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Ruminations:
The Andrean Journal of Literature

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EDITORIAL

As one of the four primary genres of literature, drama has always been an integral component of literary studies. A performative medium that is the product of a collaboration not only between the playwright and the theatre group that produces the play, but also between the stage and the audience that views the action as it unfolds, the theatrical spectacle has the potential to transcend its spatial and temporal 'limitations' to create an experience that can be almost visceral in its impact.

Our national conference on 'The Theory and Practice of Contemporary Theatre' was designed to elicit nuanced insights into theatre as an investigation into and critique of art and culture as represented by some of the seminal practitioners of this form. The papers included for publication in this issue of Ruminations have examined theatre in its diverse and complex manifestations as text and as performance.

Ms. Sharmila Jajodia's paper **"Interrogating Social Perceptions: Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man"*** explores how patriarchal mechanisms work insidiously through the institution of the family at the microcosmic level and at the macrocosmic level of the nation as well. The author inspects how Amritlal, the arch patriarch, uses his political and familial authority to deliberately destroy his son's career as a classical dancer, thereby emasculating him such that unable to 'dance like a man', Jairaj is also unable to recover from his failure as a son, husband and father.

Ms. Prakriti Vashishtha's paper **"Social Space and Performativity: A Postmodern Exploration of Wole Soyinka's drama *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963)"** puts the spotlight on Wole Soyinka as a postmodern playwright with specific reference to *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963). She examines the play through a postmodern lens that privileges the workings of performativity and hybridity within the

spatial restrictions of theatre, and uses the work of postmodern theorists to illuminate Soyinka's use of devices such as flashback, foreshadowing, and his focus on cultural constructs of space and time in the indigenous context of African culture.

In **"My Will is my Own": Examining the feminisms in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session,"*** Olivia Lobo and Dalvina Ferreira highlight Tendulkar's feminist interrogation of gender roles in middle class Indian society. Benare's position as a unmarried, independent woman with a career of her own, an affront to traditional and conservative attitudes to perceptions of the ideal Indian woman, is discussed as it is observed by the other characters in the play, and exposed for the facile and hypocritical positions they represent.

Ms. Carren Lopes and Ms. Valentina Gonsalves's paper **"This is all straight out of a school composition book": Performativity in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session"*** examines Tendulkar's use of intertextuality as evinced in the playwirght's use of nursery rhymes, contemporary Marathi poems, and Sanskrit *shloks* as tools to reinforce the status quo. Using an existentialist framework, the authors also comment on the manner in which relationality emerges as an opposition between binaries such as "being" and "nothingness," reality and an illusion, and presence and absence.

"Performing Gendered Violence: A Study of Two Contemporary Indian Plays by Women" by Dr. Sucharita Sarkar attempts to understand the performative and political aspects of how engage Shaoli Mitra's *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* (2002; translated from the Bengali play *Nathbati Anathbath,* and based on the *Mahabharata*) and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (2000). Situating her analysis within the context of brahmanical patriarchy and contemporary debates on violence against women in India, the author compares Mitra's depiction of violence through music, mimicry and lighting, with

Padmanabhan's play in which the rape takes place off-stage but which still makes the agony of the raped subject a 'felt' experience.

Lastly, Dr. Lakshmi Muthukumar's paper **"Wendy Wasserstein's Plays as Fem-enactment"** argues that Wasserstein's plays can be viewed as an enactment of the feminist critique of the Habermasian conception of the public sphere. The author explores the "interpenetrative", "mutually collapsible" and "fluid" nature of theprivate and the public spheres on stage as also Wasserstein's representations of class, ethnicity, sexuality, race and genderin plays like *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Isn't It Romantic*, *The Heidi Chronicles*, *An American Daughter*, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, *Old Money* and *Third*.

Dr. Susan Lobo
Associate Professor
Department of English

Interrogating Social Perceptions: Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man*

Ms. Sharmila Jajodia

Abstract

Social and cultural norms have defined and constructed gender roles and anyone who is nonconformist has to undergo endless sufferings and trauma subsequently. The negative impact of the unwritten rules of autocracy has always been the subject matter of Mahesh Dattani, who compels his readers and audiences to have an insight into the past, which keeps haunting the present and affects the future too. *Dance Like a Man* (1989) is a play about three generations and depicts how parents dominate children from generation to generation in making the career choices of their children. Parents not only undermine the passions and decisions of the children but also deny them their rights to make decisions. They even go to the extent of choosing the life partners for their children and arranging their marriages keeping their selfish motives in mind. Thus marriage - a social institution - is no longer a sacred institution in present global scenario and has become a matter of convenience and compromise. In the light of above observations, this paper interrogates social perception in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*, which has completed 600 shows.

Key words: Career, Choice, Gender Roles, Marriage, Social Perception

Interrogating Social Perceptions: Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man*

Indian society has been a male dominated society since ages. Social and cultural norms have defined and constructed gender roles and anyone who is nonconformist has to undergo endless sufferings and trauma subsequently. Parents even go to the extent of choosing life partners for their children and arranging their marriages keeping their selfish motives in mind. They have an upper hand in the family and personal affairs of their children and as a result it destroys the brightness of the marital lives of the children. Thus marriage - a social institution - is no longer a sacred institution in the present global scenario and has become a matter of convenience and compromise.

The negative impact of the unwritten rules of autocracy has always been the subject matter of social thinkers, writers and dramatists. Mahesh Dattani is one such dramatist in the galaxy of Indian English playwrights who compels his readers and audiences to have an insight into the past which keeps haunting the present and affects the future too.

In the light of following observations, this paper is directed to interrogate social perception in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* which was first performed on 22 September1989 at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore as part of the Deccan Herald Theatre Festival and has completed more than 600 shows.

Dance Like a Man (1989) is a play about three generations – Amritlal Parekh, his son Jairaj and Jairaj's daughter Lata. Amritlal Parekh is a rich businessman and an autocratic father who doesn't support Jairaj's passion for dance and his decision to adopt it professionally. According to Amritlal, dance will not bring Jairaj any money, and grown up men don't dance. Only boys dance, and that too, as a hobby. But a youthful Jairaj walks on 'the road not taken' by becoming a male dancer. Amritlal wants him to 'dance like a man' by making a masculine career

choice. Amritlal expresses his dissatisfaction: "Well, most boys are interested in cricket, my son is interested in dance, I thought. I didn't realize this interest of yours would turn into an . . . obsession"(415).

Ratna , a south Indian dancer has married Jairaj, a Gujarati, as she knew that he would allow her to dance after marriage. She used to come to his house to practice dance with him even before marriage when they were neighbours. Both are dependent on Amritlal as far as finances and shelter are concerned. Amritlal approves of their marriage as it suits his image of being liberal minded. Amritlal is a complete contrast to his son Jairaj as far as dance as an art is concerned. He has strong objections to male dancers keeping long hair and the family's association with dance artists. Amritlal says normal men don't keep their hair long. He doesn't like Jairaj's Guru because of his long hair and the way he walks. When Ratna tells her father-in-law that Jairaj is planning to grow his hair long to enhance his abhinaya as per Guruji's suggestion, Amrit Lal threatens that he will shave Jairaj's head and throw him on street. He even stops Ratna from visiting Chenni amma, a so-called prostitute but who is actually the living exponent of the old Mysore School who wants to teach her abhinaya and old dance compositions. He feels it will spoil the family name. He even tells Ratna that she and her husband (his son) are under his care so she should take his permission . Jairaj tells his would be son-in-law, Viswas, his father's misconception regarding dance:

Amritlal The craft of a prostitute to show off her wares - what business did a man have learning such a craft? Of what use could it be to him? No use. So no man would want to learn …anyone who learnt …could not be a man. How could I argue against such logic?(406)

When Jairaj and Ratna practice dance in the house, he once interrupts them by calling Jairaj and tells him to stop the din. He wants Guruji and the musicians out. Jairaj feels bad that he cannot even have a decent rehearsal in this house.

Amritlal. You can't …decent rehearsal …? I can't have some peace and quiet in my house! It's bad enough having had to convert the library into a practice hall for you. (414).

Jairaj wants his father to allow him to do whatever he wants to do but his father does not give him that freedom.

Amritlal. There comes a time when you have to do what is expected of you. Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. Is it because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance? (415)

When Jairaj tells him that nobody is forcing him, Amritlal thinks that Ratna may be influencing Jairaj, and then regrets that he consented to their marriage.

Amritlal had been a committed freedom fighter. He considers himself a change maker, a social reformer, as he wants to root out certain unwanted and ugly practices like dowry and untouchability. But Jairaj considers him conservative and prudish as he (father) associates dance with the Devdasi system and prostitution. Amritlal further says that he will not have their 'temples turned into brothels' while Jairaj also determines that he will not have his 'art run down by a handful of stubborn narrow-minded individuals with fancy pretentious ideals.' He further tells his father that he should be pleased that they (Jairaj and Ratna) are interested in reviving this art (dance) and should encourage them instead of being a hindrance. When Amritlal says that they are building *ashrams* for these unfortunate women, educating and reforming them, Jairaj tells him that the best way to reform is to 'let them practice their art, send them back to their temples, give them awards for preserving their art, give them their homes and give them their profession.' When Amritlal tells Jairaj that as long as he is under his care, he cannot do whatever he wants, Jairaj takes an impulsive decision and leaves his father's home with Ratna and vows never to come back under his care. They go to Ratna's uncle who makes an offer to Ratna. Jairaj immediately takes a decision to leave that place.

Thus Jairaj is defeated for not being financially independent. They return to Amritlal as the outer world is uglier than their own home. Amritlal too senses this and allows them to dance professionally and practice in his library. Ratna stops believing in Jairaj's abilities since that day and considers him a 'spineless boy' as he could not survive on his own and could not leave his father's house for more than 48 hours while Jairaj considers his decision as 'manly'.

Jairaj. "Would I have been a man then? Giving my own wife to her own uncle because he was offering us food and shelter? Would you have preferred that? … You were meant for entertainment. … So what was wrong with going back to my father? At least my father didn't make . . ." (410)

The cunning father convinces Ratna that she is better than Jairaj in dancing and thus bribes her mentally. He tempts her by promising her a dance career if she helps him to make Jairaj a grown up adult, like a man. He rationalizes that a man in a woman's world is pathetic. He recognizes Ratna, the clever woman, and realizes that he cannot stop Ratna from dancing but he can stop Jairaj through Ratna. So he allows Ratna to do whatever she wants and thus Ratna has Jairaj out of her way. Despite Jairaj's refusal to dance alone for one full year and turning down dance offers when she was pregnant, Ratna goes to the extent of cheating her husband by becoming an accomplice to Amritlal. Jairaj blames Ratna for hurting his self-esteem and expresses his anguish.

Jairaj. Bit by bit. You took it when you insisted on top billing in all our programmes . . . you made me dance my weakest items. . . you arranged lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow. And when you called me names in front of other people…I feel ashamed to repeat even in private. And you call me disgusting. (443) .

But Ratna claims that the audience want to see her dancing, that he was mediocre, and that if he danced alone, his mediocrity would be

exposed. He choreographed items for her or played the flute and thus was her stage prop. Ratna tells him he is not good at that anymore. She holds him responsible for destroying his career. Jairaj represses his desires, and turns to alcoholism to do away with depression. Not only this, he transfers (displaces) his conflict and frustrations by getting rid of his father's memories, by destroying the garden, and giving away the prized possession, the shawl to Viswas. When his father dies, he has everything removed. Jairaj thinks that his father's way of thrusting him into adulthood was perverse. Both, Ratna and Amrit Lal , regret their attempts but it is of no use.

Though Jairaj and Ratna make money from their dance school and performances abroad; they do make a name abroad, and get fame as local celebrities, yet Ratna is dissatisfied with her present and she expresses her frustration like this:

Ratna. Finished! Just like me. Yes, your father was right. Dance has brought us nowhere. It's his curse on us. … You should have listened to your father. He was right. We were never anything great, never will be, and nor will our daughter be anything but an average human being. (402)

She also tells Jairaj that their decision of leaving the house, 'coming back and accepting defeat' was an impulsive one and they both are to blame.

Still Jairaj and Ratna make every possible effort for the success of their daughter Lata's debut performance. Lata performs excellently and becomes a famous star. They want Lata to perform at the national festival in Canada and also expect the same success there. Thus they plant their own wishes and desires in their own daughter and make an attempt to fulfill their unfulfilled desires through her.

Lata wants to marry Viswas, the son of a rich mithaiwala, who owns half the buildings on Commercial Street because he will allow her

to dance. She says that actually her parents could not care less who or what he is as long as he lets her dance. Lata also wants to come to her parents' house to practice dance after marriage. She is a very practical and professional woman who like her mother asserts herself. She tells Viswas that she does not want to be a mother immediately after marriage as there is plenty of time and they are still young. She also discloses that her parents were forty years old when she was born. She also hints to Viswas that if he wants many children, then he may marry someone else.

Viswas. My father almost died when I told him that I am marrying outside my caste and accepting a daughter-in-law who doesn't make tea is asking too much of him. (391)

Besides, Ratna says that Jairaj does not cry because he is a 'man'. Jairaj wants his son Shankar to grow up so that he can teach him how to dance – dance of Shiva.

Jairaj. The dance of a man. . . . and make him dance on his (grandfather's) head – the tandava nritya. (441)

His desire remains unfulfilled. Shankar dies in childhood as he is given a double dose of opium by mistake. Jairaj and Ratna blame each other for his death. According to Jairaj, she, being the mother, should have taken care of the child but she (the Lakshmi of the house) has been away receiving acclaim for her talents, while, according to Ratna, he is a drunkard who cannot care for his child.

Thus, Amritlal Parekh shatters Jairaj's dream of being an outstanding dancer to satisfy his ego. Amritlal symbolizes autocracy-a metaphor of the unwritten rules and the accepted norms and values of the Indian joint family system. As quoted by Konar, "In the play *Dance Like a Man*, Dattani expresses his resentment for close fisted gender roles in the conventional social framework where the passion of an artist is quashed against the restrictions imposed on individual according to gender roles"(118).

Dattani has deconstructed gender roles in the play by criticizing the binary oppositions that have been transferred from generation to generation, taken for granted and resulted in hierarchy, with the hegemony of one and the subordination of the other. Gender is entirely a social construct and all the roles of men and women are conditioned and decided by the conceptions of society. Gender also signifies the socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and lead to varied forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. Dattani has shown that gender construct is as oppressive for men as for women.

In "Deconstructing Gender in Mahesh Dattani's Tara and Dance Like a Man" Saraswathi L. opines, "If the play questions conventional male stereotypes and points out that male identity is a construction conditioned by social norms and expectations, it does so by involving those very same constructions for the female characters"(5).

Ratna is suffering from guilt over the death of her child but by putting the blame entirely on her, Jairaj is also partaking of the same societal tuning to which he is a victim. He is also partly responsible for the child's death as he was present at home when the second dose of opium was administered to the child. So Jairaj and Ratna too indulge in gender role assigning which they rebel against. Viswas and his parents' expectations from Lata show how conditioned they are socially and culturally. Besides, though Jairaj and Ratna oppose Amritlal's decisions and ambitions, yet as parents they too try to transfer their own frustrated ambitions and decisions to Lata and Shankar. Ratna wants to make Lata 'the dancing star' by hook or crook, and Jairaj wants Shankar to be 'a male dancer'. Dattani makes use of the 'flashback' technique and the split-scene device to authenticate his theme, the interrogation of social perception. The stage is arranged in a living room of a dimly lit room in an old fashioned house in the heart of a city which represents the present. Just behind the entrance of the room, a modern looking rear panel is arranged which slides to reveal a garden which represents the past. The

role switching is also introduced as a vital part of the structure of the play. Viswas and younger Jairaj; Lata and young Ratna; older Jairaj and Amritlal Parekh are the roles played by the same actors.

The title *Dance Like a Man* is perhaps derived from the English idiom 'to dance to somebody's tunes', and indicates that it poses a challenge to Jairaj who could not dance to either his father or his wife's tunes or the tunes of the traditional society but tried to assert himself by dancing like a man, even the dance forms which are for women. And that is why Viswas tells Jairaj, "But you fought back. That's good. You did what you wanted to do. You were steadfast" (406).

Thus *Dance Like a Man* is a critique of a society in which parents not only undermine the passions and decisions of their children but also deny them their right to make decisions. Jairaj, in comparison to Ratna, is at the receiving end due to the gender politics and patriarchal dominance. Dattani forces us to examine our own individual and collective consciousness. He also compels us to probe whether we are really liberal minded persons as we generally believe ourselves to be or we blindly follow the unwritten laws of family conduct which are easier to follow to walk on a path. Thus Dattani hints at the close examination of authoritative society.

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Social Space and Performativity: A Postmodern Exploration of Wole Soyinka's drama *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963)

Ms. Prakriti Vashishtha

Abstract

Wole Soyinka's writing is often discussed as an occasion to explore nativism by tracing the binaries of tradition and modernity. However, it is along the lines of these binaries that one may also be able to observe the instances that stand as contradictions to these neatly bound categories. Kemi Atanda (2017) discusses the lack of any focused literature on Soyinka as a postmodernist playwright and emphasizes the vitality of the indigenous culture in African theatre.

Subsequently, Robert Tally (2013) mentions that the "…human condition is…where our experience of being-in-the-world frequently resembles being lost. Already situated in *medias res*, cultural studies have begun to disclose some of the ways of clarifying these difficulties" (*Spatiality* 43).

This paper, accordingly, attempts to explore the theory and contribution of "space" as a contemporaneous formalization that is indispensably related to performance, in Soyinka's drama *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963). It explores in its argument, the "polysensoriality" that embodies the discussed chronotope by understanding Soja's implication of space, and it attempts to probe the "spirit of place" in Soyinka's drama, by looking at the narrative as a spatial form, and observing its consequence on its characters.

Keywords: spatiality, performativity, postmodern narrative, hybridity

Social Space and Performativity: A Postmodern Exploration of Wole Soyinka's drama *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963)

Wilshire points out that "[t]he concept of performing may not apply in toto to all that we do offstage, but it is inescapable in most of everyday life" (qtd. in Pefanis 94). Accordingly, the present argument attempts to gauge the performativity that encompasses the spatiality of African folk theatre through an arguably postmodern narrative. Performativity with all its movements and transformations is subject to changing spaces, and inevitable "spatial turn", in fact, renders these spaces mobile too. This spatial turn is influenced by time as well as in time. Russel West- Pavlov mentions St. Augustine's quote about time: "…I know well enough what it is… [but] if I am asked about what it is, I am baffled" (qtd. In West-Pavlov 54-55). He further describes St. Augustine's statement as 'performative', that one may suppose relies on the "…modes of temporal embodiment…" (ibid). Subsequently, the discourse of Soyinka enables one to observe some of the aspects pertaining to an African village and the backdrop of colonization that, as argued, is postmodern in its theatrical intention and, accordingly, maneuvers performativity as a conceptual framework.

As discussed earlier, Wilshire's understanding of an inescapable performativity in "most of everyday life" may be further extended to the concerned narrative that depicts one such day in the Ilujinle village in Nigeria. Structurally, theco-dependence of the physical space and the play's division into "[m]orning, [n]oon and [n]ight…" at first gives an impression of a neatly-bound forward-moving sequence of events that begin anew and come to a definite end in its structure. (Soyinka 1963). However, its opening is in *media res* where Lakunle spots Sidi and engages her in a conservation, as both take the audience through theevents that have occurred in the past, and Lakunle extends his already expressed wish to marry her in the future. (Soyinka 2-5). The end brings with it an

unexpected complication, and yet again nudges a no exit point to its own narrative. Victor Shklovsky, as West-Pavlov mentions, discusses that "…it is only by elaborating, reworking, distorting or refracting a basic sequence of events that a tale emerges…" (qtd. 90). Therefore, the narration of this tale occupies a postmodern lens of the disruption of sequence in order to foreground the various "traces" of the political regimes that moderate the social space of Ilujinle. As an illustration, in the "Noon" part of the narrative, Sadiku, the head wife has been lied to by her husband, the village chief or "bale", Baroka, who falsely tells her that he has lost his manhood. Thus begins the "Night" part of the play that observes a victory dance by Sadiku, who leaps up and with nobody around, she chants, "Take warning, my masters, [w]e'll*scotch* you in the end" (Soyinka 32). She is an obedient woman, who reacts tearfully to this revelation and says to her husband, "The Gods forbid…The Gods must have mercy…", and yet her character goes on to reflect upon it once she is by herself at the village center, and she is seen to "…bursts into derisive laughter" (Soyinka 28). The "spatial turn' as Foucault points out, (qtd. in Hess-Luttich 3) is consequential in terms of the perceptions, expressions and dispositions of the characters. Not only individual or personal in nature, the performativity in Soyinka's discourse accommodates the role of physical spaces that allow for the collective discursive memory to seep in through the central narrative. Subsequently, it is at this point that Sadiku engages in "remembering" not just as the Baroka's wife that dutifully goes on to woo young women for him, but also as a woman herself that rises in this apparent space of a short-lived liberation.

This invariably foregrounds the performances of the villagers; the occupants of the mentioned space. Her victory dance at the village center reveals the past and ongoing anxieties and subjugation the women have had to face. This can be noticed in her response to Sidi's enquiry: "Ask no questions my girl. Just join my victory dance…" and Sidi takes pride in womanhood after knowing the reason, as she says, "Oh Sadiku I

suddenly am glad to be a woman…Hurray for womankind!" (Soyinka 33). This verbal exchange of celebration is significant in the sense that Sadiku represents the older generation, while Sidi is a young girl, but both of them relate to this event equally deeply. Sadiku also proclaims that she had been the youngest and the newest wife of Baroka's father, and the same thing had happened to him, and after his death, she has had to practice her role as the senior most and the oldest wife and woo young girls by telling them, "…[i]t is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty- one years…" (Soyinka 21). The temporality that they have lived in, takes an alternative turn within the space of both the fictional narrative and its depiction in the play, as well as in the historical memory of the feminist discourse. Her performance as the *Bale's* forsaken wife strikingly alters after the news about his manhood, and the victory dance becomes the indigenous performative symbol that disseminates this history to the readers or the audience within the space of the traditional African culture.

By now, one can take notice of the applicability of the "chronotope" that Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualizes in terms of the novelistic genres, (qtd. in Tally Jr. 46), and Robert Tally Jr. further puts forth Bakhtin's concept of the "literary artistic chronotope" that maps the "time-space" representation through the spatial and temporal indicators that are "fused into one…concrete whole. Time…becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes…responsive to the movements of time, plot and history…" (57). This observation leads one to view Soyinka's discourse as an artistic chronotope that employs a narrative complex in time and its spatial turns to foreground the simultaneous complexity in the African folk theatre and the African culture. Genette explores correlations between story and narrative (West-Pavlov 91). These explorations emphasize the techniques of portraying the order such as "…flashback…or foreshadowing…or beginning *in media res*" (ibid). One can see these techniques at work in *The Lion and the Jewel* with the earlier discussion about the opening of the play. Additionally, these techniques play a vital

role in depicting a postmodern performativity of African theatre. The technique of flashback is shown when Lakunle tells Sidi and Sadiku about Baroka's political agenda for protecting his authoritarian rule in the Ilujinle village. There is a mime of the past times, depicting the white surveyor's domineering project of building the railway through the village; the workers are portrayed to be the prisoners.Lakunle reveals Baroka's successfully vicious attempt at "…barr[ing] the gates", since "… He loves this life/ to bear to part from it. And motor roads/ [and] railways would do just that, forcing/ Civilization at his door…" (Soyinka 25). Vishnupriya mentions that "Soyinka satirized the colonial rule in [his play]…He was equally opposed to the post independent regimes that were tyrannical and corrupt…and revolt[ed] against the political authoritarianism…" (Vishnupriya 9). Evidently then, the narrative technique of flashback portrays both the performativity through the mime that assumes the politics of colonialism, as well as, brings in Soyinka's intention to expose the dictatorial authority within the African community.

With regard to spatiality, this narrative could also be stated to have some scope of "postmetropolis", that Edward Soja suggests is essentially no space that is not directly or indirectly being pulled into the urban category (Soja 2000). And so is visible in the ways in which the space is being attempted to be expanded or restored and protected by different authorities. Another space that is being subjected to contentions is the female space. The "Jewel" or Sidi, that metonymically occupies the desired space, has been photographed by the "stranger" from Lagos, and when she sees the pictures in the leaflet her own reality changes as she assumes that she is more powerful and important than the Bale himself. She momentarily forgets the limits of her own space, as she derides Lakunle, "…why should I [wed you]/ Known as I am to the whole wide world, I would demean my worth to wed/ A mere village school teacher…Hurray! I'm beautiful…" (Soyinka 12-13). Bachelard mentions "topoanalysis" within the mnemonic framework that understands that "…the experience of time is actually frozen in discrete moments in our

memory, photographic or spatial arrangements, such that space assumes a greater importance… [and] all our lives we come back to them in daydreams…" (qtd. in Tally Jr. 116), and so the audience observes Sidi "…stand[ing] by the Schoolroom window, admiring her photos as before" (Soyinka 32).

Another technique that Genette mentions is foreshadowing, or "prolepsis" (West-Pavlov 91). A few moments in the "Night" part of the play shows Sidi to be at Baroka's palace, in order to mock him about his lost manhood. However, it suggestively does not take long before the readers or the audience realize that there may be a fair chance that the liberties of the female space will be swallowed whole by the traditional agent of patriarchy. This is evident in how "… [Sidi] is deeply engrossed in watching the contest…she continues watching for some time, then clasps her hand over her mouth as she remembers what she should have done to begin with…" (Soyinka 39-40). To build on this, the foreshadowing is performed through the wrestling match between Baroka and his opponent. There are simultaneous discourses that occupy the current space at this point. In addition to contesting his opponent in the physical space, Baroka attempts to influence Sidi's understanding of his character. He foregrounds a false notion of being innocent and wise enough to know more than she ever can, and with this it becomes easier to access his motive to exploit her. His movements at wrestling go hand in hand with his speech, as he says, "Peeling bark-Sadiku, my faithful lizard!", and the stage directions indicate "*Growing steadily warmer during his speech, he again slaps down his opponent's arm as he shouts 'Sadiku'*" (Soyinka 47). This conversation also engages in the phrases and expressions native to its indigenous culture, such as "If the tortoise cannot tumble/ It does not mean that he can stand", or "When the child is full of riddles, the mother/ has one water-pot the less" (Soyinka 42). This linguistic assimilation of the phrases lends an interiority to the space of the African theatre in the context of this play.

Another meditation that one may further expound could be D. H. Lawrence's related concept of the "spirit of place", that "…combines the quasi-scientific with the quasi-mystical…and informs, if not directs and controls, the ideas of the people who live in that place…" (Tally Jr. 81). Tally Jr. quotes Lawrence: "Every continent has its own spirit of place… [it] is a great reality" (qtd. in Tally Jr. 81). Accordingly, the realities that all the characters in the concerned discourse live through, adheres to the above notion of the vitality of the "spirit of [this] place".

These movements portrayed in the narrative, once again are telling of its integrity in terms of the performativity of the discourse. For instance, Sidi asks another girl to swear to Ogun to prove her truthfulness, to which the girl replies, "Ogun strike me dead if I lie" (11). The belief system of the traditional African culture is shown to lie in the promises made in the name of their Gods. In another instance, Sidi dismisses the chief's proposal to marry him, and Sadiku, his dutiful first wife tells her, "[m]ay Sango restore your wits. For surely some angry god has taken possession of you…" (23). Here again, it is the collective and cultural reality of the place or if one may call it "space", that is inherently shaping the perceptions of its characters and their performance in accordance to it.

Moving on to the aspect of the Body as performative, Christian Schmid in an attempt to read Henri Lefebvre, explains Lefebvre's idea of the Perceived Space. He says that "…space has a perceivable aspect that can be grasped by the senses.[It is] an integral component of every social practice… [and] comprises everything that presents itself to the senses. This sensuously perceptible aspect of space directly relates to the materiality of the "elements" that constitute space" (Schmid 39). This "polysensoriality" that Tally Jr. says "…the geocentric is required to embrace…" comes across in Soyinka's play at various occasions (*Spatiality*142). The characters in the play are embodied in their own personal perceived spaces. One such instance is when Lakunle kisses Sidi, as he idealises the western way of courting. Sidi responds

to it by scolding him for it, and says "…I tell you I dislike/ This strange unhealthy mouthing you perform…Its so unclean. And then/ The sound you make/ Are you being rude to me?" (Soyinka 9). It may also suggest that Lakunle's imitation of the western idea of a union is rendered a mere performance that he cannot turn into his reality because his society is not familiar with it. Similarly, for Sidi, the act of kissing is unhygienic and emanates her disgust. Baroka too can be observed to express his plight as he confides in Sadiku about his lost manhood with a romantic touch of sensation. He says, "Sango bear witness! These weary feet/ Have felt the loving hands of much design/ In women/ My soles have felt the scratch of harsh/ Gravelled hands…And I have known the tease of tiny,/ Dainty hands/ My eager senses/ Promised of thrills to come/ Remaining Unfulfilled…" (Soyinka 30).

It is possible by now, to relate the space of performativity to what Lefebvre understands as the "lived space… [that] denotes the world as it is experienced by human beings in the practice of their everyday life…[and] can be expressed only through artistic means" (qtd. in Schmid 40). This lived space then, is what Soja calls the "Third space" that Bhabha furthers in his works as a hybrid space. Characters in Soyinka's discourse belie this hybrid space that is a product of the cultural interactions of the western and the indigenous African realities. Lakunle can be observed to be a subject of cultural and intellectual slippages through deliberate actions of suppression of his own culture, resulting in contradictions. The concept of "Mimicry" emerges as a representation of difference, for Bhabha. It is a sign of double articulation. Subsequently, Lakunle's claim of not paying the bride price has its reasons in the discourse of the coloniser as well as the discourse of the colonised since he shifts between the two discourses when says he must stand against buying a wife as his property, to not paying the price because in the end Sidi is not a maid anyway and it would be fair to not pay it anymore. From the lens of postcoloniality, in addition to the ambivalence faced by the subject,

it is possible to trace the inevitable disruption of meaning, in the reading of the play. Sidi's response to one of his assertions is, "you talk and talk and deafen me with words that always sound the same and make no meaning" (Soyinka 9). This discursive disruption could be related to the differently perceived spatiality, as discussed earlier. Bhabha borrows mimicry as a part of the articulation of Lacan in his work *The line and light* and has quoted him. Lacan says that the effect of mimicry is camouflage, and it comprises the aspect of the lack. Which may take one back to Lakunle as an "unformed creature" as Sadiku refers to him (36). Bhabha suggests mimicry to be a form of resemblance that differs/ defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Within the African space, Lakunle's performance of this lack can be mapped in his unending desire to become the white man but the most he can attain is to be like the white man and not become him. For instance, in the morning part of the play, Sidi and the villagers are all set for a pantomime when they need Lakunle to play the stranger, the man from the outside world. She says to him, "…you are dressed like him...you speak his tongue, you're just as clumsy, you'll do for him" (Soyinka 14). Here Lakunle may be a compensation for the white man. That is a lack that Bhabha grasps as a process of imitation that is never complete due to the aporia created by the historical and racial differences.

To conclude the argument, Walter Prigge quotes Michel Foucault, who says, "[w]e are in the era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered…The present age may be the age of space…" ("Reading the Urban Revolution" p 46). Accordingly, Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* becomes a rich site of examining the lived experiences within the exposure of the constantly transforming spatiality that in turn moderates and alters the performance of any given discourse, in any given time.

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"My Will is my Own": Examining the feminisms in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

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Abstract:

In her article titled 'Vijay Tendulkar's Exploration of Middle Class Psyche in Post-colonial India,' Shukla Chatterjee notes that while his plays focus on a post-colonial reworking of the "social challenges to everyday patriarchy typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, flesh trade, female infanticide, and child abuse," wherein middle class Indian women are working against colonial legacies that themselves are powerfully patriarchal in institutional, economic, political, and ideological forms (Chatterjee 126). In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar explores representations of what could be seen as middle class, upper caste plays of power and powerlessness as a means by which social mores and control are exerted through hierarchies of gender, caste, and class (Bandyopadhyayxliv). The use of a play within a play suggests that *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a postmodern series of performances: whether of patriarchal control, feminist resistance, masculinities, or feminisms altogether. As a result, the play comments on the society of its time but also refuses to anchor this commentary in genuine assertion. Benare as a middle class, upper caste, educated woman is positioned as a template for contemporary society and its struggle between seemingly traditional and modern values, yet little is indicated about the effects of the same issues on women within other social strata, particularly women who may be lower caste and/or class. This paper will thus argue that the play's use of seemingly over-arching Indian masculinities and feminisms as a commentary on "traditional" patriarchies is itself limited by this claim to universalism.

Keywords: patriarchal control, feminist resistance, Indian masculinities.

My Will is my Own":
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"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

-Swami Vivekanada

Here the bird flying only one wing is a reference to a male-dominated society, where women are suppressed and are unable to voice their opinions; therefore the world would be unable to progress unless the condition of the women is upgraded.

Since the beginning of time, women have been considered the "inferior sex" and men automatically the superior. Earlier women were seen as only wives and mothers to cook, and perform household chores, treated differently than men in terms of rights and dues in many Indian societies even in the modern world. Women are subjected to several restrictions such as not wearing something that reveals too much of her skin, particular restrictions during her menstruation, sitting in a specific posture, etc. and are vulnerable to violence and exploitation like rape, mental, physical and sexual abuse.

In his plays Tendulkar focuses on social issues happening around the 60s in India. Women are in the spotlight: they not only function as protagonists but also as the main victims in his plays. But we also see fewer women characters in his plays than that compared to the male characters. The play *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) is an English translation of the Marathi drama *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe,* originally written in 1963 by Vijay Tendulkar. It was first performed in 1971, directed by Arvind Deshpande with Sulabha Deshpande as the main lead. The play and its structure revolves wholly

round the idea of a game and includes the essential ingredients of 'reversal'. Benare, who is on the offensive in the beginning, finds herself trapped at the close of the play. It is a play about silencing a woman's voice and this is successfully attained through the court which itself is one of the strongest patriarchal institutions.

The play begins with Benare and Samant, a villager, entering the empty village hall where the troupe from the urban middle class, upper caste society are to hold a 'Mock Law Court'.Miss Benare's finger is caught in the bolt which foreshadows the mental agony she faces after being charged guilty of infanticide. She tries to attract Samant and tells him that she likes him: "Yes, I like you very much… you're very nice indeed. And shall I tell you something? You are a very pure and good person. I like you." (Tendulkar 2) It is very uncommon for a woman to confess her liking towards a man during that time when patriarchy was dominant and women were not able to voice their thoughts and beliefs.This portrays the strong characteristics of Benare in the play.

Initially Miss Benare is portrayed as a person who is determined to succeed at her job as a teacher, "But my teaching's perfect. I've put my whole life into it - I've worn myself to a shadow in this job!... My life is my own- I haven't sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those- No one! I'll do what I like with myself and my life! I'll decide…" (Tendulkar 5). Thereafter, when Samant says that he would go and check why the others had not arrived, Benare stops him from going to look for them and says, "I feel scared when I am alone…" (Tendulkar 5) Just when we get an idea that Benare is a strong woman we see her being unsteady, behaving like a 'damsel in distress'. According to the patriarchal stereotype, a woman has always depended on a man for her safety.

"Benare functions as the central consciousness in *Silence!* .It is mainly through her ironic perception that the audience get an insight into the other character." (Dharan 50) Mr. Kashikar is tagged as "Mr. Prime Objective" who is "tied up with uplifting the masses" (Tendulkar 6) Mrs. Kashikar is labelled as "Mrs.Hand-that-Rocks-the-Cradle who ironically has no cradle to rock."(Tendulkar 59) According to Benare, the Kashikars have adopted Balu Rokade who is just as a slave to them. She further states about Sukhatme that

> We have an Expert on the Law. He's such an authority on the subject, even a desperate client won't go anywhere near him! He justs its alone in the barristers' room at court, swatting flies with legal precedents! And in his tenement, he sits alone killing houseflies! But for today's mock trial he's a very great barrister." (Tendulkar 6).

Benare here, mocks Sukhatme for being a boastful barrister who is unwilling to accept that he is a failure in real life. Then she talks about Ponkshe and calls him an inter-failed scientist. Lastly, she introduces Professor Damle calling him an intellectual who prides himself on his book learning whereas in reality he just escapes from his problems. She also states that he wouldn't dare to attend the mock trial. In agreement to N.S. Dharan in his book *The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar* (1999), "The Kashikars put on a show of mutual fondness in public in order to hide their domestic discord….. Tendulkar satirizes this false display of conjugal harmony by making Kashikar silence his wife whenever she dares to open her mouth to make one remark or the other." (50). Mrs. Kashikar juxtaposes the character of Benare, as Miss Benare is depicted as a bold woman against the urban hypocrites, but the character of Mrs Kashikar falls under the typical gender stereotypes set up by the patriarchy. For instance, the garland that Mrs. Kashikar is wearing is bought for her by her husband whereas Miss Benare says that she could afford to buy the garlands as she earns her own living.

Later on as everyone has gathered in the village hall and to pass time they decide to have a rehearsal, to give Samant an idea of what was going to happen in the actual mock trial. As Professor Damle and Rawte are absent, Sukhamte suggests that Samant could play the fourth witness, keeping in mind that they take Benare's consent on it and without any hesitation she agrees. Further on, when Miss Benare is not on stage, we see Karnik and Ponkshe planning and plotting to accuse Benare, whereas earlier her consent was taken, but here no one cared to ask her if she was willing to act as guilty.

When Benare is aware of the fact that she is accused as a criminal for committing the crime of infanticide, she is thunderstruck because ironically somewhere it being a mock trial, her personal life is brought forward. The forces of patriarchy tried to suppress Benare but at this point she did not let them do so: "Who's serious? I'm absolutely light hearted. I just got a bit serious to create the right atmosphere. For the court, that's all. Why should I be afraid of a trial like this?"(Tendulkar 25). It was only when Ponkshe revealed that Benare indirectly had asked him out, stating her situation and tagging it on her friend, that we see everyone ganging up against her, and finally breaking the 'strong and determined'Benare. Is it because Benare is an educated and successful woman, something that cannot be accepted by the others from her troupe:

In delineating these characters Tendulkar has explored their psyches to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure prevailing their lives …the inefficiency of Sukhatme as a lawyer, the childlessness of Mr and Mrs Kashikar, the non-fulfilment of Ponkshe's dreams to become a scientist, the vain attempts of Karnik to be a successful actor and the inability of Rokde to attain an independent, adult existence." (Banarjee: "Introduction"9)

Moving forward we see men discussing womanhood and motherhood which is quite ironic, when Sukhatme says, Motherhood is pure…Be thy mother as a god is what we teach our children…Woman is a wife for a moment but a mother forever… considering this, what would we respectable citizens say if any woman were to take the life of the delicate bundle of joy she has borne? We would say, there could be no baser or more devilish thing on earth. (Tendulkar 30)

While we see his belief on motherhood, towards the end the decision of killing the unborn foetus, changes his words about women hood and motherhood. Coming towards the end we state the change we see in Benare's character, how from she being a powerful woman, is turned powerless by the patriarchy and its dominance over her. In the first act we see her views on life, "I, Leela Benare, a living woman, I say it from my own experience. Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be. It's a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious-" (Tendulkar 8)on the contrary, under patriarchal pressure, in her monologue towards the end in the third act we see,"Life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud… Life is something that's nothing… Life is not worthy of life" (Tendulkar 73). As the monologue was not written at first when the book was published in 1963, it was only in 1971 when it was first staged, it fell short of time and was rejected by the examining panel, that is when Tendulkar was forced to give a voice to Benare, suggested by the Deshpande couple. We therefore believe there was no justice done to the character of Benare as initially she was a strong woman but was put down at the end and she was unable to take a stand for herself.

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This is all straight out of a school composition book": Performativity in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

Ms. Carren Lopes and Ms. Valentina Gonsalves

Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* uses its premise of a theatrical troupe's improvisation of a court in session in order to enact performances of power and control within contemporary middle class and upper caste society. As Arundhati Banerjee notes, the play's Pirandellesque shifts between reality and illusion are subordinated to the ideas of an individual's relationship with society (ix). As such, the use of intertextual references to nursery rhymes, contemporary Marathi poems, Sanskrit *shloks*, and more, work to either add to or undercut the play's serious tone. Additionally, the use of repetitive phrasing, existentialist ideology, and the play's emphasis on silence and speech suggest a metatextual discussion of communication itself, or a lack of the same.

The characters in the play are largely middle class and upper caste educated lawyers, teachers, actors, failed scientists, and social workers, suggesting that these are a broad microcosm of those who inform society's progress. However, as we see within the play, their use of language, intertextuality, performance, and repetition is intended not so much to lead to society's advancement or progress but to reconfirm existing social norms wherein patriarchal dictates allow them greater existing power. "To say that gender is performative is simply to say that how we understand gender, and how we position ourselves as gendered or sexual beings in relation to others is achieved through the repetition and enactment of these activities" (Meyerhoff). In this sense, a child is neither born a 'man' or a 'woman', rather a child's social interactions (speech, gestures, behaviours) shape and maintain the so called 'gender

identities'. The play within the play allows the characters to force submission on Benare, the only character who appears (in the play's early stages) to be legitimately successful, in order to obscure their own failures.

Thus this paper will examine the manner in which this relationality, a suspension between "being" and "nothingness," wherein the play is real and an illusion, where the audience is both present and yet absented from this rehearsal space, where feminism is created by a violence done to it by patriarchal power, where farce exists because of the play's determination to take itself seriously, all suggest a commentary on social issues that is relational to contemporary society—itself shifting, nebulous, and currently undefined.

Keywords: theater, performativity, existentialism, intertextuality

This is all straight out of a school composition book": Performativity in Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

'Existence precedes essence' is the essential credo of existentialism. "The existentialist tendencies in Tendulkar are clearly discernible in *Silence! The Court is in Session.* This is not a play concerning Benare, nor about the cornered Benare. In fact the dramatic element in it is derived from the situation in which the 'being' of Benare is engulfed by the social existence of her individuality. She tries to express her ego openly and freely, and finally it is throttled. "Life is something like nothingness," these crazy words of Benare are a good comment on the nothingness of our "being" (Barve 2). The characters in the play are in the process of being. There is neither full existence nor complete non-existence, rather they exist somewhere in between these two states of being: a state of becoming. The play marks a blurred boundary between existence and non-existence.

As Benare says,

> Life seems to sing for you! There's great joy on a suicide that's failed. It's greater even than the pain of living. Throw your life away- and you realise the luck of having it. Guard it dearer than life- and it only seems fit to throw away. Funny, isn't it? Look after it. And you feel like throwing it away. Throw it away- and you're blissfully happy it's saved! Nothing satisfies. The same thing, again and again. Life is like this. Life is so and so. Life is such and such. Life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug. Life is drudgery. Life is something that's nothing- or a nothing that's something" (Tendulkar 73).

This statement by Benare forms the crux of the play's theme of existentialism.

In this context the play is both real and an illusion. We, as the empirical audience, know that the play is occurring before us, yet within the structures of the play's play-within-a-play, this is merely a rehearsal without an audience. In this manner, the audience is both present and yet absented from the rehearsal space that exists within the play. It is only Benare who is positioned as seemingly aware-yet-unaware of the presence of us as audience to whom she executes her soliloquy, whereas the rest of the characters are frozen and unable to hear this. As such, Tendulkar's use of realism within the play is simultaneously confronted by the impossibility of this realism, the suspension between the two resulting in performativity.

"*Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe*...has a play in rehearsal and a real-life story, and the two intertwine to produce some unusual dramatic confrontations" (Nadkarni 10). The performance of the mock-trial seems to be a means to address a real event in a staged manner within the play itself, and this staging allows us to confront particular social realities through the play's construction of patriarchal violence. The seriousness of the trial is considered "a game" (pass time) by the characters, except for Miss Benare. By constantly referring to the trial as "a game", other members contradict the words of Mr. Kashikar "A performance… is no laughing matter" (Tendulkar 17).

Where a performance is meant for an audience, the demarcation between the performer and audience is absent. When Benare's affair with Professor Damle is revealed and when her feelings as a little girl for her maternal uncle are disclosed, Mr. Kashikar, Mrs. Kashikar, Ponkshe, Sukhatme, Karnik, Rokde and even Samant seem to be the audience witnessing all that is taking place on stage. And we as the audience witness them witnessing this, revealing layers to the fourth wall itself. The breaking of the fourth wall at the conclusion of the play serves multiple purposes.

As Benare is initially claustrophobic, it could be indicative of her mind which is claustrophobic with the accusation, allegations and the verdict passed, from which she tries to escape. It could also be that she believes no one from her fellow group members whom she considers to be her friends can understand her situation; that she breaks the fourth wall to seek help and support outside the place confined to her as an actor. It is clear however that as much as Tendulkar is concerned with the problems of middle class, upper caste women, there is absence of an easy solution.

In the course of the play Benare is positioned by the other characters to be seen as a representative of women with a loose character. Ponkshe even says "she runs after men too much" (Tendulkar 33). This brings forth the question of her individuality. Her existence as a person is absented in favour of using her to represent a larger social issue. "Vijay Tendulkar ... harps upon the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings ... the role man has to play in these conditions" (Dass 69). In this manner, the play highlights the often acknowledged theme of feminist existentialism in the play. The play questions the gendered existence of middle class and upper caste women in the society of the time when it was staged. The emphasis laid upon the vague and obscure existence of women like Benare is suggestive of an identity crisis faced in a patriarchal society. Here, Benare is held as a culprit and suppressed as she is considered to have been transgressing the institution of marriage, education, and court, all of which are dominated by patriarchal power. The accusation against her - that of infanticide- turns into the verdict of the act she must perform. This highlights the hypocritical double standards prevalent in contemporary Indian society.

The latent sadism of the characters, of Sukhatme, of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, of Ponkshe, Karnik, or even Rokde, surfaces during the process of the trial. In delineating these characters, Tendulkar has explored their psyches to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure pervading in their lives- the inefficiency of Sukhatme as a lawyer, the

childlessness of Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar, the non- fulfillment of Ponkshe's dreams to become a scientist, the vain attempts of Karnik to be a successful actor and the inability of Rokde to attain an independent, adult existence (Banerjee ix).

Their awareness of the ineffectiveness of their own existences appears to provoke these characters to attack a successful, educated middle class and upper caste teacher who does not conform to their self-imposed restrictions. In this manner, their powerlessness requires that they create and reclaim power through this negation of her freedoms. As Benare herself terms it, "These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires" (Tendulkar 117). It is worth noting that the background of these characters is largely unknown. They are all presented individually without any relations to the other, except for the protagonist of the play- Miss Benare- whose past later becomes known to all. And it is Benare who describes the others to Samant in the opening scene of the play. This suggests that while they are to be read as a microcosm of Indian middle class upper caste society, this society is itself fragmented except in this act of quashing agency from those that seemingly transgress.

Tendulkar provides the realistic picture of marginalization of middle class and upper caste educated women in this play. Mrs. Kashikar seeks to gain power through her allied submission with patriarchal power and by distancing herself from women such as Benare. Both women in the play depict different forms of social agency. This agency is constructed through the collapse of boundaries between the public and private spheres like marriage and sexuality, socio-economic success, and moral frameworks. The agency seemingly bleeds from public spaces to private and vice versa. It is not merely that Mrs Kashikar seeks to affirm her own role within patriarchy through these emotional violences on Benare, but also that doing so affords her social agency that she - without access

to the public sphere through education, employment, or social acceptance - would be unable to gain without positioning herself as more traditionally respectable. As such, her respectability is produced through her denunciation of what is not respectable; it is becoming.

The title of the paper "This is straight out of a school composition book" is a statement made by Miss Leela Benare, and speaks for itself. Tendulkar's use of intertextuality throughout the play in the form of nursery rhymes, poems, Sanskrit *shloks* and phrases acts as a technique of foreshadowing the upcoming events in the play. Notably, many of these also exist in a space between public and private selves – the poems may be indicative of private moments in a public sphere, nursery rhymes are taught methods of social participation, Sanskrit *shloks* are a religious practice that itself is tied to cultural assumptions about social existence in India, etc. Benare singing nursery rhymes such as "Oh I've got a sweetheart" reminds us not only that she is a teacher, but also foreshadows the event of Karnik's disclosure about Benare having an unfruitful love affair with her maternal uncle. The next rhyme: "The grass is green; the roses are red; this book is mine until I am dead" could be either Benare's reference to her child or her life which she does not wish to be discussed or disclosed in public, or could indicate that the books are metaphors for her lovers who initially she claims as her own but are later abandoned one after the other. These readings seem increasingly likely as we read further, "Every single book got torn one by one and went I don't know where" (Tendulkar 9). These possible connections again mix the private and the public performance for the audience (whether the other characters of the play or us) as well as a seeming unawareness of the audience altogether, transgressing any ideas of the absolute realism of a play so reliant on metaphors and symbols.

The poem, "The Parrot to the sparrow said," sung by Benare at the end of Act I and repeated at the end of Act III, carries more significance in the latter Act. After knowingBenare's private life, one

could easily associate the sparrow with the helpless Benare who is pitied by the parrot, who could represent innocent and sensitive Samant. The cruel and merciless crow could be Professor Damle who is insensitive to Benare's troubles and cares for nothing but his reputation. As Banerjee states, "Professor Damle is significantly absent at the trial, denoting his total withdrawal of responsibility" (viii).

Benare's predicament could be further acknowledged when she recites the poem, "Our feet tread on upon unknown" by Marathi poetess Mrs Shirish Pai. In the preface to the Marathi original of this play, Vijay Tendulkar writes, "The central character of Miss Benare came to me through a poem. This beautiful poem by Mrs Shirish Pai, has been put into the first act, in the lips of Miss Benare herself" (Tendulkar, *Collected Plays* 63). This poem is used to reveal the lifelong struggle of Miss Benare to such an extent that the audience is compelled to reflect upon her intentions behind reciting such retrospective poems and rhymes which wholly reflect upon her private life.

The deliberate use of phrases and Sanskrit *shloks* such as "*Adhikasya Adhikam Phalam*", "*Janani Janmabhumischa Svargadapi Gariyasi*", "*Na Stri Swatantryamaharti*" are used during the course of the play by the characters to strongly assert their views about an ideal society. However, as we see within the play, their use is intended not so much to lead to society's advancement or progress as is seemingly indicated, but to reconfirm existing social norms wherein patriarchal class and caste dictates allow them greater existing power. The repetition of the title by Mr. Kashikar – *Silence! The Court is in Session* - and his claim of being a social worker working primarily for the upliftment of the masses suggests not only a self-positioned superiority to the masses themselves (and thus to supposedly "fallen women" like Benare), but also shows his unwillingness to hear the other side of this relationship: whether this is Benare or the masses. And speech has power. He thus assumes the responsibility of continuing with the existing patriarchal society at large and acting against those who try to break free from the

same. The recurrence of the word "silence" in the play is suggestive of how society has silenced those it feels do not conform to its dictates for respectability, in this case, a woman like Benare. The silence which has occupied Benare is indicative of the dominance of patriarchal society and its success in suppressing the other half of the society.

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Performing Gendered Violence: A Study of Two Contemporary Indian Plays by Women

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Abstract

In a culture that simultaneously glorifies and disempowers women, it is expected that violence against women will often be performed behind closed doors. Moreover, this domestic (or sometimes public) violence is usually normalized or silenced. However, Indian feminist playwrights have, time and again, broken this silence and lifted the veil off the spectre of violence on women. It is difficult, though, to depict violence on-stage without sensationalising or spectacularising it. This short paper attempts to understand the performative and political aspects of how two plays engage in different ways with gendered violence: Shaoli Mitra's *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* (2002; translated from the Bengali play *Nathbati Anathbath)*, which is based on the *Mahabharata* myth, and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (2000), which is based on a real-life incident in Santacruz, Mumbai, in 1982. By harnessing different eras, genres and dramatic traditions, the paper will explore the continuum of gendered violence, and it will also situate the performative polemics of these two plays in the context of the contemporary feminist debate on violence against women (including domestic violence) in India.

Key Words: body, domestic violence, feminism, performance, resistance

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Kathak-Draupadi: "No! Duhshasan, no! Don't take me to the *sabha*. I'm a woman. I belong inside the home….I'm menstruating. I'm wearing only one piece of cloth. Do not take me before the court in this condition."

- (Saoli Mitra, *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector*, Act I, p.35)

Leela: "So. We are listening to the sounds of a woman being raped. Outside our window, under the lights."

- (Manjula Padmanabhan, *Lights Out*, Scene 3, p.38)

In patriarchy, all legitimate sources of power are located in the rule of the father. The basic unit of patriarchal systems is the patrilineal family where inheritance passes through the male line. In brahmanical patriarchy, it is imperative to control women's reproductive ability not only to ensure male heirs, but also to maintain caste purity. There are multiple and interlinked patriarchal strategies for controlling women. These range from manufacturing consent through a culture of glorifying the good woman (mother); to creating a hierarchy of women who will scrutinise and socialize younger women; to disempowering women by restricting them to culturally-approved roles and expectations; to actively punishing transgressive women's bodies through verbal and physical violence. The glorification of good women exists simultaneously with the punishment of 'bad' women: the normalisation of the latter mode of control is partly enabled by the consent, tacit or overt, of the 'good' women [this will be evidenced in the plays studied in this paper].

One of the ways in which violence against women is normalized is by making it seem "an inevitable aspect of being female": this is often done, as C.S. Lakshmi points out, through telling and retelling myths where the violence is a passing episode in a greater tale of male heroic

glory—"Draupadi is humiliated in the Kaurava court" as a trigger that ensues the war of righteousness; "Sita enters the fire to prove her chastity" to ensure that the perfect man, Rama, is reinstated as king (Lakshmi vii).Children grow up listening to these stories where gendered violence is justified, excused, or overlooked: this social conditioning leads to women internalizing and men trivializing such violence as banal and everyday (and even as necessary to maintain or re-establish order).

The first task of feminist playwrights (and writers) is, thus, to reposition these marginalized and, often, trivialized episodes of violence against women and shift them to the centre of the text. Feminist theatre in India—although having early precedents like Swarnakumari Devi's 1904 play *The Wedding Tangle*, which focused on women's agency in the context of social issues and reforms like class struggles and widow remarriage—is usually considered to have emerged as a distinct movement in the 1970s, as "an intersection of art and activism, and a product of political as well as theatrical movements" that marked a resistance to the male-centric discourses of traditional regional theatres (Javalgekar par.3). These feminist playwrights used the stage to draw attention to women's lives, relationalities, rights and violations, as much as they wanted to encourage increased female participation in the creation and performance of theatre.

The two plays that are discussed here centralize the theme of gender violence and the responses generated by the spectacle of this violence. These two plays are Shaoli Mitra's *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* (2002; translated from the Bengali play *NathbatiAnathbath)*, which is based on the *Mahabharata* myth, and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (2000), which is based on a real-life incident that took place in Santacruz, Mumbai in 1982. Mitra's play, which traces the life of Draupadi from the *swayambharsabha* where she chooses Arjuna but has to marry her "five lords" to her last journey to the final destination: death. The title of the play, "*nathbatianathbath*" is a phrase that "Vyasdev has [used to] describe

her" (Mitra 62). The title also reveals the precarity of Draupadi's existence: despite being a royal princess with five of the best men of that age as her husbands—including the warrior-hero Arjun and the righteous hero Yudhishthir—Draupadi was unprotected and vulnerable at crucial junctures of her life: when Kichak attempted to rape her during the year the Pandavas lived incognito, and, especially, during the *vastra-haran* episode in the royal court. Padmanabhan's play, on the other hand, is neither mythic nor royal in its setting. It focuses on a contemporary incident, where a "group of ordinary middle-class people chose to stand and watch while a woman" belonging to the conveniently invisible 'lower classes', "was being brutalized in a neighbouring compound….over a period of weeks" (Padmanabhan 53). The rationale for selecting such diverse plays from different generic, social, chronological, and linguistic spectrums is to indicate the continuum of gender violence across regions and eras, and to highlight the universality of abuse and assault women encounter.

Foregrounding the theme of violence against women is a primary political concern with many feminist playwrights, but, from a performative aspect, they differ significantly in the ways in which they engage with it and depict it on-stage. Many feminist playwrights advocate that spectacularization of violence is a necessary dramatic strategy to disrupt our collective ennui, to shock us into consciousness and, hopefully, action. British playwright Sarah Kane's plays like *Blasted*(1995) or *Phaedra's Love*(1996), for instance, use heightened, visceral and often excessive sexual and other forms of violence on stage, in order to draw the audience into the world of the play through horror, disgust, and fascination; to challenge the limits of the script and the stage in representing the depths of human experience and to raise pertinent questions about sex and violence. However, the plays studied here do not use the hyper-disruptive device of explicit violence, and it may be debated that it is more challenging

to depict violence on-stage without sensationalizing or spectacularizing it.

Shaoli Mitra's *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* is narrated in the "Kathakata style" with "only one character, the Narrator, Kathakthakurun" (3). This is a pre-modern folk tradition of storytelling in Bengal where the professional storytellers would perform at family or community gatherings, by "fleshing out the narratives of the major Hindu scriptural texts with verbal and musical embellishments" (41). The solo performance by the female narrator who tells the story as well as acts out the various roles, aided by a singing and acting chorus, relies on the narratorial and acting skills of the female protagonist (Mitra herself) to enact violence, because there are no male antagonists present on stage. Since the story is familiar to the audience, the narrator does not attempt to build up any suspense. Instead, even as Yudhishthir pawns and loses Draupadi in the game of dice, the narrator shifts focus, echoes the expectations of the audience, and magnifies the sense of impending tragedy when she sings "with pathos":

> "Contented she was, happy she was,
> The beloved of the Pandav five
> [softly] But only for a short while" (Mitra 32-33).

Draupadi appeals to the moral and logical sense of the men in the *sabha* when she raises a pertinent issue: if Yudhishthir had staked and lost himself before pawning her, he had lost any rights over her, including the right to pawn her. But her claim, "the last game is void; I cannot have been won," is disregarded as "a hair-splitting doctrinal debate" even by the "wise elders" who are witnesses as the humiliation and assault continue (36). Even Arjun "hastens to stop" Bhim from interfering on behalf of Draupadi, "thinking of the established code of conduct" (36). The narration, thus, reveals the central ironies of the plot-situation. The first, of course, is the irony of patriarchy itself that is made explicit in this game of dice: the rule of the eldest male reduces all women (and all

younger men) in the family to the status of property that can be transacted, bought and sold. The second is that Draupadi's public disrobing is the outcome of a game of dice, and even her five lords do not protect her as they are obeying the rules of the game, yet the one rule that could have been used to prevent the violence is ignored by all the men present. Even Bikarna, a "mere teenager" brother of Duryodhan, protests about the logical ground that since Draupadi was the spouse of the other "four brothers also," their "permission" was necessary "before staking her": this rational claim is ignored (Mitra 37).

The total collapse of ethics, law, and reason underpins the act of violence, which is projected as a travesty of the human and civilizational order. The narrator underscores this irony when she says that it was the "great and gallant Karna," the "tragic hero of modern imagination" who is one who actually instigates Duhshasan to "go and strip the woman in front of everybody in this sabha. And let us all watch" (Mitra 37). The entire scene is punctuated with the maniacal, bestial "laughter of the boys in the Chorus" rising "uproariously from the dark": this darkness and irrationality visually and aurally frames and punctures the violence.

Mitra depicts the central act of violence through music, mimicry and lighting. When Duhshasan drags Draupadi into court, the audience sees "the Kathakar crash[ing] to the floor, downstage" as the music gains "in intensity" (Mitra 35). According to the stage directions, "The tempo of the music increases, so does the volume of laughter. The Kathak mimes the episode of Draupadi's attempted disrobing. This goes on for some time. The lights are used according to the situation" (38). The absence of words indicates the failure of humanity that such violence embodies. The absence of a real male actor on the stage symbolically universalizes the theme of male-generated violence instead of locating it within the specificity of one particular man. It draws the entire focus—and the complete attention of the audience—on the woman and her trauma: the presence of a flesh-and-blood male actor would have been a

distraction here. The non-verbal elements, like mimicry, music, laughter and lighting, serve to universalize the act: Draupadi is everywoman here, she represents all women who are unprotected, violated and victimized under the rule and patronage of men.

In an interesting deviation from the popular belief that it was Krishna's miraculous intervention that saved Draupadi and transformed her garment into an unending stream of sarees, Mitra's play depicts the saving of Draupadi through a different lens. According to her, it is Vidur, the "son of a slave," (another category of persons, who, like women, had very little rights in patriarchy) who openly protests and appeals to Dhritarashtra: "This is wrong, very wrong. Restrain your son, Maharaj!" (Mitra 38). His protest, though ineffectual initially, is followed by "all sorts of strange cries…eerie noises, the ominous howl of dogs and jackals, the hoot of owls" and it is these "inauspicious noises" that triggers a feeling of "dread" in Dhritarashtra "lest his kingdom be destroyed" by his enraged subjects "if word of this got around" (38). So, he finally intercedes and grants a boon to Draupadi, "restoring everything to her, every single thing" (39). Hence, it is the patriarchal claim of the male on his property that is the cause of the initiation and culmination of this act of gendered violence. As Karna says, "Yudhishthir has been won with all his wealth and property and Draupadi is merely a part of it": as a woman, Draupadi is dehumanised, objectified and denied any rights (37). Yudhishthir pawns Draupadi because he considers her as his transactable property, Karna, Duryodhan, and Duhshasan violate her because they consider her as property they have won; Dhritarashtra intercedes because he is scared of losing his inherited property. Mitra's play, thus, intermeshes the act of violence against women inextricably with the very structure and foundation of patriarchy. The play transcends its mythic, pre-modern setting and technique to expose the politics of gender violence that is applicable to all patriarchal systems everywhere.

Lights Out, the second play studied in this paper scrutinises gender violence through a contrasting set of dramatic strategies, although sharing a similar feminist purpose. Whereas Mitra puts Draupadi at the centre of the stage and removes the other actors as witnesses, Manjula Padmanabhan removes all the agents and victims of the central episode of violence: the entire rape is off-stage, the audience can only hear the "agonized spasm of screaming" and see the reactions of the witnesses as they watch from the window of their sixth floor apartment (Padmanabhan 36). The abstract, almost empty stage (save for a low stool where the Kathak sits) of *Five Lords yet none a Protector* is replaced in *Lights Out* by a concretised, detailed, specifically modern, urban setting. Padmanabhan emphasises this "unremarkably upper-middle-class" setting because she wishes to scan and critique the responses of this particular social class to gender violence (3).

From the beginning, even before the screaming starts, we witness the difference in male and female reactions to the repeated acts of violence that are enacted in the unfinished neighbouring building and can be witnessed through the window of the living room shown on-stage. Bhasker is relaxed, insular, and cynical: he believes the police will "laugh in your face" if they go and complain about being "frightened of noises in the next building" (Padmanabhan 5). He trivializes and reduces the act of violence by calling it "noises" and distances himself from the perpetrators: "There's nothing to be frightened of! They can't hurt you" (5). He has "watched" the violence "once or twice" and, although he admits it is "terrible" he chooses not to protest: "I don't want to stick my neck out, that's all" (6-7). This disaffected nonchalance is apparently impossible for his wife, Leela, who says, "My fear, it's—as if my insides were knotted up….I carry it around all day. Sometimes it's like a shawl, it wraps itself around my shoulders and I start to shiver" (5). Leela is deeply affected even without actually ever watching the act, yet her objection is not to the act of violence itself: "But their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can't push them out! If only they didn't make such

a racket, I wouldn't mind them so much" (8). Whereas differences in Bhasker's and Leela's responses conform to hypermasculine and hyperfeminine stereotypes, they are similar in their classed apathy: they both do not name the violence, they both refuse to protest individually, and they both are more concerned about how the violence does (or does not) affect them rather than how it affects the victim. The victim is completely erased from their concerns, which is totally self-directed: when Leela says, "When the police come they'll be able to see how terrible it all is, how it's invaded our lives, our homes, how we can't have guests for dinner," Bhasker interrupts, "Don't be silly! Of course we can!" The irony of their selfishness and their casual ability to trivialize and otherize the violence and its victim is heightened by their apparent lack of awareness of their own class-conscious self-centredness. Interestingly, the only person on-stage who may share the same social location as the invisible victim is the enigmatic maid Freida, who is always present, always obeying orders, always mute and mostly overlooked: "the other characters pay no attention to her except to give her orders" (2). The silent, present figure of Freida is a visual contrast with the noisy, invisible woman outside; but the marginalization of Freida is symptomatic of the middle-class response to all members of the 'lower classes.' The lower classes are there for service or for spectacle, but the middle-class will never allow them to belong: which is why no one questions Freida on her knowledge of, or response to, the violence.

The other characters in the play consume and discuss the violence in a range of different ways, but they are united in their self-serving interests and, often, by their inability to intervene in any meaningful way. Bhasker's friend Mohan Ram, is frankly "curious" and admits that he "wanted to see it": "just far enough not to get involved, just close enough to see everything clearly" (Padmanabhan 15). Typifying the voyeur who witnesses sexual violence only for vicarious sensationalism without any intention to intervene; he says, "Who said anything about help? I'm talking about looking, that's all" (16). Mohan and Bhasker discuss and dissect the various particularities of the violence—the nature of the

screaming, the nakedness of the victim/s, whether the violence is a result of a domestic fight or some weird religious ceremony. The prurient and parodic talk that mimics privileged, even academic, debate conversely highlights their paralytic refusal to act. Mohan sums up their classed indifference: "Well, as long as it's the poor attacking the poor…you know how it is…they live their lives and we live ours" (24). As Leela's absent "intellectual" friend Sushila theorises, such blatantly privileged distancing is equal to complicity: "Sushila said—if you can stop a crime, you must—or else you're helping it to happen" (16).

Padmanabhan nuances the range of responses to gender violence in Scene Three of the play, where Leela's friend Naina and her husband Surinder also visit their apartment and witness the violence. In this scene, the stage directions strategically position the off-stage screaming in-between the on-stage dialogue: "The screaming must be carefully paced to fit within the rhythms of the dialogue in the room…The conversation is responsive to it, not the other way around. The intensity of the screaming must be…neither too loud so as to seem right outside the window nor so soft that it can be ignored" (Padmanabhan 29). The violence interrupts the insular domesticity of the setting aurally but the rhythmic nature of the interruption indicates that its power to disturb or rouse the onlookers is limited and ineffectual. However, the continual screaming also serves as a constant reminder of the encroaching presence of violence that the audience cannot ignore, and it contrasts jaggedly with the apparently normal drawing room setting.

Naina's responses to the violence are the most relatable. On hearing the screams, she unhesitatingly identifies it as "someone calling for help"; when she watches from the window her spontaneous reaction is "midway between a retch and a cry" (Padmanabhan 33; 35). Bolstered by her supportive presence, and even as Bhasker and Mohan graphically describe, dissemble, and pretend that the violence is a ritual of "exorcism" of a "possessed person" from the "illiterate classes," Leela finally names

the violence: “It’s a rape, isn’t it?” (37-38). When Bhasker and Mohan excuse the rape by villainizing and devaluing the woman as a “whore” who is not “decent, so a whore cannot be raped,” as “whatever rights a woman has, they are lost the moment she becomes a whore,” Naina protests: “A whore can’t be raped? Is that the law?” (40-41). Like Draupadi’s protest using the rule of law, Naina’s resistance, too, is ineffectual. Like Draupadi, who is denied personhood and is reduced to a commodity of exchange, the invisible rape-victim in this play is similarly denied personhood and human rights, even the right to be rescued from harm. Like Karna, who justifies the act of violence through the excuse that Draupadi is violable property that has exchanged ownership after the game of dice, Bhasker justifies the inaction to stop violence through the excuse that whores do not deserve to be rescued: “You see, if she were a decent woman, we people would go to her rescue! She is not, and so she’s being left to her fate!” (41). The inversion of logic here is blatant and deeply ironical: Bhasker is actually using his conjecture that the woman is a whore to justify his own inaction, but he is projecting his own inaction as the proof of her whorishness. By debasing the victim, he conveniently otherizes, trivializes and normalizes the violence.

Naina exposes the false equivalences and faulty logic of Bhasker and Mohan’s argument: if only women are vulnerable to rape because the category of decency is applicable only to them, and “if men are too indecent to be raped does it mean that men are whores?” (Padmanabhan 43). The discussion, which carries on in spite of the screams coming from the invisible and “indecent” rape victim, is brought to a “halt” when “Leela starts to scream”: although she is pathologized as “hypersensitive” and “hysterical” by the others (43). Whereas Leela’s hyper-feminized screaming is a self-serving, self-preserving gesture without any empathy for the raped woman (“I don’t care what they do…I just want them far away”), Surinder, Naina’s husband, who enters soon after, reacts with hyper-masculine aggression and vengefulness that totally disregards the victim (44).

Instead of offering to save the victim, he wants to "kill" "these animals"; instead of considering the trauma of the raped woman, he suggests that the perpetrators are "screwing this whole bloody colony….making jackasses of us" (46-47). Thus, Surinder deliberately misrepresents the act of gender violence and portrays it as an act of class violence—the lower classes threatening the authority and property of the upper classes—in order to justify his own lust for violence. Typifying the response of the humiliated, angry, egoist male—those who advocate and carry out honour killings, for instance—Surinder agitates the other characters into a farcical discussion of whether to use knives or electric bulbs or acid or cameras as instruments of retribution. The absurdist quality of this fraught debate is indicated when they are totally unaware that the screaming has stopped and the spectacle—which is consumed by the "disappointedly" (53).

Surinder's hyper-masculinity breaks through the level of farce into the sordid realm of domestic violence against women in one small moment: when Naina tries to stop him from acting rashly, he "turns on her suddenly and says with quiet malevolence," "Shut up—or I'll kick your teeth in" (Padmanabhan 49). This specific moment in the play is especially significant in the context of the continuum of gendered violence across eras and social locations that this paper has focused upon. It is also significant because it emphasizes the scalability of violence against women: that can range from rape, honour-killing and dowry deaths that are highlighted in the media to quotidian domestic violence that is hidden behind closed doors in apparently genteel families. In fact, feminist scholar Shoba Ghosh has noted how "the emphasis on these 'aberrant' manifestations of violence obfuscated the issue of the more banal and everyday forms of abuse that women are subjected to within the home" (51). *Lights Out* juxtaposes these different forms and scales of violence to expose the ubiquity of abuse that women encounter, in spite of differences in social location and privilege.

Feminist sociologist Jean Chapman has argued that "misogyny," which is "rooted in brahminical patriarchy," "moves along a continuum" from private to public spaces (58). Violence is used as a tool to regulate and subdue women: "its purpose is to intimidate women" (52). Both Mitra and Padmanabhan have, through their plays, exposed violence as a tool of patriarchy, have exposed the ways in which violence is normalized, justified and perpetuated, and have, in Chapman's words, performed the important feminist task of "calling out violence against women" which accompanies demand for social reform (59). The social evils of patriarchy will not be dismantled without continuous resistance, and such calling outs—on stage and off—are the necessary steps in building that resistance.

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Wendy Wasserstein's Plays as Fem-enactment

Dr. Lakshmi Muthukumar

Abstract

The American playwright, Wendy Wasserstein's plays are perceived in this paper as dramatized, fictive presentations of the feminist critique of the Habermasian public sphere. Wasserstein's work is significant as performance drama that is self-critically feminist in its intent. Her plays are almost faithful chronicles of the changes that have come about in the landscape of feminism, albeit in a fictive context. This paper argues that Wasserstein's plays can be seen as an enactment of the feminist critique of the Habermasian conception of the public sphere. They reveal that the private and the public spheres are interpenetrative, mutually collapsible and, by their very nature, fluid. Seen through this critical and dramatic lens, the private-public dichotomy comes across as a patriarchal assertion that is at once disenabling and debilitating.

Wasserstein uses the stage very effectively to demystify and challenge the private-public dichotomy. She employs the geography of the stage metaphorically in unique ways to bring to crisis the historical separation of the spheres. For example, she uses the dorm as a liminal or a threshold space in her thesis play *Uncommon Women and Others*. Similarly, the living room in *The Sisters Rosensweig* and the garden gate in *An American Daughter* are used as interesting in-between or in-the-cusp spaces. The modern American woman's straddling of the private and public spheres and the resultant dilemmas are echoed on stage through the voiceover in *Uncommon Women and Others*, and her use of stage props such as the sofa cum bed and the answering machine in *Isn't It Romantic*.

Her characters mature through candidly self-reflexive dialogues and monologues. Wasserstein's oeuvre progressively becomes more inclusive and sensitive to issues of race, class and gender. Her later plays deal

with issues concerning gays and lesbians as well as of women of different age groups and race in a thought- provoking fashion. Themes such as how gender mutes active citizenship, the stress that accompanies complex milestones and life-choices such as career or motherhood, the pressures and guilt that accompany risk-taking, and post-menopausal anxieties are all sensitively portrayed on stage through what the critic Gail Ciociola calls a "fem-enactment" (1-2). Wasserstein's plays find a resonance with and focalize many of the issues that have been of interest to feminist theorists.

Key words: Fem-enactment; Habermasian public sphere; active citizenship; the public and the private spheres.

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It is important for women to be truly active citizens rather than mere passive ones in order to form a truly democratic public sphere, and this is what Wasserstein's plays seek to show through fictive dramatized presentations. Wasserstein's oeuvre has been given the epithet of "fem-enactment" (Ciociola 1-2) which can function as a resourceful guiding principle to a feminist exploration of her plays.

Fem-en(act)ment as word and concept provides a functional means by which Wasserstein's plays can be best understood as philosophy and as literary genre and style. It reflects what Mary Daly calls gynomorphic language, a reworking of linguistic systems to create new words and produce meanings vital to women's ends (*Gyn/Ecology xi*). Constructed as such, its fragmented components yield the principal contexts: "fem", for female perspective *and* feminist intent; "(act)", for stage drama; and "en(act)ment," for the revelation and successful execution of one's overall motifs and motives. As a whole, then, fem-en(act)ment is textual or performance drama that, guided by a feminist disposition, thematically and stylistically enacts situations of interest to women, the psychological and social effects of which form the core of that drama (Ciociola 1-2).

As a theoretical model Ciociola's idea of fem-en(act)ment offers a useful perspective to view plays written by women as representations of an effort to achieve recognition for their points of view and their claims of identity. Wasserstein's plays reflect the struggles of women mired in what can be viewed as a traditionally structured Habermasian lifeworld that is too forgiving of traditional gender arrangements. This is sensitively borne out in plays like *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Isn't It Romantic*, *The Heidi Chronicles*, *An American Daughter*, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, *Old Money* and *Third*.

This paper also posits the view that there is in Wasserstein's plays a dramatized feminist critique of the Habermasian formulation of a society that is powered by the emancipatory potential of reason and marked by a gendered ideology. The blindness Habermas is guilty of is seen projected on to the stage through characters such as Janie, Heidi and Lyssa Dent Hughes. These characters refuse to accept such a society passively and dare to make life choices that are individuated manifestations of their subjectivities.

Wasserstein uses drama as a form to raise questions about both the existence and the permeability of boundaries between the private and the public spheres. Her plays raise issues of class, ethnicity, sexuality, race as well as gender. This is particularly evident in plays such as *The Sisters Rosensweig*, *An American Daughter,* and *Third*. These productions underscore the idea that the private and the public domains are fluid and collapse in thought-provoking intersections by using the geography of the stage in innovative ways. She shows how such a binary can be broken by using stage props to demonstrate this metaphorically. She also uses her characters as mouthpieces to rethink conventional patriarchal and gendered assumptions about the private and public dichotomy.

Michelle Rosaldo in *Woman, Culture and Society* examines the distinction between the terms *domestic* and *public* as used in the evaluation of the sexes and shows how it demeans the capacities of women by preventing them from actively participating in the public sphere.

An opposition between "domestic" and "public" provides the basis of a structural framework necessary to identify and explore the place of male and female in psychological, cultural, social and economic aspects of human life…Though this opposition will be more or less salient in different social and ideological systems, it does provide a universal framework for conceptualizing the activities of the sexes. The opposition does not determine cultural stereotypes or asymmetries in

the evaluations of the sexes, but rather underlies them, to support a very general (and, for women, often demeaning) identification of women with domestic life and of men with public life (Rosaldo 23-24).

Wasserstein's characters are shown resisting precisely this kind of cultural stereotyping. It is because women perceive themselves as inferior and lack the confidence necessary to compete in the public sphere with men that they have been socially conditioned into believing that their lives must revolve around domestic chores in the private sphere of the home. Her essential point in her plays seems to be that since the notion of separate spheres was socially constructed, it is susceptible to change and her characters boldly attempt to effect that change in their lives. Her plays deal with the experiences of women of different ages and ethnicities. For example, *Uncommon Women and Others* deals with the dilemmas faced by young would-be women graduates, *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Heidi Chronicles* deal with the dilemmas of white educated women who are in a quandary about whether to choose a career or marriage and motherhood. *An American Daughter* deals with how a professional woman juggles her role in the public sphere with her role in the private domestic sphere. Post-menopausal anxieties are dealt with very sensitively in *The Sisters Rosensweig* and *Third*. The issues of women of different ethnicities and races are also highlighted by Wasserstein in *An American Daughter*. Through the character of Dr. Judith Kaufman, a black Jewish woman in *An American Daughter*, and through her Jewish characters in *The Sisters Rosensweig* (Sara, Pfeni, Gorgeous, Tess and Marv) and *Third* (Nancy Gordon) Wasserstein has parsed the dynamics and pathologies of racial and ethnic politics in America with great sensitivity.

Feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Jean Cohen, Joan Landes and Allison Weir in their essays published in the seminal collection titled, *Feminists Read Habermas*,edited by Johanna Meehan (1995), underscore the need to consider the ragged edges of the public to prevent men alone from being perceived as rational, economic and political. Wasserstein's

plays can be viewed as dramatizations of an attempt to understand such processes. For example, in *An American Daughter*, she raises the issue of who has the right to draw the line between their public and private lives. In this play we see a dramatization of a mediatized, Habermasian public sphere where publicity is no longer an important weapon against the tyranny of the state and the patriarchy. Publicity in the play does not come across as an instrument of empowerment and emancipation. For the protagonist, Dr. Lyssa Dent Hughes, it is a matter of balancing the potential political uses of publicity against the dangers of a loss of privacy. It is as if the media had suddenly become a tool of political forces, and a medium for advertisement rather than the medium from which the public got their information on political matters. The public sphere, simultaneously pre-structured and dominated by the mass media, develops into an arena infiltrated by power. A battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behaviour while strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible. Thus, in Wasserstein's plays such as *An American Daughter*, we see an interestingly gendered dramatization of this process.

Wasserstein's plays reveal her concern for gender constructions as well as patriarchal and hegemonic notions of gender, sex and sexuality. The paper also tries to investigate a research problem; the interplay between our affective bonds as women, and the individually and socially interpreted meanings using which our identities are formed and our desires are structured. These struggles are inextricably linked to women's negotiations with the complex grid of the private and public spheres at specific historical moments. Wasserstein's women negotiate their notions of selfhood essentially via a negotiation with the gendered spheres of the private and the public in an era battling with the dilemmas posed by post-seventies feminism in America. These struggles are both psychological and material as they involve not merely internal and ideological conflicts but also concrete negotiations with societal structures and material gender arrangements.

Assuming centre stage in this paper are Wasserstein's experiments with the language of drama and the stage in her attempt to give shape to this conflict. Habermas' theoretical model is especially useful in this regard because Habermas contends that we are not first individuals and then social agents. He argues that the constitution of the self is concomitant with the establishment of relationships. For Habermas, language functions as the medium in which identity is constituted, in which we understand and define ourselves, and for the coordination of social activity. Identities can be constituted through a process of social mediation, according to Habermas, only when subjects can distance themselves from particular roles and recognize that all roles are structured by "shared social norms" (Meehan 3).

This paper argues therefore that, there is, in Wendy Wasserstein's dramatic work, a consistent engagement with the feminist critique of the Habermasian public sphere which also additionally generates new relations of solidarity and female bonding, and, alters the nature and the structure of civil society by an intelligent and innovative use of dramatic space. Wasserstein, in and through her plays, revitalizes existing public spaces and also creates new ones using the geography of the stage to do so.

Playwrights such as Ntozake Shange and Wasserstein have been included by the critic Sally Burke, as belonging to the second wave of dramatists who tried "to transform both the stage itself and the society it reflected".

These playwrights sought through a praxis of the stage, to transform actor, audience, and world by using drama to promote women's awareness of their situation and to assist them in imagining alternatives to their oppression. These playwrights desired not only to dramatize women's experiences but also to change the conditions of their lives (Burke 142).

Instead of using the stage as a vacant entity, Wasserstein re-articulates and re-empowers it, to use an expression by Phillip Wegner made in the context of Space, as an "intentional world of historical individuals" (Wegner 180). The multi-disciplinary field of enquiry called Spatial Criticism which has interested academicians such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault is employed here to provide a theoretical basis for Wasserstein's innovative use of the stage as a dramatic device to artistically express feminist dilemmas at a peculiar juncture in American history. A re-empowerment of the way in which space was being viewed was significant to Phillip Wegner as an attempt at contesting conventional notions of space by opposing "the Cartesian notion of space as an objective homogeneous extension (*res extensa*), distinct from the subject (*res cogitans*) and the Kantian concept of space as an empty container in which human activities unfold" (181).

Wasserstein's plays are seen in this paper as vivifying Henri Lefebvre's theory that, "Space… is fundamentally produced by and through human actions" (26-7). Michel Foucault remarked in an interview he gave in the year 1976 that "the devaluation of space" had continued for "generations of intellectuals" and space was treated as dead, fixed and as "the undialectical" and "the immobile". Time, on the contrary, was viewed as rich, fecund and representative of life and dialectic (in *Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, *1972-77*, 63-77). Phillip Wegner hails Lefebvre's work as "a rich and brilliant example of a spatial dialectical thinking" (181) for two important reasons. Firstly, Lefebvre conclusively discards the long-standing notion of space as a pre-existing "void, endowed with formal properties alone…a container waiting to be filled by a content matter or bodies" (170). Secondly, he shows how space is socially produced:

The emergence and development of capitalist modernity occurs through a particular '(social) production of (social) space'- that is, a space that is fundamentally produced by and through human actions, and which is

thus ‘constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data (Lefebvre 26-27).

Space is seen as human produce by Lefebvre and its value is not determined merely by its materiality. Lefebvre’s definition of social space as, “[It is] not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder” (73) thus radically alters the conventional perspectives on space.

Social space for him is “a deeply historical one, its moments of apparent stability” are “short-lived and contingent at best” (Wegner 182) and his most dramatic insight is that it should be viewed as a conceptualization that is “an open-ended, conflicted and contradictory process, a process in which we as agents continuously intervene” (182). Wasserstein gives the stage a newfound function through drama as a genre by focusing on it as a deliberately produced force that “influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world” (Wegner 181).

Wasserstein’s plays may be seen as vivifying such a social space at the turn of the century. Her early plays, especially her trilogy, embody these concerns using the geography of the stage to great advantage. Her characters, both women and men, struggle to negotiate a newly reconfigured and continually shifting social terrain following the resurgence of the New Women’s Movement in America since the early seventies. Alongside new freedoms (particularly in the areas of career and sexuality) come new demands and insidious restrictions. Her plays reveal how, traditional gender ideologies prove far harder to displace even as structures change. Notions of love, sex, marriage, work and friendships have to be rethought and reworked. The exhilaration of risk-taking, the promise of empowerment and autonomy, the fear of change, the persistent threat of failure and new forms of disenfranchisement are some of the complex

themes dealt with by Wasserstein. Above all, it is in the form of theatre, the most "public" and "communal" of all the genres that Wasserstein chooses to carry out her explorations. Through this brilliant feminist appropriation of the Habermasian "public sphere", the space of the theatre becomes, truly, a realm of "critical, rational and enlightened" debate about gender arrangements.

While researching this persistent dichotomy between the public and the private spheres, and the positions that feminists and political thinkers have taken on them, it would be presumptuous on anyone's part to attempt to resolve the debate. A researcher's role will be limited to clarifying the theorizing and somewhere raising the right questions, even if he/she cannot come up with answers to these questions. Do feminists want to get rid of this division between the private and the public altogether and make all the areas of life public? Does the feminists' claim that "the personal is political" mean that feminists wish for state intervention in all areas of a person's private and personal life?

A few conclusions emerge. More than displaying a desire to abolish such a distinction, feminists are more concerned with arguments towards a reconstruction and a re-articulation of the public-private divide. Lister for example, draws our attention to "the deconstruction of the sexualized values associated with public and private so that it is the gendered quality of the distinction and of the attributes associated with each of the spheres that is dissolved, rather than the distinction itself" (Lister 121). Feminists therefore reject the rigid ideological separation between both the spheres and underscore the fact that they, in reality, overlap and interact. They also recognize that the boundaries between the two domains of the public and the private are not fixed but are constantly changing *and* are a site of constant struggle.

Any attempt to understand or define the private-public boundary cannot be fixed but will have to constantly mirror social change and evolution. Thus, Wasserstein's plays not only explore the different ways in which the "public" sphere of politics influences the private lives of

women but also the conditions under which the power relations, in the so-called private sphere, create situations of oppression and domination.

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