

## *CHAPTER - II*

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### Psychological Trauma of Leela Benare

*Silence! The Court is in Session*, of Vijay Tendulkar is a part of New Indian English Drama to ‘break the silence’ of women protagonists against oppression and injustice. The focus of the play *Silence!* is on the ‘Vulnerability of women in our society.’ Vijay Tendulkar places in the hands of readers a beautiful character, Leela Benare, who is a genuine representative of the middle class family.

Leela Benare as a schoolteacher is dedicated to her profession and exhibits autonomy in actions and choices. She feels that her life is her own and no one has the rights to interfere in it. She is self-reliant and leads her life in her own free way. She is a bold woman with infinite zest of life. But she is a victim of male’s carnal lust for flesh or body. The play moves with Leela Benare’s unpredictable and unfortunate fate where society acknowledges only the power and position of man.

The play throws light on a woman’s victimization due to men’s lust and prejudice. Leela Benare’s maternal uncle seduces her, when she is barely fourteen years old. She is hardly aware of the social codes: “Why, I was hardly fourteen: I did not know what sin was – I swear by mother, I didn’t! I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful lovely dream openly. Like everyone else! But all of them-my mother too-were against it. And brave man turned tail and ran . . .” (117).

Tendulkar focuses on man-woman relationship in a different dimension. The incestuous relationship between Leela Benare and her maternal uncle is shocking. His place is second to father. But her uncle praises her bloom every day, shows his love to her and misleads her to a social crime of incest. So the exploitation begins with her uncle

who exploits her sexually in her teenage. To top the torture, even her mother fails to understand and support her. The mother reacts in a different manner. As she is a woman bound in tradition, Leela's mother prefers to victimize her own daughter in order to honour the norms of tradition that does not allow marriage in close relation between uncle and niece or brother and sister.

It gets to be immensely difficult for Leela Benare to lead a normal life. She leads her life in maddening frustration. Her world is turned into a horrid hell, where she is unable to carry her forward-looking vision and optimistic attitude. The beautiful earth turns out in the dark room in her blooming age. Hence she attempts suicide. 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 and ignorant.

But later Leela Benare shows guts, and starts her life all over again, studies and finally settles into a teaching job. As an educated woman, Benare gets her independent life through her profession as a teacher. She loves her teaching job which gives her relief and comfort from her tormenting loveless life as “. . . I taught them beauty. I taught them purity. I cried inside, and I made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair, and I taught them hope” (117). Her career gives her self-identity and independent life, which every woman longs and hopes in Indian society so as to escape from their stifling and dreadful situations. It stands as a healing remedy for her childhood wounds and providence.

Leela Benare's is loyal to her profession. Regarding her accomplishments as a schoolteacher, she mentions, “I haven't heard a single reproach for not being on time these past eight years. Not about my teaching. I'm never behind hand with my lessons!

Exercises corrected on time, too!” (57). Tendulkar mentions that teaching is a noble profession as Benare views it. However, teachers like Professor Damle make a mockery of it by engaging themselves in disgraceful activities.

As a teacher, Leela comes into contact with Professor Damle, whom she considers as quite intelligent and academically bright. Leela Benare is duped by Prof. Damle, a married man with a family. Despite being an eminent intellectual, he demeans himself and his profession by having an extra-marital relationship with Benare and he is the person who is responsible for her pregnancy but disowns responsibility. He is her choice.

Leela Benare is disillusioned in her quest for a stable and conducive relationship. She offers herself to him, perhaps in desperate search for a life partner. She miscalculates:

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 isn't love at all – it's worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual God took the offering – and went his way. He didn't want my mind, or my devotion – he didn't care about them! [*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! [*Screaming.*] This body is a traitor! (118)

As she realizes the sexual urge of the body she calls it as a traitor.

Leela Benare possesses her own guilt and so confesses saying “I feel scared when I am alone” (58). As human beings, every one commits mistakes according to the situations; no one is perfect to blame others. Likewise, Miss Leela Benare also has her

own guilt over her deeds, so she needs to share her isolation and guilt with others. She even admits that she is scared of loneliness. To share her loneliness and guilt, she inevitably needs the support of Samant, a stranger. When she reaches the trial village, with the acquaintance of Samant, the loneliness makes her share her feelings and sufferings to him.

Leela nurtures her own dreams and tells Samant, “Let’s leave everyone behind, I thought, and go somewhere far, far away – with you!” (55). This statement by Leela Benare relates it to the mystery of her personal life but the motives behind her queries remain unexposed till the end of the play. The playwright gives two contradictory shades of Miss Benare’s personality. As a professional, she is committed to her duties but as a woman she is exuberant in expressing her personal desires.

Suppressing her tension, Leela Benare defends her own nature,

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! . . . We should laugh, we should play, we should sing! If we can and if they’ll let us, we should dance too. Shouldn’t have any false modesty or dignity. Or care for anyone! I mean it. When your life’s over, do you think anyone will give you a bit of theirs? (60)

Leela Benare firmly believes in this principle and it is not just an ideology for her but she puts it into practice and also says, “I, Leela Benare, a living woman, I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It’s your own life. It must be. It’s a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious–” (61). Thus, she is not ready to be imprisoned in the cage prepared for the women by the society.

Tendulkar presents another kind of man-woman relationship, which is between employer and employee. Nanasaheb, the chairman of the education society is an employer and Benare who is working as a schoolteacher is an employee. The employer victimizes Benare. When Nanasaheb overhears about the licentious and profligate behaviour of Benare and her pregnancy, he asks to do an inquiry and the issue is responsible for her dismissal. Leela Benare doesn't accept this view and says, "For what sin are they robbing me of my job, my only comfort? (117). Leela Benare's disappointment from her love, her suffering from loneliness and her longing for affection makes her to live for her unborn child. She hopes to get comfort from the unborn child. She wants to get married to another man in order to protect her child from society's indictment.

Nanasaheb declares, "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! There's no alternative – this woman must be dismissed," (113). Benare's monologue reveals that some enquiry is going on against her and she is in the trap of legal complications and violations. As being the victim of the suppressed fury, she raises her confidence to express the overwhelming thoughts against the oppressor. She starts pouring out her contempt for the management of the school declaring:

. . . .But what can they do to me? . . . .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. 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? I'll do what I like with myself and my life? I'll decide . . . (58)

Such thoughts isolate her from the rest of the society.

Evidences are set against the character and conduct of Miss Benare and the case against Leela Benare of infanticide is left for the prosecution. Benare is not given any opportunity either by the legal authorities or by the custodians of the society to present her own point of view. Tendulkar presents a mock trial concept to represent the subjugation of the women that is always present in our society. With the device of mock trial within the structure of the play, the playwright spares a few minutes to reveal the suppressed rage of Leela against the humiliation of womanhood, struggling against the well-organized oppressive mechanism of the patriarchal domination where woman hardly possesses a voice of her own.

In the mock trial Benare's private life is exposed and dissected publicly. The idea of the charge of infanticide decided by all the male characters seems to be unified conspiracy to ruin the respect and womanhood of Miss Benare. Mr. Kashikar, the self-styled social reformer is the chairperson of the group. He plays the role of judge, and brings the charge of infanticide against Leela Benare and during the mock-trial she appears as the accused of infanticide. Mr. Kashikar seats himself on the judge's chair and says "Prisoner Miss Benare, under section No. 302 of the Indian Penal Code, you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime?" (75). Leela Benare is stunned, at once but suddenly becomes normal and replies

“I just got a bit serious to create the right atmosphere. For the court, that’s all. Why should I be afraid of a trial like this?” (75). This charge is closely associated with the dignity of Miss Leela because she is unmarried and the idea of infanticide for an unmarried woman is essentially a ruin of her self-respect. Mr. Kashikar as part of court proceedings bangs the gavel and orders “Silence must be observed while the court is in session” (77).

Sukhatme, the pretentious lawyer, does not care for the sentiments of Miss Benare and provides no opportunity for her to express her opinions on the issue. He takes the following arguments to justify the seriousness of the crime of Miss Benare – her crime against the pious spirit of the concept of motherhood; her character is ‘bankrupt of morality; her crime of infanticide; and the gravity of the crime increases out of the realization that the accused is a woman. The very men in general who give lectures on the dignity of women and motherhood are also responsible for inflicting shame and indignity on her. Beena Agarwal in the article, “*Silence! The Court is in Session: A Process of the Construction of Female Voice*” points out the show off of masculinity by the character, Sukhatme as

Sukhatme does not care for the sentiments of Miss Benare and tackles the whole situations in context of gender stereotype. The mock trial gradually shifts to be the battle of sexes. He provides no opportunity to Miss Benare to express her opinions on the issue. Sukhatme’s philosophical exhortation on the concept of motherhood highlights that motherhood in spite of being a female prerogative is under the control of patriarchal authority. He

idealizes the mythical image of motherhood without caring for the society that ridicules or rather abuses its grace. (72)

Through the mock trial, the playwright creates the mockery of the law courts, mockery of the human existence and the mockery of the double standards of society. Vijay Tendulkar exhibits the manifestation of woman's suffering through the arguments related with 'trial of woman.' Leela is expected to maintain silence against the decisions of court and the arguments of the lawyers who represent the authority of male dominated society.

Leela finds herself uncomfortable with the repeated accusation of infanticide. Leela expresses her resentment. "I don't like your word at all! Infanticide . . . infanticide! Why don't you accuse me instead of – um – snatching public property!" (78). This issue is closely associated with her female identity and further the vulgar gaze of the male members in the court makes her nervous and helpless.

The charges against Benare are not based on the actual fact. Sukhatme turns a blind eye towards the woman and her unfavourable circumstances. He delivers a strong worded speech in the court, which is the spontaneous reflection of the male dominated society. He bursts, ". . . infanticide is a dreadful act. But bringing 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 swantantrymarhati.*' 'Woman is not fit for independence.' . . . That is the rule laid down for us by tradition" (115).

The judge, monitors the true greatness of motherhood, and states how Benare is the dark stain on motherhood. Sukhatme's philosophical exhortation on the concept of motherhood highlights that motherhood in spite of being a female prerogative is under

the control of patriarchal authority. According to him a woman has a greater responsibility of building up high values of society. He defends stating,

Motherhood without marriage has always been considered a very great sin by our religion and our traditions. Moreover, if the accused's intention of bringing up the offspring of this unlawful maternity is carried to completion, I have a dreadful fear that the very existence of the society will be in danger. There will be no such thing as moral values left. (105)

Sukhatme, highlights Leela Benare's crime by proclaiming the sanctity of motherhood as,

Motherhood is a sacred thing. . . 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—" (79)

All accede that girls should be tied in the matrimonial knot at the onset of puberty so that temptations leading to social crimes are prevented. All men unanimously agree with the traditional system that a woman should not be given independence. The society is conscious for the responsibility of the mother towards her children but at the same time society does not care for the dignity of the woman, who harbours the child. Sukhatme confirms his vision with the observation, "“Woman is a wife for a moment, but a mother for ever”" (80). The mental cruelty in the name of social justice is at apex in the ruthless comments and criticisms of the lawyer.

Tendulkar, in the play, highlights that the verbal cruelty is more intense than the physical cruelty. Ponshe, one of the witnesses also becomes cruel and hostile and provides no consolation to Miss Benare. The witnesses are presented in the witness box to present their opinions about the accusation of the case. The first witness is Ponshe, an eminent world scientist who makes filthy comments on the character and conduct of Leela. He makes an abhorable comment that “. . . to the public eye, she is unmarried” (81). He in spite of the best resistance of Miss Benare, reveals the whole truth of her effort to get married. He takes this opportunity to unveil certain private affairs between Miss Benare and him. Miss Benare shakes her head with silent resistance imploring him not to expose the facts of private life in public. He further reveals that she had proposed him for marriage.

Ponshe admits “But her situation’s very serious indeed. She wants to bring up the child. In fact it’s only for the child she wants to go on living and get married” (108). To this Kashikar comments “. . . if Miss Benare was pregnant by one man, she expressed a desire to marry another – I mean to marry you!” (105). Jyoti Havnurkar in the article “Levity and Seriousnes in *Silence! The Court is in Session*”, puts forth that, “The wanton boys like Sukhatme and Ponshe have their “sport” but in the process, they “kill” beautiful butterflies like Benare” (104).

Though Ponshe realizes the gravity of the situation, he is not ready to accept the proposal of Benare to marry Prof Damle, because it would be a violation of male dominated social values in which there has been no compromise for a woman between her pure virginity and marital life. The public exposition of the personal facts related with her age, profession and marital status suggests that a woman has no right to assert her

choices. The lawyer puts a very contemptible question before the court, “How many chances of marriage have you had so far in your life? And how did you miss them?” (98).

Then comes Mr. Karnik, who gives his observation on motherhood stating “A mother is one who gives birth” (84). The third witness is Mr. Rokde, a feeble and helpless student and one who is totally dependent on Kashikars, makes a reference of Professor Damle. Sukhatme is bent on making Rokade admire that he witnessed Benare and Damale being together. When Mr. Rokde stops, Sukhatme with vicious cruelty admits that “. . . Miss Benare’s behaviour is certainly suspicious” (87).

When Sukhatme reveals that Professor Damle was with a lady, everybody in the mock trial becomes curious to unveil the identity of that woman and are also anxious to know the identity of the man who makes her pregnant. The eyes of all the members like thirsty vultures focus on Miss Benare. To her the man whom she has had a passionate relationship with and whose child she is carrying, is one of the few men she has respected for his fine mind and apparent integrity. She becomes helpless like a trapped animal. It is only out of social cowardice that she is not able to reveal the identity of the father of the child.

However Leela has discovered Prof. Damle’s feet of clay. He does not have the strength to stand by her and own his child. A man like Damle is cheap, dishonest and cowardice, who neither accepts his misbehaviour nor bears the responsibility over the illegal affair with Benare after his marriage. A true love defends and conserves life from the miseries and its consequence but for Benare it turns into a curse both earlier and later, because of Damle, who is dishonest towards her and her child in the womb.

When Miss Benare confesses that the child in her womb is of Professor Damle, he condemns her saying “‘Where you should go is entirely your problem. I feel great sympathy for you. But I can do nothing. I must protect my reputation’” (92); while Leela pleads demanding the lease of life not of one person but of two persons. She implores, “‘Bear it in mind that you will not escape the guilt of murdering two—’. . . ‘Two living beings’” (93).

Tendulkar alludes to the existing hypocrisy when Damle appears as a mere witness. It is observed that a man has all the rights to be sinful in the society. All the rights are reserved specially for him. On the other hand a woman must be deserted, ignored, thrown away and should be punished for their sins. Leela is held responsible for unwedded motherhood, which is considered to be a serious act of social trespass, while Professor Damle who undermines Benare’s honour and self-respect by making her pregnant, is allowed to go scot-free.

Neither the so-called society-conscious man, Mr. Kashikar nor the other members of the troupe find fault with Professor Damle who, despite having a wife and five children, has willfully acted against the sacred institution of marriage by indulging in an extramarital affair. Shubha Tiwari in the book *Contemporary Indian Dramatist* clearly points her view about man-woman liaison that

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

shade, and no soothing cushion for a sinning woman. She must be strained and abandoned. Her femininity, her needs, her very existence must be ignored, or rather destroyed. She must be cornered and brutally killed- both in physical and psychological sense. (35)

Sukhatme records the statement of both parties - Professor Damle and Miss Benare. Sukhatme utters no word about Prof. Damle who is equally responsible and is a part of the bad conduct; but accuses Benare of cheap conduct, of wooing men, of fulfilling her bodily needs and so on. There is no escape for a woman in a society.

Sukhatme becomes the symbol of cruelty with his terrible laughter. He utters the proverb that ““Woman is not fit for independence”” (115). Benare and Sukhatme instead of being individuals become the oppressed and the oppressor. Sukhatme expresses that an unmarried woman has no right to make interaction with married man because society does not permit these free and liberal ways. Hence he feels that a woman must be brutally destroyed for her actions both physically and mentally. Thus the Indian society, from the beginning, has created an impact that women should not have any equal rights to speak and enjoy life as men. The pleasure is considered to be the sole dominance of male society.

Mrs. Kashikar, as much as the men is keen to draw blood when Benare is put on trial. She is extremely docile and gregarious. She is childless but in spite of it, ruthlessly criticizes Miss. Benare who decides to propose Prof Damle. She envies Benare on her freedom and self-dignity, so she helps the men to entrap Benare in their plot. She asserts, “It’s the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That’s how promiscuity has spread throughout our society” (100). Mr. Kashikar’s love for his wife is

repulsive but what he shows outwardly seems that he is affectionate towards her but as a male chauvinist he does not let his wife to speak. Mrs. Kashikar as a woman accepts the Indian customs and man-power, so accuses Benare for her boldness towards the society and the man power. She comments “That’s what happens these days when you get everything without marrying. They just want comfort. They couldn’t care less about responsibility!” (99). She expresses her anger for new and unconventional ways adopted by new woman.

On these awkward comments Leela finds herself helpless to control her suspended emotions. She immediately resists, “There’s no need at all to drag my private life into this. I can visit whom I like” (87). Mrs. Kashikar declares that “should there be no limit to how freely a woman can behave with a man? A unmarried woman? No matter how well she knows him” (100). Mrs. Kashikar, is conventional and disapproves of ‘free’ women like Benare. Whatever Mrs. Kashikar says about Miss Benare, reveals the vision of the traditional society.

Tendulkar conveys that marriage as a social institution has laid down stringent rules for the women; whereas men have no inhibition as far as extra marital affairs are concerned. Many restrictions are there on the women and when a woman tries to throw these restrictions away, the society blames her for her action and behaviour. It is expected that the woman should adjust herself to these norms. The norms are different for men and women. Being a patriarchal society, the rules are male prejudiced. Benare’s character is carved out as a rebel. She stands against the system. This attitude of the authorities expresses the basic hypocrisy and double standards on which our society is founded.

Hence Benare continuously struggles against the patriarchal system though the men coming from all social levels victimize her.

Sukhatme reveals that besides other accusations, Miss Benare also tried to commit suicide. She is subjected to childhood sexual abuse with her own maternal uncle. He reveals to the court, “My information is that the accused attempted suicide because of a disappointment of love. She fell in love at the age of fifteen, with her own maternal uncle! That’s what ended in disappointment” (111). Benare immediately confesses:

It’s true, I did commit a sin. 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 every day. He gave me love. . . . How was I to know that if you felt like breaking yourself into bits and melting into one with someone – if you felt that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life – and if he was your uncle, it was a sin! (117)

She is innocent of the ways of the world but shows great courage. She shows her moral courage and integrity to admit the mistake she has committed in her childish innocence.

Kashikar comes out with another adventure of the dissipation of Miss Benare. He says, “Miss Benare is in education field, so such immoral life of a teacher can corrupt the younger mind” (88). Kashikar comments Nanasahab, the Chairman feels awkward that a woman with immoral conduct is permitted to work in the school and that the chairman of the education society has decided to dismiss such a lady from the job who is pregnant before marriage. The urban middle class, with its sham morality, cannot tolerate Benare’s strident independent ways, and Vijay Tendulkar satirically presents it through Benare’s

nonchalant defense of herself in the face of interrogation at the hands of malicious Sukhatme.

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session* divulge the message that woman possesses the strength, the courage and puissance for facing and surviving the onslaughts of institutional power. In all depression, Benare declares, "Milord, life is a very dreadful thing. Life must be hanged. *Na jeevan jeevanamarhati*. 'Life is not worthy of life.' Hold an enquiry against life" (116). She pours out her contempt against the decisions of the authority who determine the course of her life without little space of her own being.

Leela questions the propriety of her management trying to mix up her life with her profession. She expresses that, "My private life is my own business. I'll decide what to do with myself; every one should be able to! That can't be everyone's business" (113). Leela Benare declares that she has justified the role of being a teacher and has always kept her professional life away from her personal life.

Men keep attacking her. The violence that these men show towards Benare is a result of their own failure and helplessness in life. They try to make a devilish pleasure in their sadistic behaviour towards Benare. Sukhatme further reveals that she proposes Professor Damle for marriage. This proposal is made not out of love but is a method to escape social ignominy out of the shame of undesirable pregnancy. Tendulkar establishes that pregnancy is the weakest point of femininity and it never permits a woman to nurture her own freedom. From the words of Sukhatme, it is clear that a man wants a woman to be his slave to do his works and fulfill his sexual desires. His words show that men will not spare a woman if they desire to be their own self. He says

*'Na stri swatantryamarhati.'* 'Woman is not fit for independence.' . . .

That is the rule laid down for us by tradition. Abiding by this rule, I make a powerful plea. *'Na Miss Benare swatantryamarhati.'* 'Miss Benare is not fit for independence.' With the urgent plea that the court should show no or her terrible crime . . . (115)

Kashikar as a judge generalizes the whole situation, and states "A sinful canker on the body of the society – That's my honest opinion of these grown up unmarried girls" (112). Leela Benare is sentenced to kill her child. The court orders her to kill the baby before its birth. On hearing the inhuman, heartless, merciless and cold-blooded verdict of the judge, Benare writhes in unbearable pain and screams: "No! No! No! – I won't let you do it – I won't let it happen – I won't let it happen!" (119). The ultimate verdict which is heart rendering presents Leela Benare pleading for the little bud within her to blossom, to have a mother, a father, and a good name, but, the society thwarts motherhood for the sake of its control over human life. Leela wants to give birth to this illegal child but no one is ready to accept her decision. She is alienated from society. Her condition is like an injured bird whose feathers are taken away purposely by devilish-minded people. Benare makes a suicidal attempt.

Tendulkar feels that it is Leela Benare's misfortune that she is denied the right of living as well as the right of death. Both the conditions of life of a woman are framed according to the desires of man. She mentions, "There's a great joy in a suicide that's failed. It's greater even than the pain of living" (116).

Benare is prosecuted for the crime, which she has not committed. These are the mental cruelty in the name of social justice. . The prosecution's logic is based on morality and social values and not on legal ground. She is a victim of the societal atrocities. Miss. Benare is a victim of suppressed fury but exhibits her confidence to identify her oppressor and in order to resist the mechanism of oppression she decides to give birth to the child. She is also conscious about the plight of the illegitimate child. She does not surrender herself to the situation. At this stage from an individual, she becomes an embodiment of the predicament of womanhood.

Vijay Tendulkar creates a satire on the unjust male dominating society. The persistent attempt at silencing the voice of Miss Benare becomes a safe garb to recollect and reorganize her thwarted passion. Beena Agrawal in the book *Dramatic World of Vijay Tendulkar: Explorations and Experimentations* quotes Bandopadhyay Samik who feels that Miss Benare “. . . falls into self-introspection and self-analysis and she finds, “her fantasy of liberation in the long speech, the break from silence” (82). N. S. Dharan in the article “Salient Structural Features of *Silence! The Court is in Session*” writes that “Tendulkar deliberately make Benare break her silence through this stunning monologue which expresses the hypocrisy of the urban middle-class male chauvinists who have all ganged up against her, out of sheer collective envy of her assertive confidence and uncompromising independence of spirit” (94).

It is found that the modern women on cross road are struggling with the question ‘to be or not to be’. Miss. Leela Benare makes an effort to rationalize her conduct that is not to be supported by social codes. She ignores her basic urges, modifies her suppressed desires and seeks a manifestation of them in external show of power and confidence. She

wants to have the full pleasure of life. She is confident of her status and self-conceived pattern of life. She in spite of having a realization of her weak position maintains her confidence and strength to retain her dignity. Hence in a wider perspective of social consideration, she conceives the plan to give name and dignity to the unborn child. Tendulkar shows the natural instinct of a woman to rebel when she is suppressed and exploited.

Leela declares “And now it carries within it the witness of that time – a tender little bud – of what will be lisping, laughing, dancing little life – my son –my whole existence! I want my body now for him – for him alone. He must have a mother . . . a father to call his own – a house – to be looked after – he must have a good name” (118). So she makes a desperate bid to get one or another of the unattached men in her group to marry her in order to give the coming child a name. Though Benare is psychologically harassed she still strives to search for her existence.

Beena Agrawal in the book *Dramatic World of Vijay Tendulkar: Explorations and Experimentations* quotes N. S. Dharan who appreciates Tendulkar by saying “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 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” (65). In this respect the playwright redefines female identity in the gender based social structure where rigidity under the burden of norms of gender defined roles, make the individual persistently suffer with the dilemma of existence. Savithri Tripathi in the article “*Silence! The Court is in Session: A Study of Violence and Female Psyche*” says that what a

woman wants is “. . . only faithfulness, care and support from men. She should be allowed to breathe in open air. All the restrictions must be taken away and all the doors must be opened for her because a ‘caged bird’ forgets to build its nest” (57).

So, Benare’s inner frame stirs a little to communicate to her readers of what she knows about men who profess love but, in fact only hunger for the flesh. She says, “Yes, I have a lot to say. [*Stretches to loosen her arm.*] For so many years. I haven’t said a word. Chances came, and chances went. Storms raged, one after another about my throat. And lips tight” (116). She says the very word ‘life’ gives a pang of joy. To live a life. To sing, to feel, to experiment, to enjoy, to dance, to breathe, to travel, to know, to explore – all this is life. But when one does all this, the society labels the person as ‘evil’ and gives a verdict that hangs the individual. This is the paradox of life – to live or not to live.

Geeta Kumar, in the article “Portrayal of Women in Tendulkar’s *Shantata Court Chalu Aahe* and *Sakharam Binder*” in the book *New Directions in Indian Drama*, suggests her view over Benare’s life and her trapping in the mock trial as, “Life for Leela Benare would never be the same again. This traumatic evening, which has just been a game to others, would be like a never-healing ulcer for her for ever” (24).

In the twentieth century, women are educated and aware about the equality they tend to have as social beings. As a result, they anticipate their stifling situations and in taking steps against similar sort of situations, they turn rebellious. However the consequences of their scuffles make their situations even more severe and pathetic. As a part of their revolutionary movements, women violate the so-called social norms of patriarchal society, which make them fall as victims. Leela Benare, as an individual does not want to bind herself in the established conventions of the society. She rejects all boundaries and limitations that are set for a woman. Perhaps due to this search for

individuality as a human being, she suffers and becomes an object of criticism in the society.