered by the terrible monsters of the society. Here the plight of woman is not simply working on the physical
ground but it is deep rooted to the psychological torturing to a forsaken woman who is constantly searching for an anchor to cover the misdeeds and injustices of the male folk. It is the realistic exposure of the hypocrisy, pretensions and male chauvinism of some self-centered people who treat woman like flowers in their pot or to change a bitter metaphor, they quench their bodily thirst like a lascivious animal and then desert her to her own fate. This animality or even worse than animality in this play seems to fling an unpalatable irony on our rich cultural heritages where women are worshipped as a deity and imagined as a great source of fertility and heavenly values of life.
REFERENCES

8. Sonalkar. 20.
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