

Courting reason

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Theatre does not need great directors and actors to create its magic. In Sankalp's 'Silence! The Court is in Session', Archita as Leena Benare, projected by young directors Neha and Gaurav in the centre in front with the red spot pinpointing her and those on the 'frozen' mock court dimmed and silenced, one with her character, during her intense 15-minute monologue at the climax of the play held the spectators transfixed, many with eyes moist.

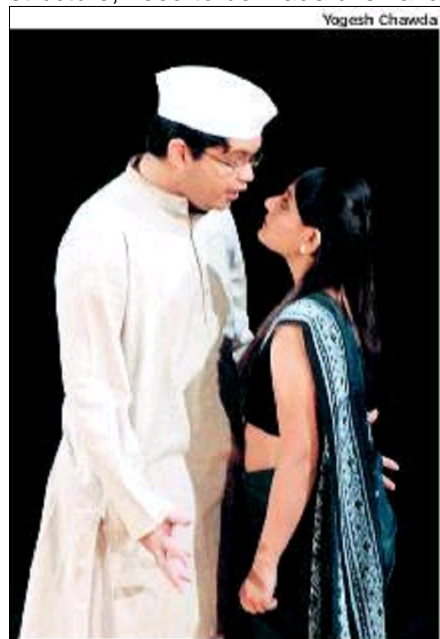
Transformed into an individual embodying all those women at whom society has been pointing an accusing finger, she could not hold back tears. One understands why Sulabha Deshpande, who was cast as Leela for the premiere of the play in Marathi 'Shantata!' had asked for this piece to be specially written so that she could give expression to her seething rage at having to silently take all the accusations society had made, locking her up in the dock. The actor will remain an individual empowered by theatre, even if with this single performance, all her life.

Sankalp fittingly celebrates with the play its evolution in 10 years. In Priya Adarkar's English translation of the original 'Shantata! Court Chaloo Aahe', here were both a challenging form of mock trial with an undercurrent of satire and a theme of social significance. For other characters, anchored by a shared human interest of scandal-mongering and tendency to sit in moral judgment, particularly against women, there are zestful budding actors.

Abhishek's cunning lawyer, Udhav's bloated moralistic judge, Rahul's quirky scientist, Gaurav's narcissistic actor, Aditi's middle-class 'I know-it-all' stereotype, Nikhil's overpowered timid son and Utsav's small-town naïve but sensitive Samant, all hypocritically as society, and farcically in their effect, turn on 'the unmarried mother' for her 'sins'. Their collective cussedness refuses to recognize her as an individual.

In the climax, Benare speaks the unspoken 'defence' of a woman seen as an inferior member of the humankind. The irony is she is made of a tender human stuff. Taking creative liberty, the playwright has her burst out in the monologue. "I offered my body on the altar of my worship," she tells the jury, as it were, in the auditorium, "But he wasn't a god. He was a man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body!"

Before Sankalp goes to Delhi, the flows of action and speech rhythm in the first act, which anyway has a loose structure, need to be made brisk and more natural, compositions livelier and Sanskrit lines spoken more carefully.



Artistes perform at Natrani