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The 'Tongue-in-Cheek' in *Silence!* and *Kamala*

Satire
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Tendulkar's plays, *Silence!* and *Kamala* are nothing if not satirical, which direct their barbs mainly against the urban middle class. In *Silence!* Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy, selfishness, sham moral standards and the sadism latent in the immediate colleagues of the buoyant but belligerent Benare. In *Kamala* he does not merely stop with ridiculing the urban middle class society alone, but, subjects to clinical satire social institutions like 'marriage', 'politics', and 'journalism' and holds them all to ruthless sarcasm.

The 'Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association', an amateur theatre troupe, belongs to the urban middle class society of Bombay. This 'experimental theatre' has Mr. Kashikar, a self-styled social reformer, its chairman. The Kashikars are always seen together, both in private and in public, as Mrs. Kashikar is extremely docile and gregarious. As for the other artists in the troupe, Balu Rokde is a helpless student, dependent on the Kashikars. Sukhatme is a pretentious lawyer; Ponshe, an inter-failed clerk; Karnik an 'experimental theatre' actor; Benare, a school teacher and Damle a professor. Tendulkar brings them all together under the banner of an amateur theatre, in order to highlight the hypocrisy latent in this microscopic cross-section of the milieu of the metropolitan Bombay middle class.

Different
characters
mocked

Benare functions as the central consciousness in *Silence!*. It is mainly through her ironic perception that the audience get an insight into the other characters. For instance, Mr. Kashikar is "Mr. Prime Objective" who is "tied up with uplifting the masses" (SC 59); and

Mrs. Kashikar is "Mrs. Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle" who "has no Cradle to rock!" (SC 59). She adds further: "Spreading enlightenment is also one of the Prime Objectives behind our Programme." (SC 59); and "Kashikar can't take a step without a Prime Objective." (SC 59). As she sees it, the Kashikars have adopted Balu Rokde, not out of generosity, but out of sheer need, "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" (SC 59). Thus, Kashikar, the social reformer, has no compunction about making Rokde "toil away" (SC 59) and in the process, making "a slave out of him" (SC 59).

Talking of Sukhatme, Benare says:

Well, we have an Expert on the Law. He's 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 flies with legal precedents! And in his tenement, he sits alone killing houseflies! But for today's mock trial, he's a very great barrister. (SC 59).

Benare, here, satirizes briefless but pompous barristers who refuse to admit that they are failures in real life.

Further, to Benare, it is only the industrious and the intelligent who realize their ambition. Hence, ineffectual types like Ponkshe can never achieve their goals, however hard they may try. In Benare's words Ponkshe is: "...a 'Hmm!' with us!...Hmm! Sci-en-tist! Inter-failed!" (SC 59).

Moreover, 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. Despite being an eminent intellectual, he demeans himself and his profession by having an extra-marital relationship with Benare, which, eventually, results in her pregnancy. The learned Professor refuses to accept her. Obviously, Benare's reference to him is highly sarcastic: "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" (SC 60).

Tendulkar turns the opening scene of *Silence!* into a marvellous piece of satire by pitting the self-consciously independent, vehemently assertive, and immensely cheerful Benare against the utterly selfish, hypocritical and malicious amateur artistes, who she subjects to merciless psychical dissection in order to expose their real, seamy

inner selves. On hearing Mrs. Kashikar's supposed desire to buy a garland for her, Benare retorts:

Mrs Kashikar
Benare

...The garland flew away- pouf! 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. That's why I never feel like buying garlands and things. (SC 66).

Professor Damle's inability to be present on the occasion of the staging of the 'Mock Law Court' causes many a ripple amongst the amateur artistes. Tendulkar deftly utilises this suspenseful dramatic occasion to expose the real natures of Kashikar and Sukhatme. Both Kashikar and Sukhatme expose themselves through their own utterances. Kashikar's sense of social obligation, though a false one, is aroused when he says: "How can I not worry? We owe something to the people, Sukhatme. A performance is no laughing matter." (SC 68).

Sukhatme's presumptuousness as a lawyer surfaces, again, when he comforts Kashikar: "Don't you worry. For today, I'll do that role along with that of the prosecuting counsel. What's so serious about that? I'm a lawyer to the marrow! I tell you Kashikar, just leave it to me." (SC 68). These words, coming as they do in the wake of Benare's earlier observation of Sukhatme's failure as a lawyer in real life, reveal the false pretensions, characteristic of such vainglorious lawyers whom we meet in our day-to-day life.

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The Kashikars put on a show of mutual fondness in public in order to hide their domestic discord. Mr. Kashikar's buying of garlands for his wife, and Mrs. Kashikar's buying of bush shirts for her husband, are indicative of their attempts to project themselves to the world as ideal 'made-for-each-other'. Tendulkar satirizes this false display of conjugal harmony by making Kashikar silence his wife whenever she dares to open her mouth to make one remark or the other. For instance, Kashikar declares openly: "She can't get among a few people without wanting to show off! Show off all the time!" (SC 72). We cannot but agree with Karnik who says that the Kashikars' public show of their fondness for each other is utterly tasteless and absurd, for in his opinion: "When I for one see such public formalities between husband and wife, I suspect something quite different in private." (SC 64).

The commencement of the 'mock-trial', which constitutes a 'play-within-the-play', offers Tendulkar ample scope to dissect and lay bare the dormant ills of discontent in the psyche of these urban

hypocrites. Though, they gang themselves up against a hapless Benare, for the time being, they have nothing but spite for one another. Kashikar, the mock-judge, banging the gavel, spitefully silences his wife: "Silence must be observed while the court is in session. Can't shut up at home, can't shut up here!" (SC 77). During the trial, Samant, an innocent villager, makes a passing remark: "Miss Benare is really amazing!" (SC 78). At this, Ponshe giving a deliberate twist to the innocent remark of Samant observes: "In many respects." (SC 78). Sukhatme, the counsel for the prosecution, calls Ponshe as his first witness in a tone soaked in sarcasm: "My first witness is the world-famous scientist, Mr. Gopal Ponshe. Well, Ponshe? Are you happy? I've suddenly promoted you to world fame, eh?" (SC 80).

Financial independence is something to be won in the hard way and, which, people like Rokde are totally incapable of. Inevitably, such people live a 'Caliban-like' existence, hanging onto favours of the falsely generous and the powerful. This bitter truth is driven home through Rokde's abject dependence on the arrogant Kashikars. Even at the 'mock-trial', discovering that Rokde has not brought the Gita, Mrs. Kashikar asks him in an intimidating manner: "Balu, where is the Geeta?" (SC 80). To this, Rokde replies: "I forgot it. I brought the Dictionary by mistake... How much can I possibly remember?" (SC 80). In fact, Benare pities Rokde at this point: "Poor Balu!" (SC 80).

Benare That the urban middle class, with its sham morality, cannot tolerate Benare's strident independent ways, is satirically presented through Benare's lone but utterly nonchalant defence of herself in the face of interrogation at the hands of the malicious Sukhatme who is bent on making Rokde admit that he actually witnessed the scene of Benare and Damle making love. To quote from the play:

- Sukhatme : What else did you see?
 Rokde : That's all.
 [Sukhatme is disappointed]. But I got such a shock! Sitting there in Damle's room-the night falling...
 Benare : What a baby the poor thing is!
 Rokde : Then why did your face fall when you saw me? Just explain that! Damle got rid of me. Without letting me come in. Usually he always asks me in- into the room!
 Benare : [Laughing] Damle alone knows why he got rid of you. And do you know why you imagine that my face fell? Because Damle snubbed you in front of me. Why should my face fall? It stayed right where it should be!
 Sukhatme : [To Kashikar] Milord, I submit that what the witness Mr. Rokde

- Benare : saw- and he alone knows why he stopped at that- I submit that what he saw be noted in record. Even to an impartial observer, it reveals that Miss. Benare's behaviour is certainly suspicious.
- Benare : It reveals nothing of the sort! Tomorrow I may be seen in our Principal's office. Does that mean my behaviour is suspicious? Ha! Our principal is sixty five!
- Sukhatme : Milord, I request that this statement made by the accused may also be noted, as we wish to introduce it in evidence.
- Benare : If you like, I'll give you the names and addresses of twenty-five more people with whom I am alone at times. Holding a trial, are you? Suspicious, indeed. You don't even understand the meaning of simple words! (SC 87-88).

During the session of the entire 'mock-trial', Mrs. Kashikar never misses an opportunity to insinuate her venomous comments directed at Benare, as she is extremely envious of Benare's boundless independence. Herself, suffering from a persecution complex on account of her barrenness, and her abject dependence on her husband, she is utterly spiteful of Benare. In the closing act, Tendulkar gives Mrs. Kashikar ample opportunity to torture Benare with a view to exposing a discontented woman's irrepressible malevolence against a superior, successful being. For instance, she stops Benare getting out of the room of torture: "Where d'you think you're going? The door's locked! Sit down!" (SC 111). This is a fine instance where Tendulkar satirizes woman to woman relationship.

Woman
to woman
& woman

Benare
Tendulkar's
mouthpiece

It is little wonder that Benare's monologue towards the end of the play is directed against men in general, and Professor Damle in particular. Here, she becomes almost the playwright's mouthpiece. Though, all of Benare's monologue is dramatic, some of her statements are highly satirical: "Emotion is something people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. It was burning through me" (SC 117). Of men's hypocritical sexual morality, she says: "their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires." (SC 117). Seared by mortal pain, she refers to Professor Damle's betrayal in the following words: "I offered up my body on the altar of my worship and my intellectual god took the offering- and went his way. (SC 118). Here the hollowness and cowardice of the learned Professor is brought out in a biting satire. In short, Tendulkar is at his satirical best in Benare's powerfully worded dramatic monologue.

Samant, the innocent villager, an outsider to the rest of the group, through his utterances and actions, becomes another powerful vehicle of satire against the hypocritical city-wallahs. Tendulkar introduces Samant in the play not only to play a key-role in the 'mock-trial' but also to highlight the gaping holes in the moral pretensions of his urban counterparts. On being asked by Sukhatme to recount before the 'mock-court' what he saw in Professor Damle's hostel room, he words his replies with utmost caution, sensing the sadistic motives of Benare's tormentors, still retaining a garb of rustic innocence and ignorance: "Where? No, no!. Why that room's in Bombay! And I was in this village. Hardly! It's silly - I don't know your Professor Damle from Adam. How could I get to his room'. Isn't that right'. What are you upto?". (SC 90)

In *Kamala*, too, Tendulkar makes use of satire in order to scoff not only at the hypocrisy of the urban upper middle class but also at the rampant corruption of the politicians, the out-thrust