

# Mikhail Bakhtin ‘Theory of Heteroglossia, Dialogism, Polyphony and Carnavalesque’ in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session*

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## Preface

The main objective of this research is to investigate the various concepts given by Mikhail Bakhtin. Some of the concepts like Heteroglossia and Dialogism are applied in novels, but this paper has investigated that these concepts can be used in the genre of play and Drama. The concept of Carnavalesque is generally used in analyzing genre of children fiction and fantasy, the main objective of this research is to find out the element of this concept in the play which is quite opposite to the children theme. The particular play deals with the mock trial in which protagonist has been accused with infanticide. We also find the contradictory thought process between Traditional mindset versus Modern Mindset.

**Abstract**—This paper discusses the elements of Heteroglossia, and Dialogism proposed by Bakhtin in Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967). Mostly, heteroglossia and dialogism are applied in the novel, but this paper has investigated that these elements can be implemented on any genre of literature especially, a play. Prior, this text has been investigated from several dimensions like feminist perspective, conflict in identity but it has not been investigated from the theory of Bakhtin. Heteroglossia is the presence of two or more expressed viewpoints so in the text there are many viewpoints on Indian society, motherhood, and about the lifestyle of women given by the characters. In dialogism, there is a conversation between two or more people. This paper has mainly focused on the Act-III when a mock trial of the court was staged. During the trial, all the characters, directly or indirectly, decide to put a charge of infanticide on Miss Benare. The paper also discusses Miss Benare’s viewpoints about Indian society and Sukhatme’s definition of motherhood. Major characters of the play have a different perspective towards the same situation. The research draws a suspension for traditional power and hierarchies. Some

important elements of Polyphony and Carnavalesque have been delivered to draw a boundary between traditional mindset and Modernity.

**Index Terms**—Court; Dialogism; Heteroglossia; Polyphony; Carnavalesque; Indian society; Motherhood; Silence.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Review of Literature

- The outsider’s vision of Samant in *Silence! The court is in Session*

Samant is an important character in the play. He is used as a substitute for Rawte who is absent and is the fourth witness in the mock trial. Samant does not know anything about the law and the court. The importance of his character is to provide information to the audiences. Samant is first one to arrive and last one to leave the stage along with Miss Benare. Samant lives in a village and the play is also held in the village from where Samant belongs. This play was new to Samant and the characters were also new to Samant. He had never seen this kind of play; he had only seen the magic shows and the Bhajans which used to be held in that village. His simplicity is foregrounded in such a way that he does not know that Benare is cozying up to him.

Miss Benare was also impressed by his personality and simplicity and Samant is an outsider who provides very important information to the audience and to the characters in the play. From Samant’s point of view the rehearsal is only some fun to do in the court. All the characters in the play decide to do a rehearsal in which Samant was used as a fourth witness and when the rehearsal started just like the audience Samant was also unaware about the play. Whether the play is a

social message or something beyond. In the middle of the play when Miss Benare faces an accusation about Damle at that point of time Samant is used to retaining sympathy for her. When Samant's turn came he provided information to the characters which shocked everyone and led to the brutal destruction of Miss Benare and then she started crying at that time Samant reactions were changed. When the play ends Samant was standing in a corner and was looking at Miss Benare and he also offered a parrot which she had bought for his nephew and Samant that gesture opens the possibility of sympathy.

- De- Silencing the silence: Legal Institutionalization of a woman's Victimization

This play shows the reality of the world, it also shows the mentality of the Bourgeois. This play focuses on the patriarchal order where men are heads and the women are being oppressed by the men. They are not allowed to do things on their own. They are used as objects by the men. The characters in the play are also exposed to what they are in real life and what they are pretending to be.

Miss Benare is the central character of the play. She is shown as an independent woman and enjoys a comfortable, social position without the guardianship of a husband. In the play she is not only accused but the questions were also raised on her independent lifestyle. Miss Benare gets a chance to represent a case in which she talks about her private life and she says that she had faced many things in her life but still she taught her students to be happy. She observes people's faces and comments "*these are mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces, how ferocious they look!*" By this statement she tells that these men are more concerned about the body. They do not care about the emotions of women. They feel that the body is a source of pleasure. In her final speech she confesses that the accusations made on her are all correct. There is nothing wrong with that. She accepts that when she was fourteen she was in a relationship with her maternal uncle and when she grew up then she had a relationship with Professor Damle. She also talks about the life and says "*life is something that's nothing or a nothing that's something*"

Miss Benare is accused of infanticide, the crime against motherhood and all the characters does not want the child to be born. They think that if the child

will take birth he can be a threat to society. They want this illegitimate child to be killed. This play also deals with the biasness of the judiciary and how the judiciary fails to provide natural justice.

- "Wound That's Born to Bleed": Critiquing Women's Position in Indian Society through Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

- Tandrima Guha

This play portrays the pain that women had experienced in Indian society and how they are treated in the society. The central character of the play is Miss Benare and her sufferings caught everyone's attention. Mrs. Kashikar is another woman in the play. She completely follows the norms which are set by the society. She does not know about her individual existence. Miss Benare is completely opposite of Mrs. Kashikar. She raises the questions against societal norms and she knows her individual existence. Benare knows how to take stand for the right things. She is an educated woman and education has taught her to be confident as a free individual. Miss Benare's character can be also compared to Chamba from the play "*Sakharam Binder*". Chamba also refuses to follow the norms made by the society and she gains her strength from sexual appeal.

All the powers are in the hands of a man. Whatever they do is right. Miss Benare had a relationship with Professor Damle but no one raised any questions against Damle. All the questions were raised against Miss Benare which means men could use their power in any way they want. They can exercise their power in women as well. This play exposes the middle class hypocrisy and the discrimination that occurs against women. Women are nothing but they are used as a sexual object. The same thing happened with Miss Benare. Professor Damle cheats on Benare and uses her as a sexual object. Due to this, Miss Leela Benare loses her job and she is not allowed to teach the students. She is furthermore sentenced to not have the child. She faces a lot of accusations from the characters in the play.

Tendulkar portrays the suffering of women in Indian society through this play and he tells the truth about the society. With this play he made people clear about their mentalities. He also demands that the women should be considered equal to men and they should be provided with the rights to equality and should be allowed to live their own lives.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

This play is the mock trial of Miss Benare in which she is cross examined and the charge put against her is of infanticide and having relationship with a married person Professor Damle. By this process, her private life is exposed. Miss Benare is the first one to arrive at the location with Samant. She starts flirting with Samant and after some time, all the characters arrive at the location. Two members of the group were absent, Rawte and Professor Damle. After some time, all the characters decided to do a rehearsal as they were free. The role of every character was the same and in the absence of Miss Benare, they decide to put a charge of infanticide on Miss Benare. Many of them speak about Benare's lifestyle and her social status whether she is married or unmarried and about her affairs. In this way her private life got exposed. In the end of the play, she defends her case by talking about her private life and she also tells that she had faced so many things in her life. In the end she accepts that all the accusations made on her were right. According to her, whatever she did was right. There was nothing wrong in it. Whatever she did was her own choice and in the future she would do things according to her own choice. No one is allowed to interfere in her life. She also tells that her life has been a series of adventures and yes, she had an affair with her maternal uncle and when she grew up, she had an affair with Professor Damle.

This trial concludes that Sukhatme makes the case against Miss Benare and Benare has destroyed the values of the society. Kashikar gives Benare ten seconds to defend her case. In the end, rehearsal ends and after that all moves out of the hall because they had to get ready for their evening performance. Miss Benare was alone sitting in that hall and Samant was the only one who went with Benare.

Vijay Tendulkar

Vijay Tendulkar was an Indian playwright, movie and television writer. His well-known works were *Silence!* The court is in session, *Sakharam Binder* and many more. These both plays were based on sufferings of women and they are similar to one another. He had won many awards like Padma Bhushan, film awards and he was a renowned television writer. Some of his movies are *Aakrosh*, *Ardhasatya* and *Manthan Nishant* etc. Through his writing he has also made people aware about the things which were happening at that time. The main themes of his works were poverty,

violence, women rights and corruption. He has also won a lifetime contribution award from the Sangeet Natak Akademi. He can be also said as the prominent figure of his time and the people were also impressed by his work and he made women aware about their rights.

## II. BAKHTIN'S THEORY ON NARRATIVES

### Heteroglossia

Heteroglossia can be explained as the combination of statements and speech to construct anything. Another way for understanding heteroglossia can be different ways of how people speak to one another. These different ways are because of the class, gender and culture.

For example:

- Different cultures have different languages so if the people of different cultures speak to one another their ways will be different.
- The second example can be on the basis of gender. When male and female speak to one another their ways of speaking will be different as compared to when the same gender talks to one another, i.e., male to male or female to female.
- The third example can be on the basis of class. If the people of the same class will speak to one another their ways of speaking will not be different. But if the people of different classes will speak with one another then their ways will be different.

This is a challenge to the idea of linguistic creativity to the original. In heteroglossia, the language is also borrowed from others and in the single perspective there are multiple voices. The originality of heteroglossia is a combination that combines the views of the different people which can be used for creating any kind of work. But it does not combine the elements of different perspectives. In a single perspective there are always multiple voices and different personal viewpoints. English is a standard language which is only used by the Elite class, which means the people who are from a high class such language suppress the heteroglossia of multiple languages. The social world is also characterized by heteroglossia in society. Bakhtin criticizes those who view language as a closed system.

Dialogism

Dialogism is the style of discourse in which characters express their viewpoints and that different viewpoints interact with each other and few of them are selected to create any kind of work. Dialogism is completely opposite of monologism. Monologism can be described as the discourse by a single person in which a single person dominates the entire conversation. Dialogism is also referred as a double voiced, which can become the main referent of the field. The viewpoints which people give should match the discourse. Then only some of them can be considered as the main reference.

The dialogical word has a relationship with other words which is addressed to a listener and the listener gives his response. Dialogism involves certain elements within different perspectives of equal value. Bakhtin develops the concept of dialogism from the work *Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. This work contains many different voices and unmerged into the single perspective. Each of these voices have a different perspective and it has its own validity in the works. The author's voice is not placed in between the character and the reader. The character has its own voice and the reader also has its own voice. Dialogism also includes the ideologies of the people that think about the discourse in the *Silence! The Court is in Session*. We get to know about the ideologies of the people and their ideologies about the women and what are their viewpoints on the cultures. And like this, the text involves the principle of dialogism in it. So we can consider that Dialogism can be used in any of the fields and in any discourse. Dialogism is a very important term that Bakhtin has invented.

Heteroglossic Elements in the text: *Silence! The Court is in Session*

In the text, heteroglossic elements can be understood through ACT 1. Miss Benare enters the hall with Samant and starts flirting with him. She also cozies up to Samant. She also talks to him about her personal life. Heteroglossic elements in the text can also be understood through the way she speaks with Balu Rokhde. She always teases him and makes fun of him. After sometime when all the characters decided to do a rehearsal, they decide to put a charge of infanticide on Miss Benare when she is absent from the scene. Before the beginning of mock trial Miss Benare hears the charges, her behaviour gets changed and most uncomfortable things which have been portrayed by

all the people who are not well acquainted with her but tries to comment and expose her personal life. We can also understand the heteroglossic elements through Samant. Samant is the first person who enters the scene with Miss Benare. He speaks in a welcoming way with Miss Benare and he also tells about his life and that he is not married and when Samant was decided to become the fourth witness, he then presented the story against Miss Benare, which shows that his way of speaking has totally changed. He shows a different side. Miss Benare is the accused according to the characters in the play and the different points of view that arose against the accused can also be considered heteroglossic elements. Each of them tells different things about Miss Benare.

Ponkshe exposed her social status and he tells the public eye she is unmarried and later on he tells the court that she had called him in a Udippi restaurant and asked him whether he will marry her or not. She also tells about her accepting the child of Professor Damle. Another element can be from Rokhde point of view where he tells that Miss Benare proposed him to marry her. She held his hand and he slapped her.

Another element is of Karnik, where he tells that she had an affair with her uncle at the age of fourteen. In that he got to know from one of his friends.

These combinations of all the different points of views lead to the exposing of her private life. These are the heteroglossic elements used in the text.

Heteroglossic elements can be also understood from Benare's point of view about the society and the norms of society. She says that society has created the rules which lead to the destruction of women. And most of the women are oppressed by those societal norms. She also gave her views on education that education is the best way to boost up their confidence and through education women can distinguish between good and bad, and with education women can see the clear picture of the world.

Heteroglossia in the text can be understood through the views of Miss Benare's view on children. She says that children are far better than adults. There is no nonsense in their heads. They are very pure from their hearts, there is nothing wrong in their hearts, they only follow the guidelines of their elders, and do their things according to their elders.

Sukhatme also belongs to the hypocrite society. He was more concerned with the society and the values and morals of society. He was both prosecutor and

defence lawyer but he only said the things against Benare, he did not say anything for defending her and for him morals of the society were more important. He was also concerned about the motherhood, he said that motherhood is the purest thing on the earth and Benare tried to commit the crime of infanticide and for that she should be punished. This also shows the biasness of Sukhatme because he was also defence lawyer of Benare and he should have at least defended her. We observe the hypocrisy and stereotypical nature of Sukhatme in Miss Benare's defence he pleads for mercy. So, this particular kind of behaviour defines his hypocrisy as playing the character of Prosecutor and Defence lawyer he himself accepted the feudal mentality standard of society that females are only wrong. Sukhatme did not even raise a voice in favour of Miss Benare and against her Uncle and Professor Damle who were equally involved in adultery.

Mrs. Kashikar was also a woman, in spite of this she said many things against Benare. She gave negative views against Miss Benare, these views can also be heteroglossic elements in the text. She also said that women like Benare, does not to take responsibility that's why she is not in a favor of getting married at mid thirties

Dialogism in Silence! The court is in session

Dialogism in Silence! The court is in session and can be understood through two thoughts that are modern vs. conventional thoughts.

Modernity and Liberation -

Miss Benare gets the chance to conclude herself at the end of the play. She defends herself by speaking about her private life. Private life is her own way of living. She will live her life according to herself. She also talks about the independent existence of women and that women should have the right to live their life independently without any kind of restrictions. They should have the right to go with their own decision. Whatever she did was her own decision. She fell in love for the first time with her maternal uncle and she was in love with him, and also insisted on the marriage so that she can live her life easily. But that did not happen because that man ran away. And after that when she grew up she again fell in love with another man who was Professor Damle and again she was in love with him but he was more interested in her body and she got pregnant at that time. She accepts everything whatever she did that was her personal choice and nobody was allowed to interfere in her

personal life. She portrayed the example of strong women who did not abandon her child like the person ( Professor Damle) who belonged to the good society and the perfect individual according to the code of conduct of society. She accepted her mistake and did not even plan to run away from her responsibility being a character of modern mindset and liberated personality but gave justice to the portrayal of a female who is always a mother first.

Personal life-

She also talks about her life that was a burden on her shoulders. But still she lives her life with full confidence. She has faced many things in her life and she tries to overcome things that have happened in her life. Life is a precious thing that God has gifted us and we should know the importance of life.

So, these are her modern thoughts and the modernity of Miss Benare can be also said as she was a well educated lady and she was economically independent. Her thoughts were different from the other characters of the play and she wants that women should be considered as equal to men and they should be provided with the right to equality. These were the modern thoughts of Miss Benare.

Conventional and Conservative Mindset-

These thoughts talk about the society, values of society and it also talks about the culture and tradition of society. And to understand this we can include the Sukhatme's view on society and motherhood. He says that motherhood is more pure than heaven. The woman who is accused had made a heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood and she had destroyed the social and moral values of the society. The crime which she has done is bankrupt of morality and law should give her punishment for that crime. If these social tendencies are encouraged to flourish, then this country will get destroyed. The unmarried women's motherhood should be considered as a great sin by our religion and by our traditions also. And he also tells us the infanticide is a dreadful act and bringing up this child can be the most dangerous thing to our society that will also destroy our society's values. And he also says that Miss Benare is not fit for independence and the court should show no mercy to her, the court should give her the greatest punishment for her terrible crime. No allowance should be made because the accused is the woman. And the accused had destroyed the roots of her culture and in our culture this crime is not allowed. At the end he says women are not fit for

independence, they should not live independently as it can be a threat to our society. In the term of threat to society he accused the unborn infant that he or she will be a threat to civilised society. But giving the arguments for the civilized society and the betterment of civilized society Sukhatme is ready to destroy the child in the womb of Miss Benare. This shows the real characters who are forming the civilized society are uncivilized and criminals deep down.

### III. POLYPHONY AND CARNIVALESQUE

#### Polyphony

If the text has more than one point of view and the voice. It has been minutely observed the text Silence! The Court is in Session has written polarity of mindset of the Indian Society. We find different points of view when we observe the characters too, for example the protagonist of the play Miss Benare has been portrayed as the figure of Modernity and Free Spirit. On the other hand being a female too Mrs. Kashikar has been portrayed as the figure of Conservative mindset and a follower of Conventional thoughts. So, the polarity of the opinion plays a vital role as every character in this play has a different opinion and all of them are against Miss Benare in terms of her living habits, for example her marital status, her affairs and her free spirited nature. But the concept of Polyphony has been viewed as belonging to the same gender and facing the same partiality and disrespect from society. Still the opinion of the character can be differ This thing has been observed in the play from the point of view of Mrs. Kashikar. She is also a female character but her opinion related to Miss Benare is quite negative when she says ‘ When you get everything without marrying. They couldn't care less about responsibility’ ( ACT THREE). She strikes on the sensitive angle of the femalehood based on the conventional opinion that if the female does not want to get married she is not a responsible female because female responsibility only lies towards her husband and his family. In the play, Mrs. Kashikar plays a vital role as she accuses Miss Benare that she might be illegitimately involved with Professor Damle. ‘Why must she have Damle, Damle alone to see her home after a performance?’ Based on the fictional assumption in the mock trial by Samant, Mrs. Kashikar tried to prove that Miss Benare does have an illegitimate relationship with Professor Damle.

Moreover, accused her character as Miss Benare based on her free nature whenever she used to dance, sing and crack a joke. On the other hand, Mock Prosecutor Sukhatme was also not satisfied with the answer and gave a conclusion of free spirited and liberal characteristic of Protagonist. But Mrs. Kashikar had stabilised her nature and feudal mentality to accuse the female based on Benare's marital status and her modern nature. So, the different characters in the plays especially in Act Three of the mock trial Miss Benare, Sukhatme and Mrs. Kashikar but the different voices had different perspectives on the same situation giving the justice to polyphony concept in the play.

#### Carnavalesque

The Carnavalesque is a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. This style of writing played a vital role in this play through the character of Miss Benare. She is a lady who is more inclined towards breaking the stereotypical thinking of the society and she deliberately expresses her thoughts to remove all the kinds of biases based on gender stereotypes. In her mid thirties she earns and remains unmarried but at the same time performs plays for social issues prevailing in society. Becomes the example for the dominant class( Males) that to work for the social cause and in her personal life through her nature breaks the level of misunderstanding and the feudal mentality of the society how both the genders should behave in a particular way. From the concept of Carnavalesque she portrays the example of equality through her nature in the forms of humor, singing and dance that forms the misconception when it comes to the judgment of her character from other people point of view. The character of Miss Benare gives justice to this style as she lives with the concept of liberal standard of society sidelining the stereotypical ideology. The interior monologue which she delivers in her mock trial makes her liberate from the shackles of the society. ‘ I want my body now for him alone, he must have a mother, father to call his own , he must have a good name.’ (Act Three). Through this particular monologue she actually described that if Miss Benare has committed a crime to get involved in the relationship with a married person Professor Damle and it is a chaos through the code of conduct of society then Professor Damle is also at fault. The infant who is lying in the womb of Miss Benare the

mock trial is conducted because of adultery of Miss Benare and Professor Damle relationship, still the infant is not at fault. The equality and liberation should not be based on the dominant class (Male), if the adultery has been committed the responsibility lies on the male and female both. Therefore, to question the character of only Miss Benare is not accurate according to the standard of civilized society. The blame also lies in the hand of father of five children Professor Damle who just washed out his hand from the responsibility of the child after Miss Benare confessed about her Pregnancy. So, through the chaos in the mindset Carnavalesques concept can be observed in the monologue of Miss Benare through which she tries to show us liberation of blames from the point of view of society that males are also responsible for the mistakes of adultery not only females. To accept the concept of Carnavalesque is important to draw a suspension for the traditional powers and hierarchies (Males of the society).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This work has tried to describe the relationship between play as heteroglossic, dialogic, polyphony and carnivalesque concept with reference to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. The study concludes that in Indian society, the conventional mindset of patriarchal society shall remain powerful and shall not be overpowered by any free thinking, especially women in the society. Here in the context of rights men have all the right to do whatever he wants. But the women are bound to follow the social norms and cultures of the society. Through the character of Professor Damle we came to know more about the discrimination and hypocrisy in Indian society. Professor Damle has been married and has 5 children but still he has an illegitimate relation with Miss Benare, but nobody questioned Professor Damle. The saddest part belonging to the dominant class and the higher hierarchy Professor Damle is not brave enough to accept the mistake and the child. On the other hand Miss Benare is ready to accept and being the free spirited female also she is a mother and ready to accept her mistake and without anyone's support wants to raise her child and to make him the civilized and understanding person of the society.

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