

**Review Article**

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# **Silence as Violence: Patriarchal Power and Mock Justice in Silence! The Court is in Session**

**Dr. M. Rajaram**

Assistant Professor of English, SRM Arts and Science College Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu, India

## **Keywords**

Patriarchy,  
Mock Trial,  
Gender Politics,  
Social Hypocrisy,  
Psychological  
Violence

## **Abstract**

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a powerful critique of patriarchal authority and middle-class morality in post-independence India. Through the dramatic device of a mock trial, Tendulkar exposes the cruelty embedded within social institutions such as marriage, law, and education. What begins as a theatrical rehearsal gradually transforms into a psychological inquisition of Miss Benare, revealing the deep-rooted gender biases of society. This paper examines how silence operates as both metaphor and method of oppression. It argues that the play presents patriarchy not merely as social control but as psychological violence enacted through language, humiliation, and collective complicity.

## **Introduction**

Modern Indian drama witnessed a radical transformation in the 1960s with playwrights who challenged social complacency. Among them, Vijay Tendulkar occupies a significant position. His works interrogate power structures, gender politics, and moral hypocrisy. *Silence! The Court is in Session*, originally written in Marathi as *Shantata! Court ChaluAahe*, reflects the anxieties of an emerging urban middle class.

The play dramatizes a rehearsal staged by an amateur theatre group that turns into a brutal trial of Miss Benare, a school teacher. The fictional charges of infanticide and immorality expose real societal prejudices. Tendulkar uses the court as a metaphor for society, where justice becomes performance and truth is secondary to domination.

## The Mock Trial as a Dramatic Device

The structural brilliance of the play lies in its use of the mock trial. What begins as entertainment slowly dissolves the boundary between fiction and reality. The participants, under the guise of play-acting, reveal their suppressed frustrations and moral rigidity.

The trial functions on two levels:

Theatrical Level – a rehearsal exercise.

Psychological Level – collective persecution of a woman.

The transformation of play into reality demonstrates how institutions normalize violence. The courtroom, traditionally a space of justice, becomes a theatre of humiliation. Tendulkar suggests that social judgment often disguises itself as moral righteousness.

## Miss Benare: The Silenced Voice

Miss Benare emerges as one of the most compelling female characters in Indian drama. Independent, financially self-reliant, and emotionally expressive, she stands in contrast to the conservative expectations of society. Her alleged relationship with Professor Damle becomes the central weapon used against her.

Benare's final monologue is deeply tragic. Her dreams of motherhood and her struggle for autonomy collapse under societal condemnation. Silence here is not mere absence of speech—it is enforced submission. The group metaphorically "kills" her spirit before the play concludes.

Her character illustrates:

The policing of female sexuality  
Double standards of morality  
Emotional isolation of working women  
Patriarchy and Collective Cruelty

The male characters represent varying shades of patriarchal dominance. Kashikar asserts legal authority, Ponkshe indulges in moral commentary, and others participate in ridicule. Even Mrs. Kashikar, though a woman, reinforces patriarchal values, demonstrating internalized oppression.

The cruelty is not physical but psychological. The group hides behind institutional roles—judge, prosecutor, witness—to legitimize humiliation. Tendulkar critiques how society collaborates in silencing dissenting women.

## Language, Power, and Performance

Language in the play functions as an instrument of power. Sarcasm, legal jargon, and moral accusations gradually strip Benare of dignity. The performance blurs reality, suggesting that social roles themselves are theatrical constructs.

The title's command—"Silence!"—symbolizes authority. It represents:

Suppression of female voice  
Enforcement of social conformity  
Moral policing  
Silence becomes both command and consequence.  
Social Satire and Middle-Class Morality

Tendulkar sharply critiques the hypocrisy of the urban middle class. While publicly advocating morality, the characters privately harbor prejudice and frustration. The trial reveals their insecurities rather than Benare's guilt.

The play thus questions:

Who defines morality?

Is justice objective or socially constructed?

Why is a woman judged more harshly than a man?

## Conclusion

Silence! The Court is in Session remains a timeless exploration of gender politics and social violence. Tendulkar exposes how institutions perpetuate oppression under the guise of legality and morality. The mock trial becomes a metaphor for societal judgment, where silence is imposed upon those who challenge norms. Ultimately, the play calls for introspection into how power operates through everyday interactions.

Tendulkar's dramatic vision compels readers and audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about complicity, prejudice, and the fragility of justice.

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