



## An independent girl like Benare became haunted in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

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**Abstract:** 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!*” 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. 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.

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**Introduction:** *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.

### Stage direction and the stage of the hunting for Miss Leela Benare:

The playwright describes 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. 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.

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 kind-hearted 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 Ponkshe. Benare mimics Ponkshe 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 Ponkshe and stands talking to him with an artificial air."

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.

Ponkshe 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 Ponkshe 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 Ponkshe 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.

### **Sudden shock of Benare and she realised the insult of her colleagues:**

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

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 demurral

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 note 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 levelled against Benare. Each of the male characters who speak 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.



### **The play with in play and the hunter became haunted:**

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 Ponshe 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. 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.

#### **Conclusion:**

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 mocktrial 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.

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