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Dr Shash

Salient Structural Features in *Silence! And Kamala*

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence!* and *Kamala* are realistic plays in the sense the middle-class characters figuring in them are obsessed with mundane issues who "find life rather dull and unhappy" (Abrams 141). They are also "discussion plays" as the social issues discussed in them are not organically integrated into their plots, "but expounded in the dramatic give and take of a sustained debate among the characters" (Abrams 139). In both the plays the 'setting' is the city and the 'atmosphere' is tense throughout, with only occasional patches of 'comic relief'. The style that Tendulkar uses in both *Silence!* and *Kamala* is 'demotic' modelled on 'the language, rhythms, and associations of ordinary speech' (Abrams 166). *Silence!* has three acts, whereas *Kamala* is a two-act play, designed on the mode of the popular dramatic construct of the present century. There are no scene divisions of the acts. The plots are expertly structured so that, in both the plays, the denouement unravels itself as 'reversal'.

It is the imposed silence on Benare that gives the title *Silence!* its unique significance. Till the commencement of the 'mock-trial'. Benare remains a picture of poise and vitality. She makes comments on the behaviour of her fellow-characters, and sits singing and humming.

Nevertheless silence descends on her when the 'mock-trial' begins with Kashikar's sudden interrogative statement: "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?" (SC 74), Benare is dumbfounded. Even the

comic relief provided by the pan-spitting contest helps her regain her composure only for a brief while, as this short respite she gains, is not to last long. As the 'mock-trial,' is resumed, Benare increasingly seeks shelter in her self-imposed silence. Further, all her attempts at protest are callously drowned in Kashikar the mock-judge's impositions: "Silence!". In such a helpless, hostile situation, Benare has no other choice but to remain silent, as no language can come to her rescue.

However, Benare breaks her self-imposed silence at last, towards the close of the play, when she bursts forth into a long and brilliant monologue which brings out in most eloquent terms, her love of life, focussing with astonishing brilliance on her betrayal at the hands of Professor Damle, and the consequent torture at the hands of her fellow-characters. In fact, it is this monologue that has captured the imagination of the audience of the Marathi theatre. Tendulkar deliberately makes Benare break her silence through a stunning monologue which utterly exposes 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.

The 'mock-trial' marks a deft stroke on the part of Tendulkar's dramatic genius. It functions almost like a 'play-within-the-play', as the real performance is supposed to have been 'Mock Law Court'. It is the 'mock-trial' that causes the terminal 'reversal' in the play. Benare, who has all along been baiting her male counterparts, ends up being the game ruthlessly hunted and baited by them all. This element of 'reversal' gives the play its unique dramatic significance. The 'mock-trial' also helps the playwright expose to his audience the cruelty that is latent in the collective psyche of the city-bred male chauvinists of Bombay. Benare is horror-struck at the naked display of their innate cruelty towards her. The eagerness and enthusiasm with which the Kashikars, Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik heap evidence after evidence against her terrify her and, eventually, she sits frozen like a motionless statue.

Structurally, the songs Tendulkar assigns to Benare are of great dramatic significance. For instance, the song she sings in the opening scene:

Oh, I've got a sweetheart
Who carries all my books,

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is of dramatic importance, as it demonstrates Senjū's character of
loyalty & devotion to his lord. The first line of the third Act
The second line of the third Act, that presented in the very
last scene:

The first line of the
The second line of the
The third line of the
The fourth line of the
The fifth line of the

is again significant, in that Senjū realizes, in the course of the play,
that the end has not yet come, that the end has not yet come.
There is a sense that there is a possibility in the very form of
the end which she realizes in the opening scene:

The first line of the
The second line of the

~~~~~  
The first line of the  
The second line of the  
The third line of the  
The fourth line of the  
The fifth line of the  
The sixth line of the  
The seventh line of the  
The eighth line of the  
The ninth line of the  
The tenth line of the

It is from the above Senjū poem by Mrs. Senjū that  
Fletcher has conceived Senjū, the central character in *Madama Butterfly*. In  
accordance with the above Japanese kind of verse, Senjū feels that  
she is destined to be delivered in the end.

Another kind of verse favoured by Senjū is:

The first line of the  
The second line of the  
The third line of the  
The fourth line of the  
The fifth line of the

~~~~~ (85-86)

Senjū sings it to herself towards the end of Act I and repeats it
again at the end of Act III where it is supposed to emerge from up

indistinct source in Benare's voice. The 'parrot' in the play is suggestive of Samant and the 'nest' may refer to her chastity which she is deprived of by Professor Damle and 'the crow' too seems to be none other than the callous and selfish Professor himself.

There is of course, a certain element of 'anti-climax' in the par-spitting context presented at the opening of Act II of *Silence!*. The playwright introduces this comic interlude mainly with a view of relieving the gloom of the immediately preceding sombre atmosphere towards the close of Act I. This comic context offers Benare some respite and we find her quickly recovering her usual cheerfulness, though only for a very brief moment.

The dialogues in the play are characterized by a certain idiosyncratic use of syntax. Most of the utterances are short and there are abundant pauses, marked by numerous dots and dashes. However, whenever serious topics are discussed, the dialogues pick up a faster rhythm, and the sentences a certain depth and fullness. Of the following quotes from the play, the first can be cited as an example of the 'demotic style', and the second, an example of rounded dialogue': Rokde : So, then-so then I said- 'This isn't proper. It's not proper! - I - I don't like this at all - it doesn't become you, - That's that's what I said: (SC 102)

The dialogue given above is so obviously 'demotic', for the readers or audience know that what Rokde says is a bare-faced lie. As for the second we may quote the following as an example:

Kashikar : This case has great social significance, Sukhatme. No joking! I must put aside the practice of court, and give evidence. Sukhatme, ask my permission. Ask me. Ask! (SC 111)

Tendulkar punctuates Benare's monologue at the end of the play with a lot of paradoxical statements, especially, when she talks of her love of life: "..., Throw your life away - and you realize the value of having it. Guard it dearer than life - and it only seems fit to throw away..." (SC 116)

Again, Benare's deep - seated, caring love that she bears towards her pupils can be seen in passages such as the following: "I cried inside, and I made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair, and I taught them hope..." (SC 117). And referring to the unpredictable demand of her body she says: "this body is a traitor! I despise this body - and I love it! (SC 118). It is such paradoxes that lend Benare's

monologue its dramatic richness, sophistication and a certain enigmatic intensity.
