

Dr. Shukla M.A.IV  
5-5-20

3

## SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION —AN INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi play *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (1967), translated into English by Priya Adarkar as *Silence! The Court is in Session*, is undoubtedly one of the most popular and interesting plays of this "angry young man" of Marathi theatre. The stimulus for *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* came from a real incident that the writer witnessed. Tendulkar came across an amateur group which was on its way to stage a mock-trial in Vile Parle, a suburb of Bombay. While overhearing their conversation, the outline of a play began taking shape in the writer's mind and resulted in the creation of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*. At the instance of Arvind and Sulabha Deshpande it was written for Rangayan, and was first performed in March 1971 in Madras (Chennai).

The theatre group in *Silence! The Court is in Session* which comes to perform at a village is a minuscule cross-section of middle-class society, the members representative of its different sub-strata. Their characters, dialogues, gestures and even mannerisms reflect their petty, circumscribed existences fraught with frustrations and repressed desires that find expression in their malicious and spiteful attitudes towards their fellow beings. Leela Benare, the central character of the play, is the only exception.

*Silence! The Court is in Session* is actually a mock-trial of a frank and straightforward school teacher, who is unmarried, but has illicit relations with Professor Damle. She (Miss Leela Benare) is cross-examined in the court with full mockery and non-serious statements and activities. Her private life is exposed before the court and she is charged with infanticide and having illicit relations with a married man. Witnesses Mr. Gopal Ponshe, Mr. Karnik, Rokde, Samant, Counsel for the Defence and Counsel for the Crown Mr. Sukhatme, and Judge Mr. Kashikar and his wife Mrs. Kashikar all behave in a way of mockery. They spit paan again and again, oath is administered by putting fingers on English Dictionary in place of the *Geeta*. The trial proceeds, by and by almost all the witnesses and authorities become hostile against Miss Leela Benare. This exhibits that a woman, howsomuch educated she may be, can easily fall a victim to the whims and dominance of men in a male-dominated society. In the name of social concern, the Judge Kashikar is most severe in his final verdict. On the charge of unmarried motherhood, illicit relationship and immoral activities, the judge commands the school authorities to dismiss such an immoral woman. "This court has not an iota



of doubt about it. Hence not only today's, but tomorrow's society would have been endangered by your misconduct." He further takes measures so that "Neither you nor anyone else should ever do anything like this again." The severest and unkindest part of his judgement reads thus : "No moments of your sin should remain for future generations. Therefore this court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed."

Silence! The Court is in Session is a three-act play. It has elaborate stage directions to make the action the play lively. The groups of actors is very small having only a few witnesses, a judge, his wife, an advocate (playing the roles of both the counsel for the defence and counsel for the crown), a servant, and the prisoner herself. The language of the play is easy and style is impressive. Barring a few soliloquies, dialogues are short and pointed. Atmosphere is light and humorous. Satire and irony find ample place in the play. Undoubtedly Silence! The Court is in Session is Vijay Tendulkar's best creation.