

Analytical Summary of the play (Act wise)

Act I

The scene opens in an empty hall which is used for functions in the village. Samant, the villager explains to Benare who has come first about the hall. She is a member of the amateur theatre group called "The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association". Benare has walked a long distance from the station and arrived at the place leaving others behind. As she enters, she cut her finger in the bolt. Samant and Benare talk intimately. Samant is not married. He comes to the hall whenever any shows are held. He speaks of magic shows. Samant refers to the trick of cutting tongue and putting it together again. The magician exercises some hypnotism. Benare comes close to him and seems to be sexually attracted to him. Benare tells that in everything, she is the first. She is a teacher, and she is never late in her attendance to the school; she is never behindhand with her lessons. She does everything properly and in time. She takes exception to Samant's calling her Schoolmarm (School mistress). She is a teacher and instructs the children who are better than adults (She has in mind Prof. Damle). The window is opened and she feels better. She wanders about and Samant asks her to sit down. But she loves standing; in the school she teaches standing so that she may have a look at the whole class. Children adore her. Other teachers and even the management are jealous. But he cannot do anything to her. She will do whatever she wishes. They cannot do anything to her. (unconsciously she puts her hand on the stomach). This is an anticipation of the humiliation awaiting her for her pregnancy (গর্ভবতী অবস্থা). They are holding an enquiry; there is a slander. All these show her plight which she expresses to a stranger. Samant is puzzled. Benare does not allow Samant to leave her. Samant asks her if she is unwell. Benare sings a song to show her cheerfulness. She takes Samant as a good companion.

It is known that the dramatic group will hold a mock law court scene. Benare says to Samant that behind the fun there is an objective. Their chairman never does anything without a prime objective of uplifting the masses. The childless Kashikars (The chairman and his wife) have adopted Balu Rokde in order to avoid the boredom of life and they have made a slave of the poor fellow (This shows Benare's dislike of them).

The other actors— Kashikar, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik arrive. Prof Damle and Rawte are absent. Samant is attracted by

Ponkshe's Sahib-like appearance. He serves them faithfully. The village boy is subservient to the city-dwellers who treat him with disdain (ভুচ্ছ করে)।

Sukhatme proposes that Samant will be Rawte's substitute. Benare approves of it calling Samant 'lovely' (the sexual attachment is suggested). Samant will play Rawte's role as the fourth witness. The play will present the trial of President Johnson on the charge of producing atomic weapons. Sukhatme takes the responsibility of preparing Samant for the role. Samant is puzzled and frightened. Mrs. Kashikar suggests a rehearsal with Samant. Benare agrees at first but later says that the rehearsal of the regular play will affect its actual performance. Sukhatme suggests a new and imaginary case against some one so that Samant may know how the court functions. This will just be a game and Benare will pass the time cheerfully before the performance of to-night's atomic weapons trial.

Benare is cheerful and goes to the inner room to have a wash. The court is being arranged. An accused has to be found. Karnik takes Ponkshe aside, and indicating the inner room tells him if he knows anything about Benare. Ponkshe says also "I have got something to tell you about her (Benare). At Sukhatme's suggestion, they all decide to make Benare the accused in the mock trial. Rokde makes stage preparations.

Benare comes out of the inner room. She is cheerful and sings. Ponkshe comes from the door way of the inner room and stands before Benare on the dias. He startles Benare by announcing "Miss Leela Benare, you have been arrested on suspicion of a crime of an extremely grave nature and brought as a prisoner before the bar of the court." Karnik and Rokde arrange a wooden dock around her. Benare stiffens and looks around her. Sukhatme puts on his black lawyer's gown and Kashikar sits on the judge's chair and declares : "Prisoner. Miss Benare, under section No. 302 of the Indian Penal Code you are accused of the crime of infanticide. Are you guilty or not guilty of the aforementioned crime." Thus at the end of Act I, there is a sudden turn of events and Benare becomes the accused and her trial will begin. Benare is stunned.

Act II

The mock-trial becomes a serious trial. The atmosphere of the place becomes gloomy and tense. The male characters keep up the pretence (ভান) of a game, but actually they find the opportunity of a sadistic kind of pleasure. The audience will gradually know it.

Benare is amazed (বিমূঢ়) at the turn of events. Samant gives cigarettes, bidis and pan masalas and the atmosphere is lightened a little. Sukhatme asks Benare why she is suddenly grave – it is a game. Benare for a time regains her usual cheerfulness. There is the contest of pan-spitting and some fun about pan-spitting in ten seconds. There is disorder and Kashikar bangs the gavel and asks all to be silent because the court proceedings will begin. Benare understands that she will be humiliated by the male accusers. She taunts the members by saying that men cannot remain silent at home and they shout at the court. So they should be reprimanded. Sukhatme wants the game to be serious. Benare says that she is not guilty of infanticide; she even cannot kill a cockroach. Rokde administers the oath-taking to Benare and Sukhatme begins to recite the charge of infanticide. Benare asks how he knows it. Sukhatme asks Mr. Ponkshe whether the accused is married or unmarried. Ponkshe lays his hand on the Oxford English Dictionary and swears solemnly as a witness. Tendulkar introduces this element of fun to lighten the atmosphere and to maintain the pretence of a game. Ponkshe answers that to the public eye she is unmarried. Sukhatme then asks about Benare's moral conduct. Benare interrupts Ponkshe to know what the moral conduct of an unmarried girl is like. Ponkshe says that Benare runs after men too much. Sukhatme wants to know if Benare has a particularly close relationship with any man-married or unmarried. Benare interrupting him says that the accused has relationship with the counsel for prosecution, with the judge, with Ponkshe, Balu, Karnik. Ponkshe and Karnik complain that the trial is becoming funny. Karnik, the witness is persuaded to declare that Rokde has seen Benare in a 'compromising situation'. Rokde becomes nervous and cannot say things distinctly. Being goaded again and again and taunted by others, he blurts out that he had seen Benare in Prof Damle's hostel room. He looks at Benare and says vengefully, "Now laugh! make fun of me!" Benare is thus placed in trouble.

Samant takes oath as a witness but he refuses to be drawn into the questions of his possible reaching Prof. Damale's room when Benare sat there and of how Benare behaved. He strongly refuses to cooperate

in the matter. Kashikar also observes that it is getting on too personal. Sukhatme says that for the sake of trial, we are taking things for granted. Karnik adds : "the crime itself is imaginary". Samant fails to understand the real motive behind Sukhatme's interrogatory procedure. Ironically what he reads from a cheap novel he carries with him tallies with what Benare had recently undergone in Professor Damle's room on the fateful night, when the learned professor refused to accept her in his life for fear of losing his reputation. Benare is stunned and asks Samant to stop saying. She says, 'it is all a lie'. Mrs Kashikar asks Samant to go on, but Benare who is alarmed shouts to Samant to stop all this. Samant explains what he is saying is from the book. Samant is innocent and is unconsciously led into the trap. Benare accuses all of them of plotting against her. Benare cannot endure this. She is full of tears and says "what can you do to me? Just try!" She leaves the place. There is silence. Samant cannot understand what has happened with Benare. Benare's sudden change bewilders all but they want to grill her further. All have guessed Benare's affair with Prof. Damle including her pregnancy.

Benare comes back to take her bag and purse. When She goes to the door again, the door is found locked from outside. The doorbolt is closed from outside because of the mishandling of it by Benare during her departure. It will be opened again only when the villagers would come to see the real 'Mock law-court'. Thus Benare is entrapped (কান্দে পড়া). So the trial has to go on till the villagers come.

Act III

Benare is called back to the witness-box. But Benare stands motionless. Mrs. Kashikar drags Benare softly and says "Why not get it over with, Miss Benare? It's all a game?" Sukhatme is asked by Karnik to 'fire away' his questions. Sukhatme asks if her name is 'Leela Benare'. Samant comes to correct it. Benare does not answer any of Sukhatme's questions.

Mrs. Kashikar tells Sukhatme that Benare has remained unmarried to the fairly advanced age of thirty four- "That's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying". Rokde adds that Benare goes to Prof. Damle's room at nightfall. Once Damle got rid of him. Sukhatme says that Benare's behaviour is suspicious. Mrs. Kashikar says that Benare once made overtures (বিয়ের প্রস্তাব) to Balu in the dark.

Rokde as witness tells the court that Benare held his hand in the dark and that he slapped her. Ponkshe as a witness of the mock-trial tells the mock-judge that Benare once tempted him to marrying him. Benare sits in the dock like "a block of stone, drained of colour and totally desolate." Samant once tells the court that he does not believe it. Ponkshe describes his meeting with Benare in the Udipi hotel and how she told him of Professor Damle's refusal to marry her after having made her pregnant.

Karnik tells the court that it was not Balu who slapped Benare but Benare who slapped Balu. There is another vital information that Benare made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide when she happened to fall in love with her own maternal uncle. Benare tries to put up a feeble protest saying that they have no right to interfere in her private life. They all say that this is only a game, a fun. Benare does not answer any question. Benare leaves the witness box and goes to the door. Mrs Kashikar takes hold of her hand and leads her to the dock. Mrs. Kashikar tells the court that once she and Mr Kashikar wanted to give Benare a lift to her home, but she vanished. This proves that she regularly visited Prof. Damle after the performance. Ponkshe in a long statement says how Benare proposed to him and wanted to marry because she wished to bring up the child. She wanted a father for the child. Sukhatme as prosecution counsel sums up that Benare at first lured Mr Ponkshe and then Rokde.

It is also known from the witnesses that Benare keeps Tik-20 in her bag. Kashikar, the judge is permitted to be examined as a judge. Kashikar makes the important announcement that the chairman of Benare's school, Nanasahib Shinde has already decided to dismiss Benare from service. He heard Nanasahib speaking angrily to some one on the phone that it was a sin to be pregnant before the marriage. It was a shock to Benare. The chairman was certainly speaking about Benare. Benare tries to swallow the Tik-20. Karnik dashes forward and takes it away. Samant is shocked.

Kashikar now resumes his role as the Mock-Judge and asks Sukhatme to sum up the case as the defence counsel. He says that "human beings are prone to error." But as the lawyer for the prosecution (Sukhatme is both prosecution counsel and defence counsel) he pleads for severest sentence possible for the accused. Kashikar asks Benare if she has anything to say. Benare is motionless. The whole court 'freezes' in the positions they are. Benare stands up and delivers a long speech; she expresses her love of life: "How now, how wonderful every moment is! Even 'You' seem new to yourself... it

is greater than the pain of living." She accuses all men as hypocrites whose only interest is in her body and not in her bleeding heart or agonised mind. Commenting on her co-actors, she says: "these are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces—how ferocious they look!" She concludes by saying that she is afraid of them all. In the past she committed a sin in falling love with her maternal uncle as a teen-aged girl. She had asked him to marry her. But he was interested in her newly-blossomed beauty. As a grown-up woman she fell in love again. Professor Damle, the intellectual accepted her offer of the body and went away. It is her body that has brought her present plight. Her body is a traitor; she despises her body. She asserts in pain and anxiety that hers is a selfless mother's quest for a father for her child.

Now Kashikar, the mock judge gives the verdict. Benare has destroyed the social customs and sacredness of marriage and motherhood. As a teacher, she has set a very bad example. She must destroy the foetus in her womb.

Benare cries out "No! No! No!". She collapses with her head on the table; only stifled sobs are heard. Sombre silence prevails in the court. The door opens little by little and two or three faces peer in. They have come for the show. Samant asks them to come after five minutes. Karnik, Ponkshe, the Kashikars and Sukhatme get ready for their performance of the night. But the frozen figure of Benare arrests them and they try to make them get up. They assure her that the mock-trial was only a game and she has no reason to get hurt. Samant calls out to her inert static figure in a low, pleading voice. She is unresponsive. Samant places the green cloth parrot in front of her and leaves. Benare weakly moves a little but gives up all attempts to get up. At this point her voice is heard singing softly from an indistinct place "The Parrot to the sparrow said etc..."