



ISSN: 3107-5088 (ONLINE)

ISSN: 3107-4898 (PRINT)

www.cognitivethinking.in

Cognitive Thinking: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

(An International, Open Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed & ISO Certified Journal)

Vol. 1 & Issue 4 (October - December 2025)

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Kanwar Pal Singh

**A Comparative Study of Tendulkar's *Silence! the Court is in Session* and
Janam's *Aurat***

1. Dr. Neetu Kumar,

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Maharaj Singh College, Saharanpur, U.P.

2. Dr. Meenu Kashyap

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Arya Kanya Pathshala Degree College, Hapur.

Article: Received: 14/12/2025, Accepted: 19/12/2025, Published:30/12/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18093368>.



© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article/ Journal distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are properly credited (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract: The emergence of critical Indian theatre in the post-Independence era served as a vital cultural platform for scrutinising the nation's social and political structures, particularly concerning the status of women. The decades spanning the late 1960s through the 1970s marked a period of intense social realignment, setting the stage for two seminal works of feminist critique: Vijay Tendulkar's proscenium play, *Silence! The Court Is in Session* (1967), and Jana Natya Manch's (Janam) street play, *Aurat* (1979). While separated by only a little over a decade, these works represent fundamentally divergent strategies for voicing protest and effecting social change, encapsulating the ideological split within Indian feminist and political discourse of the time. Vijay Tendulkar is a pioneer author of "Theatre of Cruelty" in the Marathi theatre. He is one of the outstanding Indian playwrights, screen and television writers, literary essayists, political journalists, and social commentators. He has been the most prolific Indian playwright and theatre personality in Marathi, the principal language of the state of Maharashtra, which had a continuous literary history since the end of the classical period of India.

Keywords: Women, Society, Activist, Theatre, Drama, Gender discrimination.

Introduction: Vijay Tendulkar's endeavours annihilate the very ground of the established values of a fundamentally orthodox Indian society. He is a great writer and won a lot of awards. In 1984, he received the Padma Bhushan award from the Government of India for his literary accomplishments. He won Maharashtra State government awards in 1956, 1969 and 1972; and "Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar" in 1999. He was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1970, and again in 1998 with the Academy's highest award for 'lifetime-contribution', the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (Ratna Sadasya). In 1977,

Tendulkar won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay for his screenplay in Shyam Benegal's movie, *Manthan* (1976). He has written screenplays for some of the important art movies of India, such as *Nishant*, *Aakrosh* and *Ardha Satya*. For the past five decades, Tendulkar has been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality in Maharashtra. Vijay Tendulkar can be acknowledged as the precursor of modern Indian drama. His contribution is marvellous and bulky in the development of modern dramatic sensibility. He is ranked with great playwrights like Badal Sarcar, Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh.

He has enriched the Indian drama and theatre by picturing the varied problems of native life in Maharashtra. His plays are mostly centred on women, their plight, their exploitation, and sufferings in the male dominated society. Violence is one of the famous themes of his plays specially against women. His women characters are much prominent and ahead of his time whom the patriarchal society takes as a challenge to their authority.

Main Text: On Contrast to that Safdar Hashmi (12 April 1954 – 2 January 1989) was an Indian Communist playwright and director, best known for his work with Street theatre in India. He was also an actor, lyricist, and theorist, and he is still considered an important voice in Indian political theatre. He was an activist of the Students Federation of India (SFI). He was a founding member of *Jana Natya Manch* (JANAM) in 1973, which grew out of the Indian People's Theatre Association. His street plays are inspired by leftist ideology and try to explain or highlight the dark realities of society. How the poor, downtrodden, subalterns and women are treated in society. Women are doubly exploited at their homes and outside. He was murdered in 1989 in Jhandapur while performing a street play, *Halla Bol*, because he was exposing the reality of the society. His street play *Aurat* was first performed in 1979, the occasion was the first conference of working women under the aegis of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the trade union wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This street play became one of the most popular street plays.

This project focuses on the comparative study of the two languages, Marathi and Hindi and the two forms of drama: experimental Marathi Theatre and Hindi Street Theatre. Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (originally *Shāntatā! Court Chālu Aahe* in Marathi) (1967) originated within the experimental Marathi theatre movement, reflecting the intellectual and moral turbulence of the urban middle-class woman Leela Benare. Tendulkar's *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, which was translated by Priya Adharkar as *Silence! the Court is in Session* proved to be the milestone not only in his career but also in the history of the whole Marathi theatre. He broke away from certain traditions of the Marathi theatre that had been dominated by family melodramas centred on the middle classes. *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *The Vultures* (1961), along with the *Silence! the Court is in Session* is a study of human violence and terror, and how the individual characters revolted against and protested against the social evils and traditions. It is primarily a social satire focused on embedded hypocrisy and pervasive judgmentalism within bourgeois morality. It also focuses on the treatment of independent women who are not in the patriarchal mindset. Its aesthetic approach favours psychological complexity and profound social commentary, delivered within the contained environment of the proscenium stage.

Tendulkar's *Silence!* has its setting, typically in a single room which symbolises the social and moral constraints imposed upon the middle-class woman protagonist, Miss

Leena Benare, who is 34 years old, an independent school teacher who is also a part of an amateur theatre group called “Sonar Moti Progressive Association.” The other members of this group are Mr Kashikar, Mrs Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, and Prof. Damle and Rawte, who all belong to the urban middle class of Bombay. Mr. Kashikar is the chairman of the association, while Mrs. Kashikar is a housewife who follows her husband like a meek shadow. Balu Rokde is a college student whose education is taken care of by the childless Kashikars. Sukhatme is a lawyer, and Ponkshe is a clerk in the central telephone office. Karnik is an actor in the experimental theatre with pretensions to being an expert in Modern Theatre. Damle is a professor who plays a key role in the action of the play, though not physically present.

Soon, all her co-actors arrive. Prof. Damle’s inability to join them on the occasion and Rawat’s absence, due to his sudden illness, worry Kashikar. Sukhatme allays Kashikar’s apprehension by telling him that he will play the role of both the counsel for the prosecution and that for the accused. He suggests Samant as Rawta’s substitute, and Benare readily endorses his suggestion, saying that “Samant is lovely, indeed, for playing Rowta's role as the fourth witness in the “Mock Law Court.”

All agree to accept Samant, the fourth witness in the play, who is to present the trial, presenting Johnson on the charge of producing atomic weapons. At first, Samant is completely astonished and nervous, trembling at the very thought of acting along with these sophisticated and metropolitan artistes. Just to make Samant know the court process, Mrs. Kashikar suggests a rehearsal with Samant, as the actual play was scheduled to be staged at night. They all agree with Benare, who suggests “a new and imaginary case against someone” (71), so that Samant may understand how a court functions.

The technique of the play is the use of a mock trial—a meta-theatrical device, or a play within a play, that immediately critiques the boundaries between performance and reality. The mock trial begins with "trivial banter" and laughter, gradually transitioning into a "menacing" psychological assault as "ugly secrets start tumbling out." This technique transforms the stage into a critical lens, scrutinising the performance of justice itself. The judge and jury are arbitrary, hypocritical peers—individuals like Sukhatme, a failed lawyer-cum-actor, and Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar—who are demonstrably devoid of the human value and compassion necessary for true justice. The structure reveals how societal institutions, symbolised by the court, often function as mechanisms of control and subjugation, particularly against women.

The ironic title, *Silence! The Court Is in Session* serves as a powerful satire. The command for silence is immediately rendered meaningless by the constant disruptions caused by characters like Mrs. Kashikar, suggesting that the court—intended for objective detachment—is anything but. Ultimately, the word 'Silence' becomes a symbol for the "patriarchal conspiracy" designed to suppress a woman's voice in the name of social ideology.

Now Benare comes out singing. She looks fresh. She puts away her things in a basket on the dais at the right. All the while singing

“The parrot to the sparrow said
Why, oh why are your eyes so red?
Oh, my dear friend what shall I say?
Someone has stolen my nest away,

Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow!” (74).

Through this song, Tendulkar tries to express her pain, suffering and agony. We also smell the violence and cruelty which she has faced in the male-dominant society and which her co – actors planned to pour upon her in the name of a mock trial.

Ponkshe, coming from the door way to the inner room and standing before Benare on the dais, startles her saying, “Miss Benare you have been arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extra ordinary grave nature and brought as a prisoner before the bar of this court” (74) At this Benare stiffens, while Karnik and Rokde arrange a wooden dock around her. Benare, suddenly and seriously, is accused of a grave crime and Kashikar, the judge of the mock court, asks Benare, “Prisoner Miss Benare, under section no. 302 of the Indian Penal Code, you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime?” (74)

Miss Leena Benare is presented as a paradigm of emerging feminine independence in post-colonial India. At thirty-four, she is self-dependent, successful, and unmarried—a profile that inherently challenges the rigid domestic roles prescribed by middle-class society. Her very existence as an autonomous woman makes her a target for the collective misogyny and latent hostility of the theatre troupe.

The true focus of the mock trial is not merely a sexual transgression but Benare’s assertion of self-determination. Her "crime," being pregnant out of wedlock, is compounded by her explicit intention to raise the child while remaining unmarried. This act fundamentally threatens the patriarchal system, which relies on mediating reproduction and controlling inheritance through the institution of marriage. Benare’s decision is interpreted as a "heinous blot on the sacred brow of motherhood. Tendulkar expertly reveals the collective bias and moral policing inherent in this milieu. The play suggests that the social contract among the middle class requires conformity, and any assertion of feminine independence is targeted and severely punished.

Benare's violence is primarily psychological and emotional, stemming from public humiliation and betrayal by her peers. This intense focus on psychological trauma reveals that for the Indian middle class, patriarchy functions not solely through formal institutions but through internalised collective vigilantism. The oppressors—Mr. Kashikar, Sukhatme, and Mrs. Kashikar are not high institutional authorities but ordinary citizens and peers. They demonstrate how oppressive power structures are authenticated and perpetuated by ordinary people who utilise moral judgment as a form of social recreation. The sadism displayed during the mock trial confirms that power resides in the enforcement of unwritten, restrictive societal rules that clog women’s lives with limitations.

Mrs. Kashikar opens the door for a series of striking darts on Benare. And evidence after evidence is heaped on her. Mrs. Kashikar, mercilessly, reveals that Benare made “overtures” to “Rokde, a boy much younger than herself. Ponkshe, in spite of Benare’s implorations not to expose her, blurts out how she asked him to marry her and how she told him that she was pregnant with a child of Prof. Damle, a married man and the father of five children. Then Karnik exposes her childhood love for her maternal uncle. Kashikar also tells that he heard her requesting the chairman of the education society, Nanasaheb Sindhe of Bombay, to drop an enquiry against her. But he was ordering angrily someone on the telephone angrily, “it is a sin to be pregnant before marriage. It would be still immoral to

let such a woman teach in such a condition! There is no alternative, this woman must be dismissed” (113).

The judge Mr. Kashikar, orders Ms. Benare to abort her child. According to him, to have a child without marriage is against the tradition of Indian culture. The judgment passes to Ms Benare seems too absurd. Mr. Kashikar says:

“The crimes you have committed are the most terrible. The mortality that you have shown forgiveness for them.... though your conduct was the mortality you were planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow. It must be said that the school officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from job.... There is no forgiveness.... No memento of your sin should remain for the future generation. Therefore, the court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed (118-119). She screamed to this: “No! No! No! I won’t let you do it. I won’t let it happen, I won’t let it happen” (119).

Tendulkar gives Benare a chance to express her feelings and agony in her last interior monologue. Monologue is full of Benare’s internal turbulence, her rebelliousness, her rage against society as well as self, her bitterness at the harassment she has suffered.

Throughout the play Tendulkar raises the voice against the male dominance, sexual harassment and social injustice in the play. Benare who is 34-year-old became the mouth piece of Tendulkar. She is the only character who raises her voice against the wrong doing to her and to the other characters.

Benare, a prey of male chauvinism, is used simply to gratify the quench for bodily thirst and deserted at the end to her own destiny. Man has the right to be sinful in society. He can be harsh, notorious and innocent too. All the rights are reserved especially for him. On the other hand, a woman must be brutally destroyed for her actions both physically and mentally. The character of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, Ponkshe, Rokde, Sukhatme represents hypocrisy and an inferiority complex. One can clearly notice a conflict raised by Tendulkar between the real self and the performed self in the play. Tendulkar digs the inner self of all the characters in the plays, how they present themselves and what they actually are. He has identified the role of society in shaping and determining their identities. In an interview, Tendulkar divulged: “This play is a caustic satire on the social as well as legal justice.”(Interview) Benare represents all the women in India who are suppressed, oppressed and marginalised. “Benare’s defence of herself against the onslaught of the upholders of social norms in a long soliloquy has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theatre.” (Banerjee ix)

Aurat established itself as a foundational text for Indian feminist and activist performance, advocating for structural change and collective empowerment. *Aurat* provide a comprehensive literary and performative history of the feminist struggle in India, demonstrating that achieving liberation requires both the psychological excavation of internalized prejudice and the physical mobilization against material injustice. *Aurat* (Woman), written and performed by the radical Leftist Street theatre collective Janam, founded by Safdar Hashmi, arose directly from organized feminist struggles, particularly those targeting dowry deaths and worker exploitation. This play consciously departed from the constraints of formal theatre, utilizing the immediacy and accessibility of the street to engage directly with the marginalized and the working class. *Aurat* is, therefore, an activist

text whose primary goal is not reflection or complex realism, but rather political mobilization and the prescription of organized revolutionary action.

Aurat employs the public, confrontational Street Theatre (Agitprop) format to deliver a materialist critique rooted in Marxist principles, offering a solution through active agitation and collective political mobilization. Both plays share the aim of articulating protest against patriarchal aggression, but their disparate methodologies force a critical examination of which mode of performance—reflection or action—is more effective in achieving women's liberation.

Aurat utilises the public square and the aesthetics of Agitation Propaganda (agitprop). This shift in venue is inherently activist, moving the performance out of the elite, ticketed access of the proscenium and directly into the public space for unmediated communication. By democratising the public space and discourse through performance, street theatre becomes a powerful protest technique in itself.

Aurat openly addresses raw, immediate issues impacting marginalised women, such as bride burning, dowry, and wife battering. The play employs traditional agitprop techniques—designed to be accessible, immediate, and revolutionary in intent. Unlike the complex, veiled satire of *Silence!* it seeks to foster awareness and mobilise support for social reform, utilising theatre as both an educational and entertaining tool. This form of expression, used by feminist groups like Stree Sangharsh, directly engaged with protest techniques such as local demonstrations and public performances outside locations implicated in dowry cases.

The choice of medium thus represents a fundamental decision between achieving psychological depth and maximising immediate political efficacy. While Tendulkar's play delves into Benare's interior world to achieve artistic profundity and psychological critique, *Aurat* sacrifices complex character development for mobilising power. By using rapid, shocking scenes of suppression juxtaposed with "songs of revolution, the play ensures that the protest is externalised, immediate, and clearly prescriptive. *Aurat* subverts elitist notions of womanhood and articulates explicit political connections between gender, class, and sexuality, targeting a revolutionary change rooted in grassroots awareness.

Aurat shifts the focus entirely from the moral policing of the middle class to the raw, explicit material violence endured by the working class. The play openly deals with instances of dowry murders, domestic violence, and workplace exploitation. This focus deliberately contextualises oppression not as a psychological malaise but as a tangible threat to material survival, directly linking private suffering to public economics.

Janam utilises a Marxist framework to articulate this critique, narrating women's troubles in terms of production, reproduction, and revolution. Women are shown to be oppressed both domestically and economically, thus tying their subjugation directly to the capitalist structure and class struggle. *Aurat* celebrates the multitasking role of women but uses this high labour quotient (both in the factory and the home) to frame their exploitation. The ageing woman factory worker, a key figure in the narrative, symbolises the link between gender oppression and labour injustice.

This divergence in subject matter highlights two distinct theoretical streams of Indian feminism during that era. Benare's struggle reflects the liberal or bourgeois feminism, prioritising individual autonomy and freedom within the established social system. Conversely, *Aurat* champions Socialist or Marxist feminism, arguing that true

liberation requires structural economic change and collective action. Benare's attempt to seek individual autonomy is ultimately shown to be insufficient—a "bourgeois line" where the character is left "helpless and motionless on stage". *Aurat* rejects this individual plight, connecting the personal pain of dowry and battery to the public solution of trade unionism and mass mobilisation. The focus on the power game of the marginalised working class necessitates active resistance against violence, which is explicit and physical, contrasting sharply with the subtle, psychological violence presented in *Silence!*

Aurat concludes with prescribed action and revolutionary optimism, consistent with socialist agitprop. The approach to protest in *Aurat* is opposed. Protest is voiced through explicit, external scenes of oppression "juxtaposed with 'songs of revolution,' which makes the protesting voice surface and stand out against the patriarchal rhetoric." The goal is not interiority but mobilisation. This ending is highly didactic. It follows a clear "socialist/Marxist line of thought," affirming that liberation is achieved only through "active agitation" and class solidarity. By linking feminist liberation directly to organised labour, *Aurat* offers a concrete, prescriptive avenue for change through collective empowerment. This divergence in resolution also highlights a key ethical choice regarding the role of political theatre: whether the function of art is primarily to analyse injustice (Tendulkar) or to prescribe immediate collective action (Janam). Janam's activist imperative compels it to provide a revolutionary path forward to fulfil its role of agitation and propaganda. "The play *Aurat* portrays the challenges faced by women in the social and domestic spheres of life, where several obstacles are put forth by patriarchy." (Bharti, 9)

The comparative study of *Silence!* and *Aurat* reveals that patriarchy manifests differently across India's class spectrum, demanding equally distinct theatrical responses. Tendulkar focuses on the destructive nature of moral hypocrisy within the middle class, while Janam concentrates on the material and economic violence faced by the working class.

The ideological commitment of Janam, rooted in socialist realism and agitprop, mandates a clear, active resolution. *Aurat* actively rejects the "bourgeois line" of individual suffering and helplessness seen in *Silence!*. The final scene provides a concrete, solution-oriented conclusion: the ageing woman factory worker, representing the oppressed class, joins the trade union activists in protest, emphatically taking up the "red flag of revolution."

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, and Jana Natya Manch's *Aurat* stand as foundational texts in Indian feminist theatre, utilising radically different dramaturgical approaches to voice protest against patriarchal aggression. The comparative study reveals that the two plays collectively map the dual landscape of oppression in India: the insidious, psychological violence afflicting the urban middle class (Tendulkar) and the explicit, material violence endured by the marginalised working class (Janam).

The difference in performance medium embodies a spatial ideology. The proscenium stage suggests that middle-class oppression is an intellectualised form of cruelty, contained within the private sphere of moral judgment, reflecting the class's detachment. Conversely, the public, immediate setting of *Aurat* suggests that working-class oppression is raw and inseparable from the public sphere of economics and politics.

One of the main distinctions between the two works lies in their chosen medium, which ultimately dictates their ideological resolution and political efficacy. *Silence!* utilizes the contained, introspective Proscenium Theatre and meta-theatrical devices to deliver a

psychological critique, often resulting in a modernist pessimism that exposes deep-seated flaws without offering solutions. Conversely, *Aurat* employs the public, confrontational Street Theatre (Agitprop) format to deliver a materialist critique rooted in Marxist principles, offering a solution through active agitation and collective political mobilisation.

The two plays define the scope of 20th-century Indian political theatre: Tendulkar offered the audience introspection and existential dread, while JANAM offered immediate mobilisation and collective hope. Both works remain cornerstones of Indian drama, ensuring that the dialogue on social justice, gender equality, and human rights continues to challenge artists and audiences alike. “Both *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Aurat* uses their respective medium of proscenium and street theatre to voice the protest against patriarchal aggression with the aim of effecting indirect or direct change in society. However, it depends more on the spectator/ reader to decide which is more convincing, given that regarding the question of commitment, both forms continue to prove their sincerity.” (Debayan, 8)

Works Cited and Consulted

- Tendulkar, Vijay (various Translators). *Collected plays in Translation*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.
- Hasmi, Safdar *Aurat*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EsdI6vqCMI>.
- Debayan Deb Barman. “Breaking the Silence: Women’s Protest Voiced in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session* and Jana Natya Manch’s *Aurat*” *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Vol. 4, Issue-IV August 2013.
- Bharti. Hashmi’s Street Theatre: Machine And *Aurat*. *The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal*, Vol. 3 Issue 3 (June 2017). [Home | Expression Journal](http://Home|ExpressionJournal).
- Salunke, K. B. (2025). Hybridity and Identity- Diasporic Voices in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Stories. *Cognitive Thinking: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(3), 96–101. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17230829>
- Banerjee, Arundhati. “Introduction” *Five Plays*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995.
- Rao, V., & Sharma, K. K. (2025). Educational Erosion: The Marginalization of Teachers Amidst Digital Distractions. *Cognitive Thinking: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(3), 191–195. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17416860>