

**Introduction to World Literature**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**  
**'Stage'ing Protests**

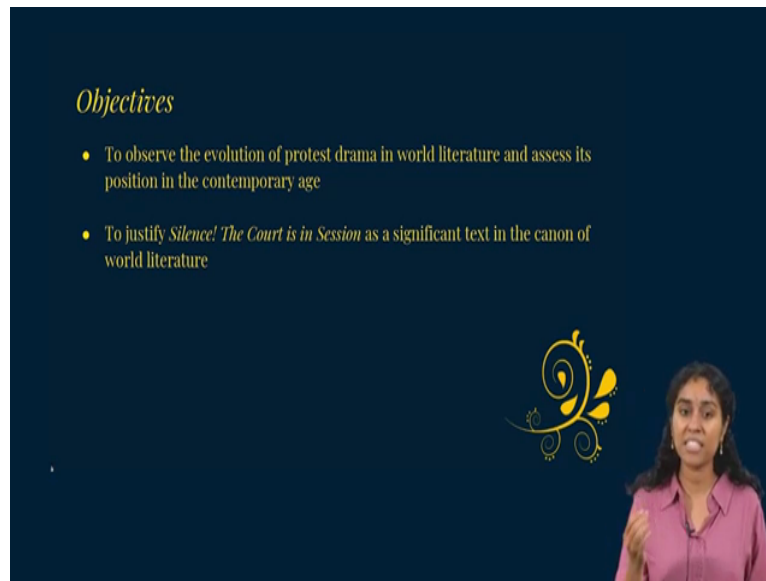
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Hello and welcome to the presentation staging protests my name is Ranjini, as the title of this presentation suggests this slide this presentation will be drawing a balance between protest and democracy as well as the role of literature that is played in bridging the gap between the two. So the presentation will aim to provide a summary of protest drama in world literature and we will focus on Vijay Tendulkar is Silence! The Court is in Session as an example of protest drama in world literature.

So as the title implies and as we will be discovering throughout the course of this presentation, there is an intrinsic link between protest and literature and the to facilitate one another in very interesting ways, we shall learn about this in the coming few slides.

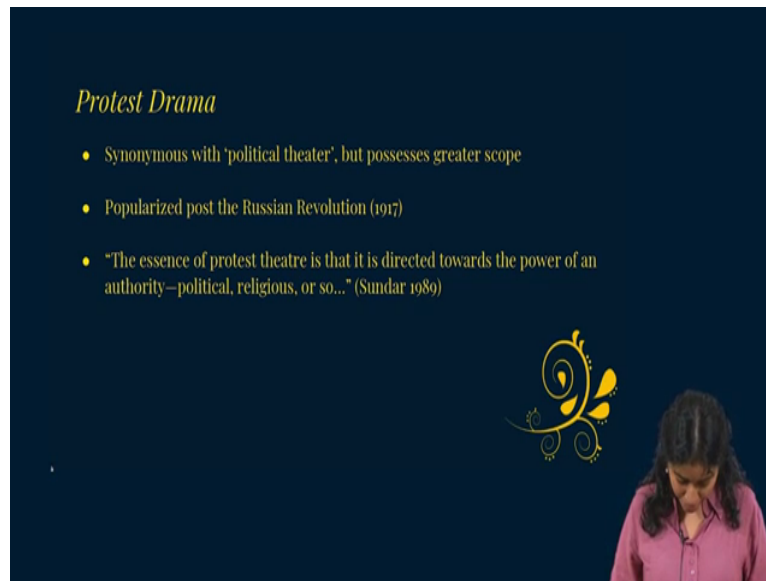
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So the objectives of this presentation the outside I will just mention what the point of the presentation is. It is to observe the evolution of protest drama in world literature and assess its position in the contemporary age, so not only will we draw a trajectory of how protest drama has evolved through the years but also assess the relevance of protest drama in today's age and whether at all it deserves a place in world literature.

Secondly they will justify *Silence! The Court is in Session* as a significant text in the Canon of world literature. So the *Silence! The Court is in Session* was a Marathi play translated to English and this play has not often found a place in world literature as much as it has in Indian literature. So this presentation will have a look at all the components and all the features of *Silence! The Court is in Session* that add to it as a truly universal text and that the similarities that it shares with different other texts remarkably make it a piece of world literature.

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So we will begin by asking ourselves the basic question which is what is protest drama? So the arts have always been a powerful medium to make a strong impact on society about various social issues and drama is no exception to this, drama has been used as a means to express discontent, dissent and to critique all sorts of actions of those who possess the power and who those who wield this power as well and drama has been used to speak out against oppression, discrimination, injustice in general.

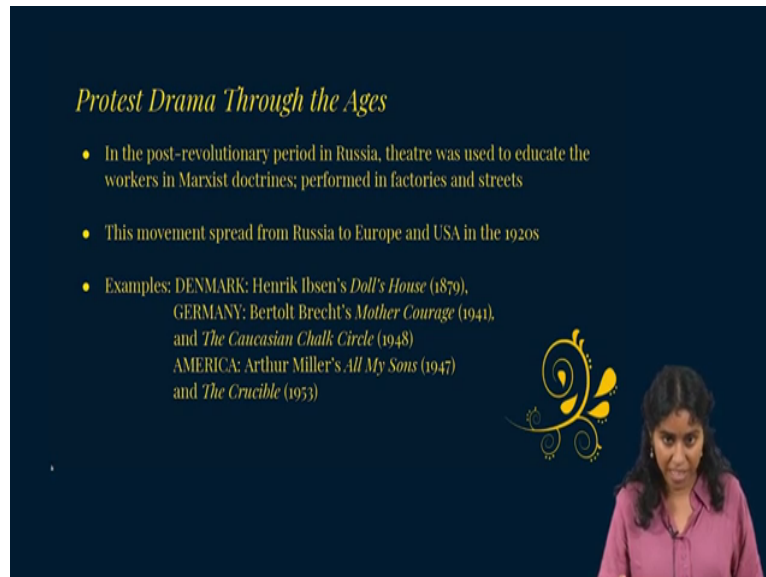
So protests drama come under this large ambit of socially concerned theatre but we must be careful to not confuse it with political theatre with which it is synonymous but it does not entirely equate itself to that. It processes a much larger scope let me give you an example, so socially concerned theatre may raise consciousness about social ills of which individuals are responsible while political theatre mean necessarily have to do with the state and not just collective responsibility of a society.

So in a sense protest drama is imbued with a sense of responsibility towards individuals and society that is much larger in scope than just political theatre and drama in general due to the presence of a live audience has much greater scope for deeper impact on people. The reason for this is that drama is an extremely powerful tool in getting messages across, it helps arouse audiences and to help them take immediate and effective action in a very definitive manner.

I would like to quote a theorist Pushpa Sundar at this juncture, she says the essence of protest theatre is that it is directed towards the power of an authority, political religious or so and she goes on to say even when it does not seek to change beliefs or to exhort to action, protest

theatre is valuable in giving intellectual and emotional support to the already converted as such it can be an important force in political and social change this statement were Pushpa Sundar I believe as largely to our understanding of protests theatre and is something for us to keep in mind through the coming slides of this presentation.

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*Protest Drama Through the Ages*

- In the post-revolutionary period in Russia, theatre was used to educate the workers in Marxist doctrines; performed in factories and streets
- This movement spread from Russia to Europe and USA in the 1920s
- Examples: DENMARK: Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House* (1879),  
GERMANY: Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1941),  
and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948)  
AMERICA: Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947)  
and *The Crucible* (1953)

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So protest drama through the ages, (03:55) begin how has it evolved. It is known to us that in the post-revolutionary period in Russia, theatre was used to educate the workers in Marxist doctrines and performed in factories and streets, this movement spread from Russia to Europe and US in the late 1920s. So protest drama exemplified conservative political theatre and protested capitalist systems and values in its original and early stages.

These plays are aesthetically poor and consisted of short episodes using a few stage props since then this type of theatre has come to acquire a form of its own which we today popularly known as street plays, a street drama. However the modern anti-establishment theatre acquired a definite shape only in the 1960s reflecting the movements in the contemporary world.

So you must understand that there is a relationship between what is being enacted on stage and what is happening in the contemporary world and these two are intrinsically linked in the ambit of (polit) protest drama and political theatre. For instance a lot of drama would be directed against dictatorships or unpopular governments and their policies such as the one in Vietnam and the Vietnam War that took the theatre at rage during the time.

In Russia in 1970 the theatre became an outlet for expression of ideas and the airing of dissatisfaction but the crucial thing to keep in mind here is that theatre allowed what print did not what was not allowed on print was brought to the stage and enacted to a live audience and this in fact was seen to have more impact than a print publication. So one of the major unofficial themes in Soviet theatre at that time had been censorship and freedom of expression and similarly in (philippati) in Philippines and Latin America too theatre has been a significant weapon of protest against dictatorships.

So there are some examples here given for protest drama from other countries, one of them most popular among them all happens to be Henrik Ibsen is the Doll is house which was published at first enacted in 1879, Bertolt Brecht is Mother Courage and the Caucasian Chalk Circle both in the 1940s and from America Arthur Miller is All My Sons came out in 1947 and The Crucible 1953.

So these are some crucial plays that are known to us today as protest drama and fall into the arms of protest theatre in general.

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Keeping in line with our objective which is to identify the relevance of political theatre and protest drama today, I have a contemporary example to discuss with you which is Hamilton the Musical by Lin Manuel Miranda, Hamilton the Musical reached broad way in august of 2015 and main musical history for a variety of reasons, it was an act of theatre that blends American history along with the (pre) present political scenario in America.

The musical brings into limelight issues of immigration, Hamilton himself was portrayed as an immigrant from South Africa this makes an important political statement at a time when measures are being taken by the federal government of the United States to drive out a number of citizens from the United States on the basis of their status as immigrants and another powerful move by the director and the casting crew in general was a decision to feature an almost non-white cast as a founding fathers in the musical.

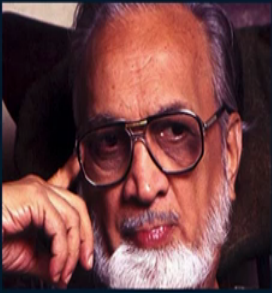
The result is this broad way blockbuster that is rooted in political social and the racial history of the United States of America with the parallel thread about the present political scenario running alongside all throughout the musical. Once again as we observed previously there is an intersection of the present and the past in a way that brings two limelight is the fact that history is always something that we can learn from and that we have to keep repeating in order to rectify our mistakes.

The present and the past are politically interlinked in a way that will always have something to teach us, Hamilton fits the bill as a perfect protest play and as a form of political theatre because it aptly touches on sensitive topics in the contemporary political scenario in the United States, it raises consciousness among the audience to economic, political and social issues in contemporary times.



So it is fair to say that protests drama and political theatre are indeed relevant in the contemporary age and are perhaps even here to stay.

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*Vijay Tendulkar (1928 - 2008)*



- Author of *Shantata! Court Chaula Ahe* (1967), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), and *Sakharām Binder* (1972)
- All of Tendulkar's plays underscore the complexity of human relationship; in spite of these similarities, his plays are distinct from each other.



At this point we will move on to the next objective of this presentation which is to outline and to summarize the play *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar, Vijay Tendulkar was one of the most outstanding Indian playwrights who wrote in Marathi and mastered different genres of literature including essays, short stories, criticisms screenplay, general writing in theatre and drama, he is known for his plays including *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* which is the Marathi version which is now translated into *Silence! The Court is in Session* which came out in 1967, *Ghasiram Kotwal* which came out in 1972 and *Sakharam Binder* which came out in 1972.

He has received numerous accolades to his name including Padma Bhushan the Sangeet Natak Academy Award, the Filmfare Award, Saraswati Samman, Kalidas Samman and Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar. All of Tendulkar's plays underscore the complexity of human relationships, the plays (con) the plays concentrate on different aspects of human characters most of them deal with the situation of an individual pitted against society and explores the tensions between the two.

In all of them women play extremely key roles in the plot and all the plays contain a subtle critique of modern and upper middle class and lower middle class Indian society and allow for the naturalistic model of dramaturgy but despite all these similarities across Vijay Tendulkar's plays each of his plays are distinct from each other and hold their own.

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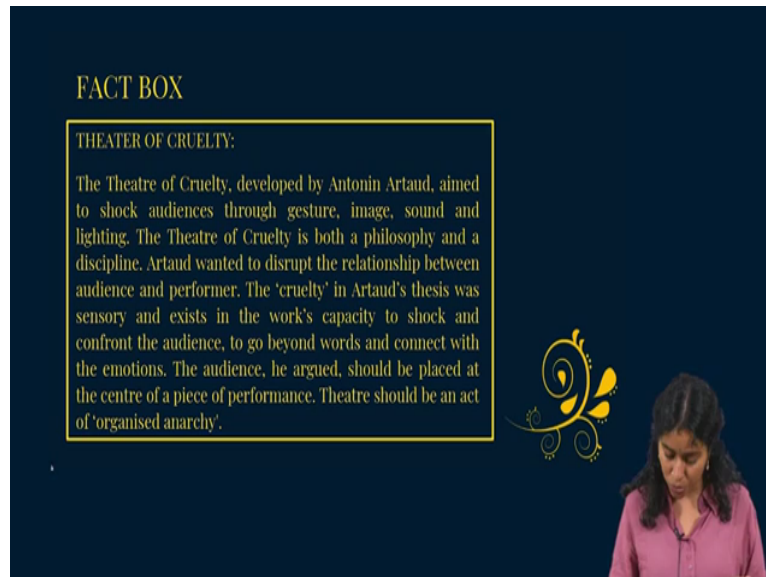
*Vijay Tendulkar (1928 - 2008)*

- Widely regarded as the first genuine playwright of modernity in India
- Acknowledged as the creator of the modern Indian 'theater of cruelty'

It means also worthy of mentioning that Vijay Tendulkar is regarded as the first genuine playwright of modernity in India and is acknowledged as a creator of the modern Indian

theatre of Cruelty, this in fact tells us that he can be placed alongside a large number of modernist writers who share a number of (see) similar characteristics with his works but at this point we must try to educate ourselves on what the theatre of Cruelty is and why it was such an important feature of modernist writing.

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**FACT BOX**

**THEATER OF CRUELTY:**

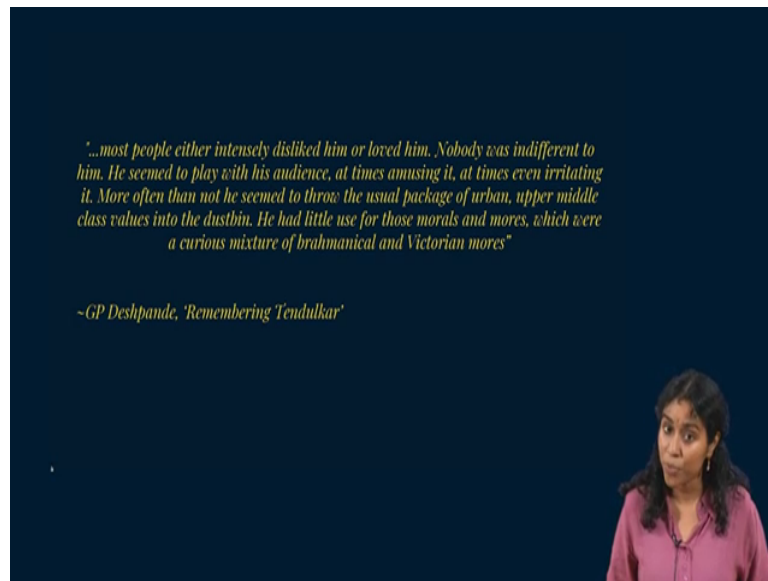
The Theatre of Cruelty, developed by Antonin Artaud, aimed to shock audiences through gesture, image, sound and lighting. The Theatre of Cruelty is both a philosophy and a discipline. Artaud wanted to disrupt the relationship between audience and performer. The 'cruelty' in Artaud's thesis was sensory and exists in the work's capacity to shock and confront the audience, to go beyond words and connect with the emotions. The audience, he argued, should be placed at the centre of a piece of performance. Theatre should be an act of 'organised anarchy'.

So theatre of Cruelty, the theatre of Cruelty developed by Antonin Artaud aimed to shock audiences through gesture, image, sound and lighting, the theatre of Cruelty is both a philosophy and a discipline. Artaud wanted to disrupt the relationship between audience and performer, the cruelty in Artaud is thesis was sensory and exists in the works capacity to shock and confront the audience to go beyond words and connect with the emotions.

The audience he argued should be placed at the center of a piece of performance, theatre should be an act of organized anarchy and this is not dictate confined to just Silence! The Court is in Session but as a quality that can be observed across different modernist place.



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Here is a quote from the obituary of Vijay Tendulkar as written by GP Deshpande in his piece remembering Tendulkar. Most people either intensely disliked him or loved him. Nobody was indifferent to him. He seemed to play with his audience, at times amusing it at times even irritating it more often than not he seemed to throw the usual package of urban upper middle class values into the dustbin.

He had little use for those morals and mores which were a curious mixture of Brahminical and Victorian mores. So this might tell you the flavour of Tendulkar is writing and what to expect from our learning of *Silence! The Court is in Session*.

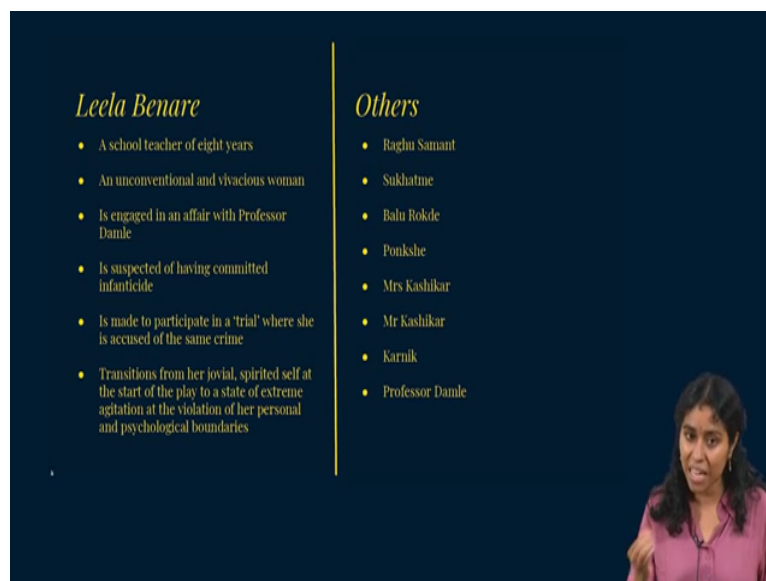
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Coming to the play itself the English translation was done translated into English by Priya Adarkar which was done in 1978, this translation was done in 1978. So Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe in Marathi is now a landmark play in the annals of Indian drama in English and is based on a 1956 short story by Friedrich Durrenmatt a Swedish playwright and is written in the form of a meta-theatre or a play within a play.

This has its own values and merits which is also a characteristic of modernist writing and this is something we shall explore in the coming slides of this presentation but there is something that I have to mention at this juncture Silence! The Court is in Session is not the only or the most renowned protest drama to have emerged in Indian writing although it is the most impactful another important play that we must acknowledge here is 1873 is Nil Durpan which did not gain as much recognition at its time but is still regarded as one of the most prominent and prolific protest dramas known to us today.

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So let us dive into the plot of Silence! The Court is in Session there are about nine characters in this play who have a prominent role but the most prominent role of all goes to Leela Benare as (mentioned) mentioned previously Tendulkar Awards women characters a very prominent role in his plot and this is evident from the role of Leela Benare in this play. Leela Benare is a schoolteacher with 8 years of experience an unconventional and vivacious woman who is engaged in an affair with Professor Damle.

She is suspected of having committed (infant) infanticide and is made to participate in a trial where she is accused of the same crime. She transitions from towards the end of the play

from word jovial and spirited self at the beginning to a state of extreme agitation at the violation of her personal and psychological boundaries. So let us have a look at the other characters now.

We have Raghu Samant who is a young man who in his own words in earns enough to keep body and soul together he is a mild mannered and friendly young man who runs chores for the group and is asked to act as a fourth witness in the trial. Sukhatme, who arrives on stage with the rest of the characters and is introduced as a lawyer within the play. Balu Rokde, a young boy who is given shelter by the Kashikars fed clothed and educated him while he run errands and performed all jobs for them, he accompanies the Kashikars and takes care of their orders and thus chose for them.

Ponkshe who is introduced as a science student, so Leela Benare educates her audience and says that he has failed in his intermediate examinations and these are the examinations that would have allowed him to join University, now he come to two other crucial characters Mrs. Kashikar and Mr. Kashikar, Mrs. Kashikar who Benare introduces as the hand that rocks the cradle is actually a woman who has no children of her own, her role is registered at the outset as one that provides nurture and secondary support as a housewife.

In contrast to this is the dominating character of Mr. Kashikar he is a dominant spouse who is referred to as a chairman of the group by Benare and sees himself as a man of superior intelligence. So we see that there is a contrast between the husband wife combo here and it is shown that he has a great self of sense of self-importance that can be damaging to the confidence and his team of Mrs. Kashikar.

Finally we have Karnik was an experimental theatre actor there is one thing that is of crucial importance here and that is the absence of professor Damle, a crucial character in the play and what was known to us from his absence is that there is withdrawal of responsibility on his part from the situation and therefore putting the blame entirely on Leela Benare. At this point we dived right into the plot here we should talk about how Leela Benare is in a situation where she has been accused of infanticide and this is also portrayed in the plot within the plot where she is put in a mock trial.

So Leela Benare a sense the trial as a mock criminal but is actually based on but is actually convicted of a crime that is based partly on conjecture and partly on hearsay but the rehearsal of this mock trial eventually evolves into a trial in reality and this becomes a sort of

mousetrap for Benare who is caught in the middle of aggressive men who want to put her down for her situation of being pregnant in a situation born in and the child that is in that might be born out of wedlock.

and hypocritical middle class men like Kashikar Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik with their middle class sentiments and with their patriarchal mind-set make fun of the destitute poor Benare and who was brutalized and humiliated for her pregnancy and the woman is actually in fact fathered by the absent professor Damle. So this is the setting in which the rest of the play and the plot evolves from a woman put in a position that was not of her making entirely and a bunch of men and a one woman who and who in the situation not of her own making and different characters in the play take it upon themselves to subject her to humiliation and to brutalize her situation.

What we must acknowledge here is that not only are the men characters complicit in the humiliation of Benare but also Mrs. Kashikar this is something that we will explore in the coming slides.

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So here are some quotes from the play that I would like to share, so while Benare satirizes the false pride and pretensions pretentiousness of the middle class men folk represented by her elderly colleagues, she has in mind a particular person was wronged her and fled away this is an allusion to the character of Professor Damle and it was often known to us that she feels that he might be a coward for having done this, her annoyance regarding the so called guardians of the society is severe.

As an independent woman she feels the need to have full control over her personal and private life and a personal action can never be put into judgment by male chauvinism and this is evident from her quote which is life is a very dreadful thing. Life must be hanged. Na jevana jevanmarhati life is not worthy of life. Hold an enquiry against life – cack it from its job, it is evident where this frustration stems from.

They are holding an enquiry if you please! But my teaching is perfect. I have put myself I have put my whole life into it - I have worn myself to a shadow in this job! Just because of one bit of slander what can they do to me? My life is my own. Though her viewers (underdog) unorthodox and very individual centric and perhaps even feminist her social conduct of having a baby in her womb without fright puts her in the dock and makes her the target of male chauvinism and male aggression but finally Benare speaks of herself and the dead silence is broken by herself assertion and triumphant voice.

The cry of his speech is that in spite of everything she cannot fall out of love with life although life is denying love marriage, child and happiness she bursts forth and declares that she will claim what she wants and that despite her not getting what she wants she is steadfast in her claim that she is innocent and that the only enquiry that must be held is against life. Finally we come to the quote by Mrs. Kashikar that happens these days when you get everything without marrying.

It is the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That is how promiscuity has spread throughout our society. From this it is evident that there is a (mad) married and I a childless woman commenting on the status of an independent woman who is (pro) possibly bearing a child and was also earning on her own. Therefore it is evident from this that it is not just the male is in this play that propagate and take forward the role of the patriarchy but also the woman Mrs. Kashikar is just as complicit as the rest of the male characters in putting down and displaying aggression towards Benare without sympathizing with her situation.

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*'Silence!' as a Crucial Text in World Literature*

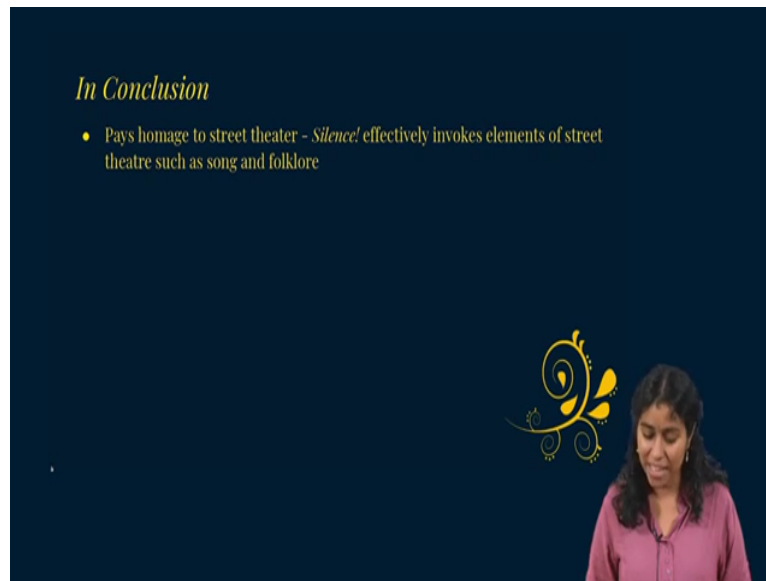
- Lays out the trials of negotiating love within a patriarchal society
- Commentary on the stigma associated with unplanned motherhood and premarital intercourse; presents a strong case in favour of women's choice
- The institution of marriage is probed and critiqued  
Also explored in  
Ibsen's *Doll's House*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (explored via critique)  
Congreve's *Way of the World*, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (explored through satire)

Can we acknowledge silence as a crucial text in world literature? So to begin with silence lays out the trials of negotiating love within a patriarchal society. It comments on the stigma associated with unplanned motherhood and premarital intercourse; It presents a strong case in favour of women's choice but what is really interesting to note here is that silence is not isolated in displaying these qualities.

The institution of marriage is probed and critiqued and also explored in Ibsen's *Doll's House*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* through the man of critique where it portrays marriage as a burden on the woman and only the woman, in the end of *Doll's House* Nora the protagonist of the play is saying to shut the door with a slam and leave the marriage. In Congreve's *Way of the World* and Wilde's Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

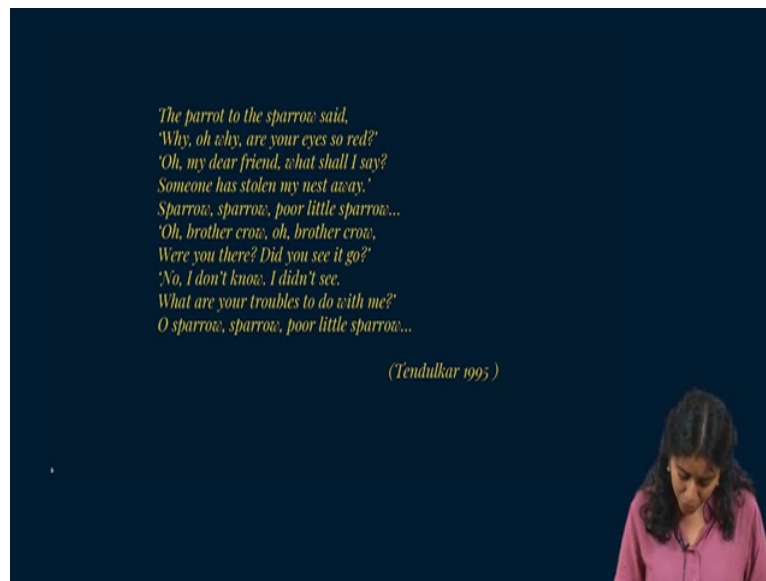
The authors use satire to explore marriage and see it as a means of achieving materialistic gains. So marriage is seen as a social theme that has been explored across a variety of plays and silence is a valuable addition to this set of plays that explore marriage through the theme of protest drama.

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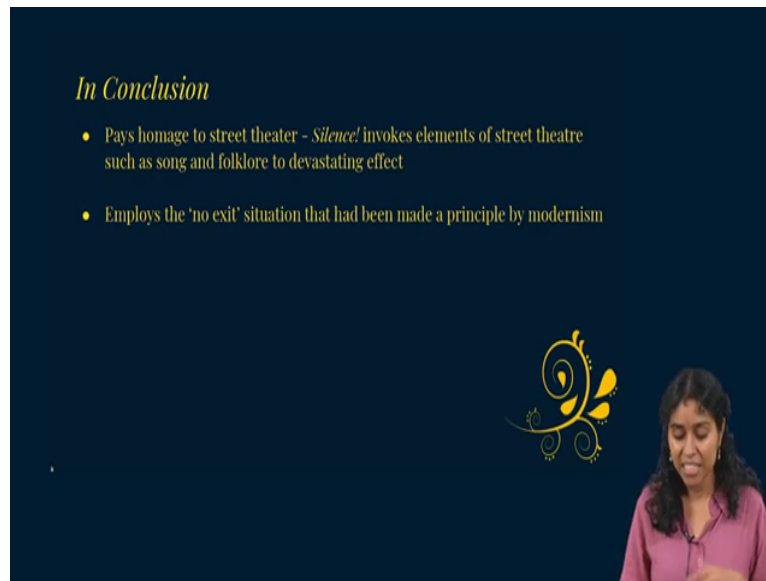
What can we say about *Silence! The Court is in Session*? *Silence!* pays homage to street theatre, silence effectively invokes elements of street theatre such as song and folklore.

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To quote (brand) Benare from the play in her very dramatic monologue in which she explains her position. The parrot to the sparrow said. Why, oh why our eyes so red? Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say? Someone has stolen my nest away. Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow. Oh, brother crow, oh brother crow. Were you there? Did you see it go? No I do not know. I did not see. What are your troubles to do with me? O sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow.

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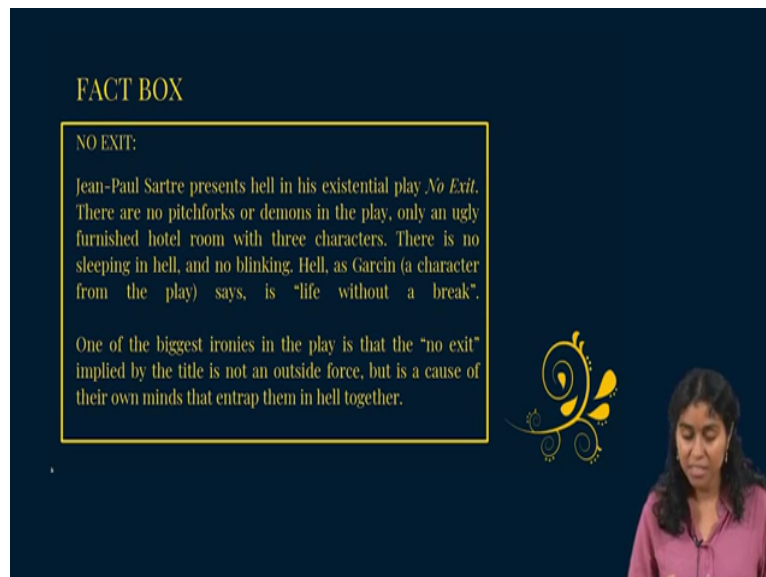
*In Conclusion*

- Pays homage to street theater - *Silence!* invokes elements of street theatre such as song and folklore to devastating effect
- Employs the 'no exit' situation that had been made a principle by modernism

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This is one of the instances of street theatre in silence and it invokes to great effect an almost devastating effect. So the next characteristic of this play that really lends to it as a piece of world literature is the use of the no exit situation that had actually in fact been made a principle by modernism. So let us have a look at what the no exit situation is.

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**FACT BOX**

**NO EXIT:**

Jean-Paul Sartre presents hell in his existential play *No Exit*. There are no pitchforks or demons in the play, only an ugly furnished hotel room with three characters. There is no sleeping in hell, and no blinking. Hell, as Garcin (a character from the play) says, is "life without a break".

One of the biggest ironies in the play is that the "no exit" implied by the title is not an outside force, but is a cause of their own minds that entrap them in hell together.

The slide features a decorative yellow and black floral graphic on the right side and a small inset image of a woman in a pink shirt in the bottom right corner.

So no exit Jean-Paul Sartre presents hell in his existential play No Exit, the term that is known to us today it was actually initiated in as a title of his existential play itself but has now become a principle in modernism. There are no pitchforks or demons in the play only an ugly furnished hotel room with three characters. There is no sleeping in hell and no blinking. Hell as Garsin a character from the play says is life without a break.




One of the biggest ironies in the play is that the no exit implied by the title is not an outside force but is the cause of their own minds that entrapped them in hell together. This is a characteristic observed in silence as the number of characters almost roundup against Benare and make the situation worse for her without really helping her in any way and the play also ends on a very non positive and pessimistic note where it was never known to us whether Benare survives a weather in the what happens as the outcome of this trial, whether there is any positive impact at all.

So this level of pessimism is also something that we can associate for the theatre of cruelty that we discussed a couple of slides ago.

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*In Conclusion*

- A precursor to Indian feminist writing; portrays female struggle in a manner that evokes empathy from people of different backgrounds
- *"Theatre can be a mobile unit in a journey across new geographies, a place that doesn't center the discourse in white male hegemony, but a space that can be filled and moved, by and to the margins, perpetually decentered as it explores various identity configurations of production and reception"*  
(Dolan 1993)
- A postcolonial text that draws attention to the role of intersecting histories and nationalist formations in affecting women's position in society



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So in conclusion, silence can be seen as a precursor to Indian feminist writing and portrays female struggle in a manner that evokes sympathy from people of different backgrounds. As mentioned by Dolan in his piece, theatre can be a mobile unit in a journey across new geographies, a place that does not centre the discourse in white male hegemony but a space that can be filled and moved by and to the margins perpetually decentred as it explores various identity configurations of production and reception.

So a final point that must be considered here is, a postcolonial text that draws attention to the role of intersecting histories and nationalist formations in affecting women is position in society. So this is what we can view silence as. So Tendulkar far from treating this protagonist as a continuation of the dominant gender discourses of the time inverts this and uses the play within the play device to great effect and represents not just theatres treatment of women but also society is treatment of women and this is brought to for especially by the play within the play device.

So this device not only blurs the distinction between the private and the public but also between reality and play and between performance, enactment and between the tangible and the intangible. Tendulkar also writes this play in a postcolonial context and it may be interpreted as an early incorporation of gender into the postcolonial narrative between the characters of Mrs. Kashikar and Benare we see that the character of one is seen as ideal as a nationalist woman whereas the other is seen as a repository of undesirable qualities.

Benare is criticized as a woman who is reclaiming explicitly non-Indian qualities while Mrs. Kashikar is seen as ideal woman was representative of national nationalist trades in women. In finally and the something that must be mentioned here is in delivering his closing arguments and against Benare Sukhatme who is the lawyer in the play draws heavily upon the ideas of morality gender and women in society and goes on to say *na stri swatantra marhati* which means women are not fit for independence.

So this tells us in different gendered personalities and it is meant for a reassertion sorry I will take that (())(25:10) and this tells us that independence therefore has different meanings associated with how one is gendered personality exists in society, for men it means the reassertion of control over women things and discourses. So this play brings to for the question, what does independence really mean for women? With that I conclude this presentation, thank you.