

SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION

By Vijay Tendulkar

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By VIJAY TENDULKAR

Objectives

Lesson Plan for the students of the BA Program, Elective English III yr course. The purpose of this essay is to introduce the student who has opted for Elective English in the BA Program to a play by a Modern Indian Playwright. The student will be introduced to the tradition of Indian drama and some of the salient features in this genre. We shall also look at the breaks and continuities that modern drama introduces. Furthermore, we shall also analyse drama's role in raising issues and disseminating ideas. The student will also be given a brief biography of the playwright. The first lesson plan also provides a detailed list of characters and a discussion of the First Act

Dear Students,

This study material is designed to provide you with an introduction and discussion around the critical issues in *Vijay Tendulkar's "Silence! The Court Is In Session!"* As you are aware this play has been prescribed in The English Discipline Course for the students of BA Programme IIIyr.

While discussions on the play are important, it is even more important that prior to reading this study material, you do a thorough reading of the play. Do not feel intimidated by the suggestion. If you do have a small group of friends who are part of the course, you may even undertake a group reading, where each one of you can read out the part of individual characters. It would be better still, if you could emote the part allotted to you, instead of merely reading it. This will engage your complete attention and enable you to come to grips with the action of the play. After all, you must remember that when Tendulkar wrote this play, he was not thinking about its being prescribed for undergraduate students at a university college. He wanted a living, thinking, and feeling audience to engage with issues that he felt very strongly about. He wanted his audience to go home thinking deeply about the questions that his play brings to the fore.

Background Detail Pertaining To The Play

The play “*Silence ! The Court Is In Session*” is an English translation of a play written in marathi in the year 1967 by *Vijay Tendulkar*. The title of this play in Marathi is “*Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe!*”

Where did the germ of an idea that inspired Tendulkar to write this play come from?

The play is based on a short story by *Friedrich Dürrenmatt*(1921-1990). The short story "Die Panne" written in 1956 is available in an English translation titled "Traps." Durrenmatt was a Swiss author and playwright whose work reflected the experiences of World War II. This detail allows us to see how powerful the impact of creative writing is. It also documents for us the fact that human beings are easily influenced by ideas and that these ideas can have their origins in any eclectic source. Suddenly the commonalities of language make us register the common bonds that link us with people around the world. Where ever a writer is located, the fact that he is speaking about human experiences always enables others to connect to the shared universality of

human experience. See if you can locate Friedrich Durrenmatt's story. It might just be fun to track down this story and see how a reading enlarges your own understanding of Tendulkar's play.

Tendulkar's "*Silence !The Court Is In Session*" belongs to the genre of drama. Tendulkar's play, "Shāntatā! Court Chālu Aahe" ("Silence! The Court Is In Session") was first staged in 1967 and is acknowledged to be one of his mature works. A movie was made on this play in 1971 by Satya Dev Dubey for which Tendulkar wrote the screenplay. It might be a good idea for those of you who are interested in the genre of film to look for a video of this production, Those of you who are interested in theatre could check at the National School of Drama, near Mandi House, New Delhi. They might have a recording of the play, which has a rich stage history, in their archives.

We have now looked at two significant aspects of the play. First, we know that *Vijay Tendulkar* was inspired by a short story, written in German by a Swiss writer which was translated in English. We also know that he wrote the play in Marathi. Yet another significant dimension of the play is that it is located in an Indian context. The play draws upon an older Indian tradition of drama at the same time, it is located in the India of the 1950s and does to some extent document the lives, mores and perspectives of people in this period. Necessarily, the play therefore draws upon situations that would be typical of the lives of men and women in the newly independent Indian state, undergoing rapid changes as it sought to assimilate modern ideas and incorporate these while trying to break free of the stranglehold of older constricting patterns and thought processes.

Notions Of Genre

This brings me to yet another important aspect that you need to consider. The course in literature that you are studying deals with a large range consists of forms. These are also described as genres. Poetry, prose, short story, epic, fiction and drama are some of the popular genres in which writers have expressed themselves through the ages. What are the various genres you are familiar with? Is there any genre that appeals to you more than the others? Did you know that if we were to look at the history of literature in any period, we would find that at any given time some genres have always been more popular than the others? One of the good things about being readers and students of literature in English in the Twenty-First Century is that we are introduced to a very large repertoire of genres and authors

You could explore the distinguishing features in the different genres that you are studying. The epic quite often uses poetic meters. So do a lot of plays. In fact, a later play by *Tendulkar, Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) made dramatic history by its use of older and more popular folk traditions of dance and music. Even "*Silence! The Court Is In Session*" introduces nursery rhymes and poems, through its characters. So you see while terms like poetry and prose are general indicators, a work of literature can quite often successfully use both poetry and prose, such as the Mahabharata, which often intersperses poetic and prosaic forms. A drama thus is shaped not only by the thinking of the playwright, it also draws from the long history, social and cultural of the place it is located in.

Let us then look quickly at some of the aspects of drama, both in the context of India and the world. As you are probably aware ours is an old civilization with a a rich and diverse tradition of

drama and spectacle and we have a fairly old tradition of ancient Sanskrit drama. Eventually Sanskrit drama was slowly replaced by drama in regional languages and when we move closer to recent drama in modern times, we find drama in regional languages being translated into English, which is one of the newest languages on the Indian subcontinent.

Older History Of Drama

Sanskrit drama which can be traced to the ancient vedic times is first recorded in the form of exchanges between some of the gods who feature in the **Rigveda**. These were succeeded by a large number of Sanskrit dramatists such as **Kalidasa, Banabhatta, Shudraka, Asvaghosa**, to name a few. In Sanskrit drama, especially in the plays of **Kalidasa**, the male protagonists spoke in Sanskrit. Usually, the women and other minor characters spoke in pali, prakrit or apstamba. This was a very evolved and sophisticated form of dramaturgy and boasts of a manual for both playwrights and actors which details at great length every aspect concerned with the production and staging of a play. Exhaustive guidelines are provided in the **Natyashastra**, a remarkable treatise on the art, craft, aesthetics and dynamics of play production.

The primary aim of Sanskrit drama was to produce harmony and provide pleasure. So dramatists kept acts of violence and death away from the stage. Most plays subjected the central characters to great trial and suffering, at the end of which they emerged stronger and usually concluded on a happy note. The subject matter was borrowed from the older stories and myths and centered around important figures of royal birth, who in turn are often visited by the gods, demons and other semi-divine beings. **Kalidasa's** well known play **Abhigyan Shakuntalam**, is the story of the birth of one of Bharatavarsha's kings "Bharata. This is a story that traces the lineage of the Puru dynasty, while exploring the love of King Dushyanta for the daughter of an apsara who lived with her foster father Kanwa, in a hermitage. The earliest version of this story fleshed out in the form of a play by Kalidasa can be found in the epic, the **Mahabharata**

Do read, **Abhigyan Shakuntalam** if you can. This will allow you to analyse more acutely the difference in the modern Indian play and its shift from the traditional Sanskrit play. **Abhigyan Shakuntalam** is available in translation and provides an important link in the history of translation. This play was discovered by indologists in the 18th century and translated into English, German and French and was viewed with great wonder in different parts of Europe. It was also translated into Indian languages. In fact, the earliest play written in Marathi for the stage was an adaptation of **Abhigyan Shakuntalam** in 1880.

You may be curious to know whether there were any other influences apart from the tradition of drama in Sanskrit that shaped contemporary Indian drama. The answer to this is in the affirmative. While Sanskrit classical drama did influence theatrical representation in different parts of India, there was also the incorporation of and emergence of very rich local traditions of cultural expression. These contributed their own flavor and colour to the development of new traditions in regional drama. So while Sanskrit is the primary language from which most of our modern Indian languages evolved, one must also recognize the impetus regional theatre received from alternate traditions in each region of India.

Regional Influences

When we look at theatre traditions in Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu or Maharashtra, for instance, we observe the rich influx of local practice that exists in each of these regions. The popular folk

tradition leading to the development of Marathi theatre was the Tamasha. This was a form of theatre which came into existence in the early sixteenth century in Maharashtra. Tamasha was a folk tradition of theatricals and love songs called Lavanis popular among the common people especially those from the Kolhati and mahar communities. One of the significant facts to remember about the Tamasha is that it adapted into its practice of song, dance and story, a host of narratives from the sanskrit tradition, namely the puranas, the dasavataras and the Krishna leelas. The Tamasha could be performed anywhere, in an open courtyard, in a large open stretch of land or even in front of a house. Thus, as you can see it was not constrained by the absence of a proper or regular stage. The Tamasha was perhaps one of the earliest community cultural activities in which women danced and sang before an audience.

The classical and folk traditions of theatre were then followed by what we could broadly term the modern period in Indian Theatre. In the instance of Maharashtra, we can see the eighteenth century as the period from which we can trace the beginnings of modern Marathi theatre. Modern Marathi theatre is indebted to the contributions of *Vishnu Das Bhave*'s adaptations of older Sanskrit narratives like *Sita Swayamvar*, in Marathi. His contribution was to present the dialogues in the form of ordinary, everyday conversations. He also used innovations like changeable scenery which he borrowed from the Western stage.

Another important personage associated with modern Marathi theatre was *Anna Saheb Kirloskar*. The foundation of commercial repertoires in Marathi theatre can be dated to the time of his founding of the Kirloskar Natya Mandali in 1880.

Modern Influences

Meanwhile a lot of English theatre also travelled to India. The early twentieth century saw a lot of English plays being staged in different parts of India. Indian theatre in the twentieth century owes a great deal to ideas and influences from across the continent, from both Europe and America. Both in the First and the Second World, idealistic men and women struggled to put across on paper their concerns about the rights and desires of a burgeoning population. The Twentieth Century is about the spread of notions of democracy all over the world and its implementation in political governments as well. With the exception of small pockets in the world, most countries moved in the direction of governments by the people, of the people and for the people. This did not of course mean that an equal or equitable world was immediately achieved. Yet, this was a major step in that direction and several playwrights the world over began to engage with the lives of the ordinary people. Most of the characters in Modern Drama are from a new class that grew to its optimum in the twentieth century, namely the middle class.

In India we also struggled in the formative years of the twentieth century with colonialism, and our own struggles for independence from British Rule. Alongside, a strong sense of our identity as Indians we also tried to negotiate the difficulties imposed by rigid caste structures and ossified gender roles and expectations. To add to this were long standing religious convictions that had again entrenched themselves in cultural practice. As a country whose people went out into the streets to fight for their right to freedom, citizenship, governance and independence, we also adopted several new ideas. Our constitution which we adopted in 1950 speaks about these ideas and defines them as fundamental rights which accrue to every man and women, independent of his social class, and gender. We need now to see what our inspired playwrights made of these new ideas and influences.

Vijay Tendulkar: A Life

You may not be aware that ***Tendulkar*** is one of the pioneering writers of plays for the proscenium theatre in India. Other prominent writers who wrote plays around this time are ***Girish Karnad*** and ***Mohan Rakesh***. ***Tendulkar*** is also one of our prominent modern playwrights, reflecting and exploring the journeys of individuals through the Indian cultural milieu. As Arundhati Banerjee points out, “he has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for the past forty years.” ***Vijay Tendulkar*** was born in Kohlapur, Maharashtra in 1928. He was from a Saraswat Brahmin family and his father worked as a clerk and also ran a publishing business. Kohlapur in the 1920s had its own Maharaja Shaju I.

The world ***Tendulkar*** grew up in was in pre-independent India and as a young boy he was naturally attracted to the world of words and writing. He displayed a prolific interest in the same, writing his first play at the age of eleven. So he came of age in an India that was on the threshold of great changes. ***Tendulkar*** was witness to the fact that older feudal and traditional structures and familiar ways of life were being disrupted and changed by the new ideas of social ferment and political change in the air.

Tendulkar was an impressionable young teenager when the Quit India Movement was in full force. Despite the reservations of his family, he joined the movement. Along with his interest in a world of ideas, ***Tendulkar*** was deeply absorbed in the everyday world around him. His first job was that of a journalist with a Marathi weekly that was published from Pune (then Poona). He worked as a journalist for a great number of years, and eventually shifted to Mumbai (then Bombay), as the Chief Sub-editor of a Marathi Daily. Subsequently he worked as a freelance writer and he was a regular columnist for The Maharashtra Times. The year 1948 saw him as the editor of Navbharat. Alongside regular journalistic activity, ***Tendulkar*** also found outlets to his creative writing through short stories. Discovering that his narratives contained a surfeit of dialogues, he experimented with writing one act plays. This led eventually to his writing full fledged plays. He continued to live in Mumbai for the rest of his life.

As you already know, ***Tendulkar*** began his career writing for newspapers. He had also written two plays, “***Āmchyāvar Kon Prem Karnār***” (Who will Love us?), and the “***Gruhastha***” (The Householder). His early attempts at playwriting did not receive much appreciation and he decided never to write again. Something like this happened to an aspiring playwright in the Nineteenth Century in England, Robert Browning. He moved from writing plays to writing poems, and popularised the dramatic monologue through his poetry. ***Tendulkar*** however continued writing plays in spite of the plays not being received favourably. In 1956 he wrote “***Shrimant***,” which was to establish him as a significant playwright. This play also saw the arrival of ***Tendulkar***, the playwright who was ready to explore unconventional themes and look closely at the many changes that were taking place in the society around him. “***Shrimant***” startled the conservative audience of the times. It has a rather radical storyline; an unmarried young woman decides to keep her unborn child while her rich father tries to “buy” her a husband in an attempt to save his social prestige. In “***Shrimant***” ***Tendulkar*** plunges deep into the heart of middle class morality, challenging social codes and questioning taboos. This questioning remains of central importance in all of his plays.

In a writing career spanning more than five decades, ***Tendulkar*** has written 30 full length plays and 23 one-act plays. Several of his plays have gone on to become classics of the Marathi theatre as well as modern Indian Theatre. His plays have been translated and performed in many Indian languages. ***Ghashiram Kotwal*** (*Ghashiram the Constable*) (1972), a musical combining Marathi

folk performance styles and contemporary theatrical techniques, is one of the longest-running plays in the world, with over six thousand performances in India and abroad, in the original and in translation. *Tendulkar* has a prolific output of writing to his credit and it is not possible to discuss each and every one of his plays keeping in mind the limitations of this study material. It would be a good idea for you to read some of *Tendulkar*'s plays in order to familiarize yourself with his writing.

Shantata as you all know is a play in Three Acts. Like *Shrimant*, the protagonist of this play deals with an unconventional woman. Her experience places her in a vulnerable position in a rigid society that runs on hidebound codes. The young woman and the choices she makes are seen as threatening the very edifice of the society she lives in. Her existence therefore becomes problematic and she is perforce silenced in the course of the play.

World Of The Play

Silence! The Court Is In Session is a play in three acts dealing with the lives of ordinary people in a small town. Coming from diverse backgrounds, around ten characters are engaged in a group activity. They are members of "The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association (SMTPA). This is a socially committed group whose prime objective is to facilitate awareness around important issues affecting the community or the world. These are raised for discussion by the various members of the group who enact a court-room scenario. *Tendulkar* borrows from court proceedings in order to stage a mock-trial. For this particular evening, the group is meeting to perform a mock trial protesting against President Johnson's production of atomic weapons.

The idea of a mock trial in order to engage the audience is a brilliant strategy adopted by *Tendulkar*. In doing so, he borrows from an important institution made available for the resolution of civilian problems in the modern world, namely, the world of the law courts wherein the highest secular principles of the law are enshrined. The officials of the court are meant to uphold the rights of the individual and they legislate accordingly, keeping in view larger principles, duties and responsibilities. Courts and the justice they deliver are perforce meant to be free of prejudice and bias. We need to examine whether such objective evaluation and bias free justice is made available in the course of the play.

Tendulkar uses the possibilities of an open discussion forum which the court provides in order to introduce to us a motley group of characters who are thrown together and perforce create a small social community when they decide to stage a mock trial. Social work ostensibly is the glue that binds the different characters together.

As you now know the play is divided into three Acts. Read each Act carefully? What do you think are the salient features of each of the three acts? Is there any distinct difference that you could notice between one act and the succeeding act? As you know all three acts take place in the same hall. In the first act, the play swings into action in an empty hall presumably used for a lot of public functions in the village such as speeches, receptions, weddings, women's bhajans and magic shows. We are introduced to all the characters in the play in the first act itself as all the members of the SMPTA begin to assemble for rehearsals.

List Of Characters In Order Of Appearance:

1. Raghu Samant: Appears on the stage holding a green cloth parrot. Is a young man, who earns “enough to keep body and soul together,” in his own words. He lives with his brother and sister-in-law, is unmarried and dotes on his nephew. He is a mild-mannered and friendly young man. Runs chores for the group and is asked to act as the fourth witness.
2. Leela Benare: is a school teacher of eight years standing. She comes across as a vivacious and unconventional woman. She seems to have a mind of her own and is very forthright. She has a sense of fun. She is also able to laugh at the foibles and eccentricities of the various members in the group.
3. Sukhatme: Arrives on stage along with the rest of the characters. He is introduced as a lawyer in the stage directions. He comes in smoking a beedi.
4. Servant: Possibly a porter hired from the station, he is one of the general factotum which arrives on stage. He carries “two wooden enclosures, the dock and the witness box, puts these down on the left side of the wings, returns to face Punkshe, is paid money for his services and leaves the stage.
5. Balu Rokde: As a young boy he was given shelter by the Kashikars, who fed, clothed and educated him while he ran errands and performed odd jobs for them. He accompanies them and takes orders from them.
6. Punkshe: Is introduced as the Science student. Leela Benare tells us that he has failed his intermediate examinations, these are examinations that would have allowed him to join the university. Punkshe smokes a pipe, has taken his inter exams for the second time and works as a clerk at the Central Telegraph office.
7. Mrs. Kashikar: Benare introduces her as “The-hand-that-rocks –the-cradle.” Yet, Mrs Kashikar, although she is given this epithet has no children of her own. Her role, it is suggested at the outset is one of providing nurture and secondary support as a housewife. The use of a married title “Mrs. And her husbands surname are the only way in which she is represented throughout the play. This perhaps is her only public identity. She is known as the wife of Mr. Kashikar. It is her husband who calls all the shots and is shown as very rude to her, putting her down and cutting her short on every occasion.

The taking on of a marriage usually involves a change of the surname for a woman. The man retains his own name. This is accepted as conventional practice all over the world. There are feminists who have voiced their apprehensions about how this change of surname indicates the subservient status that a woman occupies in contrast to her husband, including a gradual erosion of female identity and selfhood. Today a small percentage of women do use their own surnames.

8. Mr. Kashikar: The dominant spouse, he has indulged his wife by stopping on the way to the hall and buying her flowers to put in her hair. He is referred to as the chairman of the group by Benare and sees himself as a man of superior intelligence. He is shown to have

a great sense of self-importance and sees himself as undertaking any and every action only with Prime objectives in view.

9. Local Resident

10. Karnik is an experimental theatre actor, shown as habituated to chewing pan

As you will notice, there are minor characters and there are major characters even in a play like *Shantata* which does not have a conventional romantic storyline. For instance, in *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, the narrative begins with the king out on a hunt. In the process he strays into a hermitage and encounters with a beautiful young woman to whom he is attracted. Over Seven Acts, Kalidasa traces the moods of love, longing, parting, separation, misunderstanding and eventual reunion over a period of a few years.

In *Shantata*, the action of the play takes place over a single evening. There are young men and a young woman in this play. However the play is not an exploration of romantic love that blossoms into commitment and adult responsibility. We see instead a cross section of people from the middle-class who have assembled together for staging a mock-trial on issues that concern them. These different people may never have met each other were it not for the Sonar Moti Tenement. With the exception of the Kashikars who are husband and wife and Balu Rokde, who has been raised by them, the rest of the characters connect with each other through dealings in a very public world. Each member of the group is different from the other in terms of age, gender or social status. They are all brought together in the same place is the device of the “mock trial” that they are enacting. This is definitely the breaking of new ground. Tendulkar is addressing issues in the play that deal with collective psychology and its shaping of individual responses.

First Act of The Play

The notes by the playwright describe the setting of the play which takes place in an old community hall, which is used by the residents of the village for a range of social, cultural and group activities.

Do pay attention to the playwright’s notes. Usually these provide a cue for the actors in the play. However, in your case as a reader of the play, in the absence of an actual performance, they enable you, as the reader, to get into the atmosphere of the play.

For instance, the stage directions tell us that Samant enters carrying a lock and a key and a green cloth parrot. Miss Benare who follows him is carrying a purse and a basket of equipment. The objects they bring with them are in the nature of stage props. There are also a number of miscellaneous objects piled up on the stage. These range from broken chairs and odds and ends to “worn out portraits of national leaders.” Make a small list of all these items. What is the significance of this jumbled heap of stage props? These add to the atmosphere of the play. Stage props reveal to the reader/audience details about the characters and the world they live in. They also give the audience a sense of the times that the play is located in. Perhaps they even provide an indication of how we are meant to view events that are to follow.

Other than the actual dialogues spoken by the characters and the stage props they carry, you can see stage brief directions related to characters movements and expression in parenthesis. (for

instance, looking around, terribly shy and embarrassed.) These operate as codes and signals that guide us to an understanding of the play.

Notice for instance that we are shown Benare standing in the doorway sucking on her bruised finger. Samant provides commentary on this, communicating to us that she has crushed a finger presumably while bolting the door. We are plunged immediately into the lives of the characters. One of them is injured and the other is concerned about her predicament. He immediately draws parallels between her current experience and a similar situation in which he found himself on an earlier occasion. While we see Samant as a kindhearted person, are we meant to read any more into Benare's sucking on her finger? Is this indicative of anything other than the fact that she has an injured finger? Are we to assume that this inadvertent injury is preparing us for any deeper symbolism that will become apparent at the end of the act? Notice that at the outset, Benare herself dismisses the injury as being of little significance.

While exploring the hall, Samant and Benare fall into conversation. Samant is a regular frequenter of the hall. Presumably he lives in the village. Benare is a visitor and Samant tells her about the various cultural events that the hall is regularly used for. Both of them have reached the hall much before the other members of the group. How did this happen? Benare gets off at the station and walks in the direction of the hall much faster than all the other characters. Only Samant is able to keep pace with her. The rest of the troupe is yet to come in. Why does Benare walk faster than usual? Why does she tell Samant that she desires to "leave everyone behind, . . . and go somewhere far, far away- with you." Why is Samant puzzled by her response? In the next few lines we realize that Benare and Samant have met only a short while ago. With this new information, how do we interpret Benare's statements? Do they seem out of place?

Why does Benare move close to Samant and ask him questions? Look at the following directions for instance "[She comes as close as before. Embarrassed, he backs away once more]" Do the stage directions suggest that Benare is teasing and prodding Samant? Is the play suggesting that such proximity between a man and a woman is not usual? Is there a suggestion that Samant is not used to interactions of this kind with women? Benare is presented as a lively and inquisitive young woman. Is there a suggestion that she is unconventional?

What do we make of the following stage direction "[Perhaps as a response to his complete innocence, she moves away from him.]" If this were to be enacted, remember that the audience will have no access to the stage directions written in parentheses. The actors will have to provide cues in other ways. Now body movements, gestures and facial expressions will have to be used to communicate this to the audience.

Let us now look at the conversation itself. What is being suggested here? Is it being suggested that Samant is an inexperienced young man from the village? Is there a suggestion that Benare, who is an outsider and a woman who is engaged with the public sphere due to her teaching, has a different approach to Samant? Would you say that Benare is extremely outgoing and perhaps a little provocative? When she tells Samant that she likes him very much, he is a little confused. Why does she tell him this? Is she attracted to him? She hardly knows Samant. Does she move away from him because he doesn't notice her overtures? Again, she looks at the hall and announces that she likes the hall very much. What do we make of this response of hers?

Perhaps, the dramatist intends us to see Benare as an impulsive and excitable young woman. Her questions to Samant enable us to learn more about the surroundings and also about Samant. What

are the things we learn about Samant? We learn that he is a bachelor. We learn that he lives with his married elder brother. He has a sister-in-law who leads a regular community life. She is part of the women's bhajan group. There is a nephew whom Samant is very fond of.

Benare is a school teacher. She has been working as a school teacher for the past eight years. She loves her work and draws great pleasure from teaching. She enjoys teaching. Despite her passion for her work, she hints that some slander is afoot and there is perhaps an attempt to remove her from her job. She also puts her hand on her stomach, quite unconscious of the gesture. While the audience mulls over these bits of detail, Benare begins to tell Samant and the viewers about the group of motivated social workers who will be assembling to rehearse for a play. In fact, we hear about most of the characters from her in the first Act. While she tells Samant about each of the characters, we also get a brief sketch of what they seem like to Benare. She seems to get it right most of the time. Benare tells Samant and the viewers more about the other characters than she lets on about herself. Benare is also very critical of all the members of the group that she rehearses with.

By the end of the first act, we have met all the characters.

Balu Rokde is the odd-job man who runs a lot of errands for the Kashikars. On the face of it, he is awed by them, is quite often chided by them and is shown as accepting them as his superiors.

The Kashikars seem to be an older married couple. They have no children and while they are ostensibly working for a social cause, they have a very hierarchical relationship. Although he buys garlands for her and she buys him shirts, Kashikar is clearly the speaking head of the family. Mrs. Kashikar is not educated, unlike her husband.

Mrs. Kashikar's cue is to fall in line or remain silent. She plays a rather subservient role in her marriage to Mr. Kashikar. The Kashikars represent perhaps average middle-aged couples of their times. Women in the nineteen-forties and fifties were seldom given an extensive education. They were often trained in housework and then married off, ostensibly to run their husband's home. The Kashikars take a little more time to get to the hall. They are delayed because they stop to buy jasmine flowers for Mrs. Kashikar's hair. This used to be a popular practice, the buying of fragrant garlands or venis by women to adorn their long tresses with. Please notice that Mrs. Kashikar buys a garland for herself but she does not buy one for Benare, although she knows she will be meeting Benare at the hall. Was this an oversight? Why doesn't she buy flowers for Benare? Why does she make it a point to tell her so? What do you make of Benare's response? A contrast is immediately set up between the two women. Mrs. Kashikar is uneducated but having a husband, is coy about getting him to buy her flowers for her hair. Is Tendulkar examining cultural practices of courtship where men buy flowers for women? Is this a token of gift giving extended to women who are accepted and approved of in a patriarchal society? Benare's response signifies her rejection of such courtship ritual. She declares her economic independence and announces that she never buys garlands nor desires them.

Is Benare discomfited by the fact that there are no flowers for her? When she mentions to Mrs. Kashikar that she is employed and can buy her own flowers, is she signaling a rejection of Mrs. Kashikar's choices? We are also made aware of her single status. Benare who is educated and employed, is set apart from Mrs. Kashikar. As you can see there are a lot of undercurrents running through the play.

We are also introduced to Rokde, Sukatme and Ponshe. Benare mimics Ponshe and laughs at his nervousness. She hides behind the door and startles the new arrivals by booing them. Karnik arrives next, and is then followed by the Kashikars.

Pleasantries and snacks are exchanged. There is general stock-taking, and Rokde who seems responsible for the luggage is pulled up by Mr. Kashikar.

Damle, one of the members in the group is absent. At the mention of his name, stage directions provide us with the information that Benare “falls silent and motionless” and “goes by mistake to Ponshe and stands talking to him with an artificial air.”

We see that despite being outspoken and unconventional Benare is slightly on edge all through the First Act. Her response to all the characters is also a little exaggerated. When we move on to the Second Act, the reasons for this will become clear.

What happens when all the characters have assembled? Benare goes to wash up and moves out of view from the stage. Since another member from the group, Rawte, is not likely to be present, Kashikar asks Samant to take over his role. Balu who pleads that he would like to take on this role is turned down peremptorily. What does this tell us about Mr. Kashikar? Although he projects himself as a social worker, wanting to raise public consciousness through a mock-trial, he is a rather opinionated and inflexible man.

Samant is enthusiastic about doing his bit and wants to know how he will play the role entrusted to him. At the same time he wants to understand how a court trial works as he has never been inside a courtroom. To give Samant an idea of how the courtroom functions, all the members decide to stage a mock trial for him.

The narrative proceeds towards its denouement. At the end of Act I, a few things are being spelt out for us. There is a lot of undercurrent tension that surfaces in the exchanges between the characters. Each of the characters have their own pet peeves. Benare manages to irritate all of them. Balu Rodke does not want to be addressed by his first name. Mrs. Kashikar is regularly shouted down by her husband, yet she sees herself as more important than Benare, for instance. Ponshe is a mediocre man, aware of his intellectual failing, but is filled with self importance since unlike Rokde, he is financing his own education and is not dependent upon anyone else. Karnik, informs Ponshe that he has some news about Benare that Rokde has shared with him. What is the nature of this information? Is this part of men’s talk when they have something salacious to say about women? Is Tendulkar suggesting that women in the public sphere are often the subject of unsavoury discussion?

Benare who is unconventional and something of an extrovert is not present when Sukhatame’s suggestion to have a “different kind of accused” is accepted readily enough by Kashikar. Sukhatame further argues that “when there is a woman in the dock, the case does have a different complexion.” What is the significance of this observation? Is there a suggestion here by the playwright that when women are singled out and subjected to public scrutiny, several irrational and hide-bound prejudices come to the fore? It is then decided that Benare will be charged with a crime. The fact that this decision is taken in Benare’s absence and she is not given any choice in the matter is significant. Is there a suggestion that even in the world of the theatre group, formed by people uniting to draw attention to social issues there are power centres and hierarchies? Is

Tendulkar asking us to examine how women can be undermined in spite of their economic independence?

Kashikar declares that “a charge with social significance” will be leveled against the accused. How are we to interpret this statement? Kashikar, as we have seen keeps heckling Rodke and running down his wife. He also desires to dominate all proceedings. What exactly do we make of Kashikar’s notions of “social significance?” How are we to view Kashikar’s treatment of his wife and his readiness to put Benare in the dock? Is Tendulkar suggesting that in the public sphere women have less stature irrespective of where they are located?

The fact that Ponshe calls all the actors and whispers to them is also a little sinister. Although the spectator is not taken into confidence, two things become very noticeable around the end of the First Act. Firstly, the decision to stage a new mock trial, on an entirely unrelated new subject is taken largely by the important male characters in the play. These men seem to hold positions of power and authority in the world outside the hall and inside it as well. Secondly, the women in the play occupy a subsidiary position in relation to the men, irrespective of whether they are conventional or not. Mrs. Kashikar, despite being the proverbial better half of the domineering Kashikar enjoys very little dignity. Other than Mrs. Kashikar, there are men too who have diminutive identities in the play. For instance, both Samant and Balu Rokde have subservient roles in the worlds they inhabit. They are quickly intimidated by the more powerful characters. Mrs. Kashikar and Balu Rokde for instance, are quite insignificant and quickly beaten down when they express any opinion by Mr. Kashikar. However, in the first act, with the exception of Samant, most of the characters including Mrs. Kashikar seem ready to belittle Benare. The whisper campaign which comes into play when she is offstage highlights this attitude.

Notice that Benare is quite unprepared when she is accosted by Kashikar as she comes out of the washroom, singing. She is accused of the crime of infanticide. Infanticide refers to the killing of the new born child or infant. This is a crime that despite being punishable by the law often surfaces in modern India. In fact, given the development of technology, infanticide has now taken on other ramifications. Technology makes it possible to destroy the child in the womb and is referred to as feticide.

To get back to the play again, as we can see, Benare’s absence has been disadvantageous and she has not been left with too much choice. She is to play the role of the accused and she is accused of a terrible crime. It is only natural that she should be stunned. This is a significant moment in the play. Suddenly, we seem to have moved away from the world of play acting into a more real world of intrigue, suspicion, crime and recriminations. The first act of the play concludes on a note of great tension. This is in stark contrast to the nondescript opening of the play

Who is the most interesting character out of all the people that we encounter in the first act? Is there any character that you like more than the others? Is there any character that you dislike?

Notice that Benare is at her happiest and most confident in the first Act. What does this tell us about her? Is she any different in the Second and the Third Act? What are the reasons for this change?

Some Points For Discussion In Act I

1. Benare and Samant meet for the first time in the hall where Benare's group is scheduled to perform in the evening. How are we meant to interpret Benare's uninhibited exchange with Samant? Is this a theatrical limitation that Tendulkar has no control over? Are we being asked to notice that Benare is unconventional and that she seems a little forward in her exchange with a perfect stranger?
2. Despite Benare's ease with conversations, is there a sense that something is bothering her? What are the things she says that confirm this assumption?
3. Benare is able to have the last word in her exchange with each of the characters in the narrative, before she goes off to freshen up. What do you think each of the character's response to her?
4. Benare either riles or teases each of the characters she meets in Act I with the exception of Samant and Karnik. How do each of these characters communicate their differences with her? What is Benare's response to Ponkshe, Mrs. Kashikar or Rokde for instance?
5. Why do the characters go into a huddle when Benare leaves the room? The decision to stage a mock-trial, which began in earnestness, shifts into something more sinister. How does this happen?
6. Sukhatame's comment that "when there is a woman in the dock, the case does have a different complexion," states very clearly that men and women are perceived in the public sphere entirely on the basis of their gender. It also tells us that there are preconceived notions and expectations centered round women's lives and identities. Would you agree?
7. We can see that the eight speaking characters we have been introduced to in the first act function in a hierarchy. Kashikar, Sukhatme, Karnik and Ponkshe seem to have a little more authority. Balu, Samant, Mrs Kashikar and Miss Benare seem to be more vulnerable to pressure. We see Mrs. Kashikar and Balu Rokde cowed down by the first four characters quite often in Act I. Only Leela Benare seems to be impervious to this subtle hierarchy. She seems fairly in control of herself.
8. We do notice her occasional discomfort. Some of it is noticeable when attention is drawn to the absence of Damle, one of the members of the drama group.
9. However, when she returns from the washroom, the whole situation seems to have undergone a sea-change. Benare is suddenly one of the hunted. She no longer enjoys the power and control she displayed at the beginning of Act I.
10. Benare recites and sings poems and songs in the course of the First Act. Each song has a sad ending. Whether it is the rhyme that she wrote in her notebooks when she was little, or whether it is the poem by Mrs Shirin Rai that she recites or the poem about the weeping sparrow, all of them have sad conclusions.

Act II of The Play

This Act begins on a different note. While Act I allowed Benare to modulate our responses to all the other characters, we observe a major shift in Act II. Earlier in Act I, we learnt about the rest of the characters through Benare. Act II reveals to us new aspects of Benare's life, provided gratuitously by the rest of the characters assembled on the stage. She is now on trial in more ways than one.

Benare is shaken and startled by the accusation that is leveled against her. She tries to regain her composure at the beginning of Act II

After a few false starts, slapstick and comic in nature, Benare who is charged with the crime of infanticide denies it.

This is followed by the argument of the prosecution, represented by Sukhatame. Sukhatame pontificates on the significance of motherhood and highlights the glorification and deification of the role of the mother in Indian culture. Kashikar adds to this, quoting from the Sanskrit and reiterates the high status of the mother and the motherland, both of which supersede even that of heaven. Such exalted constructions of women as mothers are part of the history of the nationalist movements and of the period preceding it wherein women's identities were fixed within the domestic procreative space and subsequently mythologized around notions of the motherland.

How do such constructions translate when examined in the context of real women? Do we, for instance, see any evidence of the exalted role played by any mother within the world of the play? Is there any lived record of the vestiges of this older ideology? If we look at how Mrs. Kashikar is treated, we see very little evidence of any status accorded to her. It is true that Mrs. Kashikar has no children of her own. Therefore, one conclusion that we could possibly draw is that in this group of people women without children are not held in high esteem. Does this change when we encounter women with children? The play itself does not deal directly with any actual mother figure. Samant's sister-in-law is the only point of indirect reference that we get. So in a mock-trial where the judge and the prosecution award the highest status to the figure of the mother, we need to see how the court will treat an expectant mother. Benare's observation that all the pontification offered by Sukhatme and Kashikar on the subject of motherhood sounds like it is out of text books is significant.

After declaring that the status of a mother is hallowed, the court proceeds to cross-examine Benare. What exactly is the nature of this cross-examination?

At first, the meaning of the term infanticide needs to be explained to Samant. On understanding its implication Samant informs everyone present that a widow had been tried in their village "one or two years ago" for the same crime. This little anecdote provided by Samant goes back a long way into the history of women's lives in patriarchal Maharashtra.

Before we move into any further analysis of Act II of the play, I would like to draw your attention to some very significant historical detail that will sharpen our understanding of the issues raised in the play.

In the year 1882, Tarabai Shinde, a woman activist from Buldhana wrote a tract entitled StripurushaTulna in Marathi. Her 52 page tract was a response to the death sentence of one

Vijayalakshmi in the Bombay high court, a twenty-four year old widow, who had been found guilty of infanticide.

While Vijayalakshmi's sentence was mitigated from death by hanging to one of transportation, sensational publicity accompanied the event. The attention she received and the public discussions and debates that accompanied her case pushed Tarabai Shinde to draw attention to harsh and prescriptive patriarchal attitudes to women in her time. Tarabai rightly points out that women are singled out for blame. StreepurushTulna analysed the attitudes to women in a patriarchal society. In Vijayalakshmi's case, the offending male is never mentioned. He is never discussed or named along with her although common sense would allow us to deduce that ordinarily a man would be responsible for impregnating a woman.

As denizens of the Twenty-First Century, we could perhaps consider ourselves far away in actual time from the issue that Tarabai Shinde raises. Let us however look at the points of similarity and difference in both stories. Benare, as Act II lets us deduce, is a young unmarried woman who is pregnant. Vijayalakshmi too was a young woman who was obliged to follow the cruel and heartless systems of denial and self abnegation prescribed in orthodox hindu communities for widows. Although they belong to two different centuries, the reactions to their transgression share much in common. Again, what both women have in common is the fact that in conventional and traditional societies both unmarried and widowed women are disallowed any sexual proclivity. They are also not allowed to bear children.

What both Benare and Vijayalakshmi have in common is that their identities of unmarried woman/widow do not allow them any access to the males in their community. Vijayalakshmi's life as a widow only allowed her a constricted life within the domestic sphere. As a young woman in independent India Benare has access to the public sphere. However the fact of their pregnancies leaves everyone in the community agog. Vijayalakshmi has the local policeman patrol her, while in Benare's case all the members of her troupe and onlookers view her with suspicion. Their pregnant condition is the starting point for the generation of tremendous social outrage.

In the eyes of the legal system Vijayalakshmi is charged with a criminal offence and punished for it. Benare is also charged with infanticide. So although, Tendulkar's play is set in modern India, it draws upon practices and prejudices that are drawn from a hoary past. Tarabai's tract is very pertinent to our understanding of Tendulkar's play despite having been written almost seventy years before "Shantata!" Look now at the responses to the news of Benare's pregnancy that each of the characters in Shantata offers.

As we hear the responses of each character in Act II who has some evidence to offer against Benare, we are very disturbed by the viciousness and malice that is directed at her. Some of this information, we must remember, is actually fictitious detail which is concocted impromptu by the characters in order to have a case for the prosecution.

In the first instance, Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide. Nothing is offered by way of concrete evidence to support this claim. Instead, the entire court scene degenerates into a series of discussions pertaining to Benare's personal life and mores. Why is there this sudden shift? Why does the play move from the question of infanticide to an exploration of personal relationships in Benare's case? As a matter of fact, the earliest speculations are offered by Samant, who, as the audience and the characters are aware, is making up a story as he goes

along? Does this give us any new insights into the personality of Samant? Is this really the man who came across as timid and simple at the beginning of the play? Does he seem rather conservative, perhaps even unused to the idea of accepting women in the public sphere? Is he representative of a hidebound patriarchal system of belief that readily damns all women who do not conform to prescriptive patterns of behaviour?

Samant's reference to the widow who was accused of the crime of infanticide links the current narrative to an older past evoking a host of associations. It also asks us to look at the issue of infanticide as a problem that continues to plague us in contemporary times despite being punishable as a heinous crime. Where does the impetus for infanticide originate? Does the act stem from cruel heartless women, who kill their young or from a inflexible societal code that prescribes rules for women and then ruthlessly polices them?

Samant we must remember is a voracious reader of racy bestsellers written in the hundreds. It is possible to argue that the imagined narrative that is Samant provides so effortlessly to implicate Benare is deeply rooted in a world-view that borders on misogyny. This would explain why every character in the play adds details to sully Benare's reputation and present her as a forward and immoral young woman who makes a play for every man she sees. A great deal of vicarious pleasure and smugness is displayed by all the characters who offer gossipy details of their exchanges with Benare. While ostensibly Benare is accused of the crime of infanticide, what the second act does is to make insinuations about her. Kashikar, who plays the judge suggests mildly that Benare's real life cannot be discussed in the mock trial but Sukhatme as counsel overrules him. Kashikar himself is shown as enjoying the stories being concocted by the witnesses, despite his faint demurrals

This is really the private secret that is slowly unveiling itself in Act II and will finally be made public in Act III, namely how men view women and how the very mention of women conjures up certain stereotypical roles and identities for women. There are violent undercurrents that run through Act II and reach a crescendo in Act III. Ram Sharma has drawn attention to the fact that the undercurrent of violence that the audience is made to encounter draws its inspiration from Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty'.

As he points out

“*Vijay Tendulkar* symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the century to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing on the middle class society. In all his plays, he harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. Influenced by Artaud, *Tendulkar*, relates the problem of anguish to the theme of violence in most of his plays. He does not consider the occurrence of human violence as something loathsome or disgusting in as much as it is in nature in human nature. He says, “Unlike the communists I don't think violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that human being is born with. Not that it is bad. Without violence man might have turned into a vegetable.” While depicting violence on the stage, *Tendulkar* does not dress it up with any fancy trapping so as to make it palatable.”

The introduction of violence on the stage is certainly an influence that Tendulkar incorporates from his readings of world theatre. However, this is not to suggest that violence is non-existent in Indian society, ancient or modern. In fact, it may be argued that violence is endemic in societies like ours where coercive hierarchies of caste and gender are operative features. So

Tendulkar is depicting quite accurately the perspectives that govern the way we live our lives on the stage

To move now to the moot point of the play, in Act II, all manner of insinuations are now leveled against Benare. Each of the male characters who speaks of Benare does so in a disparaging manner and Kashikar allows this, insisting that this is only a mock-trial. Benare at first, tries to deal with the cross-examination lightheartedly and displays a sense of flippant humour in the initial stages. However, as the act proceeds, she becomes tense and agitated. As the questions become more intimidating and shrill, Benare protests that her private life cannot be discussed in a mock trial,

Benare's bursting into tears and leaving the scene of the mock trial is intended to arouse the suspicions of the rest of the characters and also perhaps the audience. In her absence Kashikar remarks that "The whole fabric of society is being soiled these days." Sukhatme's comments: "we must all get together. We must act" recalls for us the end of Act I, where a decision to stage a mock trial and make Benare the prime accused was set into motion. Then as now, Benare's absence from the stage is significant. Benare returns to pick up her bag and purse and tries to leave the room through the only doorway to the outside. Unfortunately for her, the door is stuck and she is not able to open it. The locked door becomes symbolic of the absence of escape routes for Benare. Despite not wanting to continue with the play, she is forced to continue with it. Act II ends on a note of unease. Kashikar, the judge and Sukhatme, the prosecutor, who press for the continuance of the mock trial, are shown as actively interested in the procedure.

Act I suggested undercurrents of tension, beneath the façade of bonhomie. In Act II, all attempts at maintaining a sense of camaraderie are split wide open. What begins in jest as a mock-trial swiftly assumes ugly dimensions.

Key Issues Raised By Act II

1. In Act I we were introduced to all the characters through Benare. In Act II, each of the characters reveals a little more about himself.
2. Benare no longer displays the free uninhibited spirit she revealed in Act I. Although she tries to retain some of her effervescence in the beginning of the Second Act, she increasingly grows tense and is on the defensive and speaks less freely as Act II proceeds.
3. Sukhatme and Kashikar pontificate on text book notions of motherhood.
4. However neither of them seem to accord any respect to women in real life. Kashikar speaks disparagingly to his own wife and both Sukhatme and Kashikar abuse their positions of authority as lawyer and judge to allow all manner of insinuations about Benare to be made.
5. Act II also makes clear that what is under discussion is not the crime of infanticide allegedly committed by Benare but the possibility of uncovering Benare's illicit relationship with the Damle.
6. Instead of collecting evidence to prove Benare's guilt in the crime of infanticide, an attempt is made to besmirch her reputation.

7. Kashikar's dismissive reference to two important social reformers in 19th century Maharashtra is significant. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) and Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962) were keenly involved in the issues of women's education and widow remarriage respectively. Recognising that women lived under very harsh conditions in traditional Hindu societies, both Agarkar and Karve strove to ameliorate living conditions for women.
8. Kashikar is of the opinion that Agarkar and Karve destroyed the subjugated position of women in Indian society and allowed women to take untoward liberties. This comment exposes Kashikar completely.
9. Is *Tendulkar* also warning us through the device of the lawcourt that while all kinds of rules and checks and balances may exist on paper, real change is not possible unless the mindset of those who are invested with authority is transformed?
10. In Act I Shirin Pai's poem which is recited by Benare draws attention to the difficult position of women in Indian society. Did you know that Shirin Pai (1929) herself is a writer and social worker. In Act II Samant's reference to the story of the widow reiterates that the lot of women was not an easy one at any level. Through the allusions that *Tendulkar*'s characters makes to real life figures in the play, we realize that *Tendulkar* would like us to remember that the basis of common assumptions and practice needs to be traced back to older customs and traditions

Act III of The Play

Act I and Act II are more or less of the same duration. Act III is a tad longer than the two earlier Acts. In an actual presentation, this may perhaps escape the notice of the audience. Act III is also the most intense and most serious of all the three acts.

When Act III opens, the cast has not even changed its position. Benare stands still. At the end of Act II she had tried desperately to leave the hall. Now she refuses to respond to the directive of entering the witness box.

Mrs. Kashikar drags Benare into the witness box.

At the beginning of Act II, Benare had agreed in good faith to play the role of the accused, although the idea had been mooted in her absence. If at that time we had a suspicion of the mal intent of the other characters, the sequence in Act II has succeeded in convincing us that there is definitely some malice and mischief afoot. In Act III Benare does not agree to occupy the witness-box. She is placed there perforce. The cross-examination now is insistent and relentless. She does not answer any of the questions that are directed at her. If this was just a friendly exchange, or if any of the other characters were really her friends, they should have stopped the cross-examination and asked her why she was so upset. This was not done in Act II. It is not going to be done in Act III either. Instead the characters harp on how this is only a mock trial.

Increasingly the audience is forced to recognize that Benare's cross-examination crosses the boundaries of reasonable argument and propriety. We cannot help noticing the insensitivity of the rest of the cast. Benare's silence is quickly translated as contempt of court. Her sense of

outrage is quickly interpreted as defiance and provides an opportunity for most of the characters to testify against her. Other than Samant, who is really not in the game, as he is not part of the Living Courtroom team, no one is willing to speak favorably on her behalf. Instead of rallying around her, the rest of the characters begin answering on her behalf.

All the veiled insinuations and suggestions made in Act II are now made openly in Act III. All manner of impertinent questions are put to her, under the guise of finding out the truth. She is asked her name, her age, and also why she is unmarried. All of these become an opportunity to frame her.

There is little evidence of the infanticide that she is accused of. Instead there is an attempt on the part of most of the characters to tarnish her reputation. There is an attempt to present her as an immoral woman of dubious character. All her associations and actions are viewed with jaundiced eyes. In Act II we could tell the difference between a fabricated story and a real one. In Act III we can no longer distinguish the lies from the truth.

What are articulated in the course of compiling evidence against her are petty prejudices and a reiteration of hide-bound expectations that women are usually buried under in patriarchal societies. Benare's remaining unmarried at the age of thirty four is seen as a deliberate choice of promiscuity and invites the censure of all the characters. No discussion is provided of the men who give evidence against Benare, nor are they cross-examined. In fact the differing viewpoints work as the point-of view of a cross-section of society on the questions of morals and codes prescribed for young women.

By providing such a perspective, *Tendulkar* is asking us to view critically the mindset of a society which thrives on two sets of rules; one for men and another for women. We are made aware of the authority wielded by the powerful and the helplessness of the small individuals who are trapped within the snare of antediluvian social mores and constraints.

We discover in the course of Act III that Benare has contacted several men and put forward a proposal of marriage. This very detail shocks the characters in the play. We need perhaps to ask why this should be so. After all, in everyday life, marriage proposals/advertisements create a space in which a prospective bridegroom may interview several young women in the process of finding a wife. Why should Benare's quest to find herself a husband be viewed as untoward? Benare herself comes across as far more attractive and intelligent when compared to all the men she supposedly propositioned. Why does each one of them turn her down? The fact that she is pregnant and is looking for support in the form of a father for the child is ostensibly the reason for rejecting her. Benare is not contemplating infanticide. She seeks instead a secure future for her child in a myopic society.

Unfortunately for her, the men she knows and approaches are shown up as pathetic. All they can contribute to her life is scurrilous gossip and exaggerated versions of her plight, which they milk for sagacious detail. This is true of the maternal uncle who exploited her when she was fourteen, Damle, the married professor with five children, who deserts her. It is equally true of the weak and unsupportive Ponkshe and Rokde as also the Chairman of the Education Society who dismisses Benare from her job as a teacher once he finds out that she is unmarried and is carrying a child. All these men, ostensibly the upholders of a society which venerates and glorifies motherhood, will not lift a finger to support an expectant mother. What is even worse is

that they do not stop at denying her help. They go out of their way to make her personal and professional life hell.

The entire focus of Act III shifts from an investigation of the possibility of infanticide to a gradually constructed narrative of Benare's licentiousness, her immorality and an indictment of her very presence which is seen as a "canker in society."

In doing so, Tendulkar exposes the actual culprits in society. Earlier feminist tracts such as the one written by Tarabai Shinde point out the persecution and victimization of women in Benare's situation. *Tendulkar* joins issue with Tarabai Shinde and her ilk by showing us the actual forces behind such acts of persecution. It is the judges and prosecutors, the respectable men and women in powerful positions in society who are seen as the perpetrators. It is their blinkered vision, and their lack of compassion and humaneness that results in countless infanticides. When they give her ten seconds to speak, this is only a perfunctory gesture.

Each of the other characters is probably aware of the real story. Yet none of them want to really approach Benare's problem in a humane manner or treat her with dignity. This is highlighted through the extraordinary sequence during which Benare breaks her silence in Act III and communes with the audience, putting forward her version. You would have noticed that the characters in the play freeze and that at this juncture Benare occupies centre-stage. She is eloquent and puts forward a very moving narrative that allows the audience to view her in the light of a vulnerable young woman who has had a raw deal, once as a young girl, and then as a young adult. It is remarkable that she has struggled and survived against such odds and achieved so much. She draws attention to the group that is persecuting her and women in her position by referring to them as "cultured men of the twentieth century" with "ferocious faces," "worn out phrases" and bellies full of unfulfilled desires." Despite this powerful indictment, Benare's heartrending soliloquy speaks of her fighting spirit and her commitment to her work, her love for the children she teaches and her passion for life. Her affirmative beliefs evoke a sympathetic chord.

Yet, given the thrust of the play, is there any possibility of a happy conclusion? As we will discover, this is not the case. Benare's soliloquy allows the audience to view her situation from a different perspective.

Yet, literally and metaphorically, the characters in the play who represent the community she lives in do not hear her. Her version falls on deaf ears and frozen hearts and brains. Kashikar, the judge announces the verdict of the mock trial. Benare is seen as attempting to short-circuit all social codes and mores. She is accused of having committed a terrible crime and she is informed that the child in her womb will be destroyed. This is the only punitive solution that the living lawcourt has been able to provide. Tendulkar drives home the horrifying recognition that nothing has really changed in terms of people's attitudes. It usually takes a man and a woman to bring forth a child, irrespective of whether they are married or otherwise. While the offending male is excused, the vulnerable woman, who can very often be a victim is put on trial as in this case and condemned universally. In all such situations, the magnificent act of creation, that is solely the privilege of women is marginalized as irrelevant. There is a sharp divide between the deification of the mother as goddess and the real flesh and blood mother who is put in the dock.

Benare breaks down and puts her head on the table sobbing uncontrollably, on hearing Kashikar's verdict. She says she will not allow them to destroy her child. At this point the mock-trial comes to an end and the door to the hallway is unlocked in preparation for the evening's

program. Patting her head and cajoling her not to be so sensitive and telling her that it was only a game, all the characters hurry away to prepare for the show. Only Benare lies motionless on the stage. Attempts to persuade her to get up are in vain. Samant comes in and leaves the cloth parrot beside her. The last image on the stage is that of a Benare who struggles to move, but cannot. Like the toy bird, The play ends with a song of a grieving sparrow whose secure world has been destroyed by predators. The play ends here.

The focus is on an immobile and broken Benare who has been crushed by the hostility and viciousness of her peers and her community. She is bereft and has no support. Will she rise and recover. The playwright leaves it to us to mull over this fact. Even if Benare were to eventually get up, rehabilitating herself will be an uphill task. She has no economic support, no job, no male protection and she has also been ostracized by society. Her future is deliberately left bleak.

Key Issues Under Discussion

1. While the play is set in modern independent India that has a constitution that provides equal rights to everyone irrespective of caste creed or gender, Tendulkar's play demonstrates that this is not the case in real life situations.
2. The wielders of authority, the controllers of opinion, the initiators of action are usually powerful people with a long history of support systems. Their understanding of their new role is not as citizens of a democracy, it dates back to a hierarchical socio-economic system that is much older.
3. Their notion of social reform and change is largely superficial. As Tendulkar proves, by scratching a little, their deep seated convictions and prejudices are uncovered. It takes very little to rupture the thin façade of emancipation and liberalism that they try to project.
4. Women in this world are still extremely vulnerable and subject to most danger, both in the private sphere and in the public sphere.
5. How is this society, ostensibly free and rational an improvement on that which existed before? Is this the question that the playwright would like the audience to ponder over?
6. This is where the very important role played by literature is highlighted. By creating a real-life situation and giving us all the points of view through a host of characters the playwright expects us to mull over the issue, Benare's story ends sadly, but it has definitely alerted us to women's vulnerability and exploitation in patriarchal societies. It has also alerted us to the prejudice and meanness displayed by people in positions of power and control.
7. Like Benare, we as readers, are unable to avenge ourselves on the Damles, Kashikars and Sukhatmes of this world. However, they have been demystified for us. We no longer look at them with awe nor do we feel anything other than anger and contempt for them.
8. The play also sensitizes us to Benare's precarious position in this hostile and unfair society. It also enables to understand why Mrs. Kashikar and Rokde behave in the way they do. Completely under Kashikar's control, neither of them has the power to break free from him and think differently. They are allowed to survive because they collude with the authority figures and are hostile to Benare, who threatens them by her free thinking and independence.

9. Samant reveals to us the dangers of limited exposure. Despite his best intentions, Samant remains to the end largely uncomprehending of the whole issue.

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