

Negotiating Power and Patriarchal Authority: Gendered Identity and Resistance in Kamala, Silence! The Court Is in Session, and Kanyadaan

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Abstract

Aim: This research paper examines the dynamics of patriarchal power and gendered identity in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar, with special reference to Kamala, Silence! The Court Is in Session, and Kanyadaan. Tendulkar's dramatic works reveal how male-dominated social systems control women's voices, identities, and bodies through institutional authority, social morality, and ideological pressure. The study argues that patriarchy operates not only through direct domination but also through liberal hypocrisy, emotional control, and internalized oppression. Kamala exposes the commodification of women and the silent subjugation of Sarita, while Silence! The Court Is in Session reveals patriarchal morality through the public humiliation of Leela Benare. Kanyadaan further explores how caste, ideology, and marriage reinforce gendered power.

Methodology: The study uses close textual reading and thematic analysis of the selected plays. It examines characterization, dialogue, and dramatic situations to understand how gender roles are constructed, enforced, and resisted. Feminist theoretical perspectives are applied to interpret patriarchal structures, internalized oppression, and emerging female consciousness within socio-cultural contexts.

Outcome: The analysis shows that Tendulkar skillfully portrays the many forms of patriarchal power that suppress women in both private and public spaces. His plays reveal how women experience commodification, moral policing, emotional abuse, and ideological domination. At the same time, female characters develop awareness and resistance, creating a space for questioning oppression and asserting identity.

Conclusion and Suggestions: Tendulkar's plays challenge patriarchal mindsets by exposing gender injustice embedded in social institutions, family structures, and political ideologies. Women's resistance in these plays is psychological, symbolic, and ideological rather than openly revolutionary, yet it signals emerging feminist consciousness. The study suggests that Tendulkar's works provide an important framework for examining gender and power in modern Indian society. Further research may extend this analysis to other contemporary writers to better understand how literature interrogates power relations and advocates social change.

Keywords: Negotiation of Power; Patriarchy; Gender Identity; Feminist Resistance; Commodification; Domestic Subordination; Media and Masculinity; Gender Construction.

Introduction - Vijay Tendulkar (1928–2008) is one of the most influential figures in modern Indian drama. Writing in post-independence India, he transformed Marathi theatre by introducing contemporary themes and realistic social concerns. His plays draw attention to the darker realities of everyday life, especially the workings of power, patriarchy, and social violence within family and society. Works such as Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, and Kanyadaan explores how gender roles are constructed and enforced within male-dominated socio-cultural systems. Drawing from real-life incidents and social tensions, Tendulkar reveals the harsh realities of patriarchy, social

control, and moral policing. In the preface of **Collected Plays in Translation** Vijay Tendulkar asserts that;

“My characters are not cardboard characters; they do not speak my language; rather I do not speak my language through them; they are not my mouth-pieces; but each of them has his or her own separate existence and expression. This is felt more in the original versions of my plays because of the nuances and variations of speech I attribute to my characters”(x)

Tendulkar's dramatic world presents women struggling to preserve dignity and identity in oppressive environments. Characters such as Sarita in Kamala, Leela Benare in

Silence! The Court is in Session, and Jyoti in *Kanyadaan* demonstrates how patriarchy functions through authority, humiliation, and emotional manipulation. At the same time, these women reveal the tension between submission and resistance, showing that female identity is shaped through negotiation within unequal power structures.

Feminist theory provides an important framework for understanding these portrayals. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that “**one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman**”, emphasizing gender as a social construct. Judith Butler explains gender as “**a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame**”, highlighting its performative nature. Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that “**the subaltern cannot speak**”, pointing to the silencing of marginalized voices. Tendulkar’s plays dramatize these insights by revealing how gender roles are socially imposed, internalized, and continually contested within everyday life. This dynamic is perceptively noted in the introduction to *Collected Plays in Translation* by Samik Bandyopadhyay, who observes that;

“Tendulkar studies power and violence in spaces institutionally defined, the specificities more often than not serving to camouflage the violence in the exercise of power. The institutions that are exposed with their power mechanisms include media (*Kamala*), performance (*Silence! The Court is in Session*), the family (*The Vultures*), the State (*Ghashiram Kotwal and Encounter in Umbugland*), society and morality (*Kanyadaan*) and sexual mores (*Sakharam Binder and A Friend’s Story*). As the institutions come to embody power, power assumes an institutional body, its practice defined and determined within the parameters of the particular institution.”(xlii)

Through his exploration of gender and authority, Tendulkar portrays patriarchy as a socio-political system sustained by cultural norms, institutional practices, and internalized beliefs. His plays highlight the ongoing struggle between oppression and agency, demonstrating that gender identity remains a contested terrain shaped by resistance, negotiation, and the pursuit of selfhood.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Scholars widely observe that Vijay Tendulkar exposes the hidden violence and hypocrisy embedded in modern social institutions. Critics such as Shanta Gokhale and V. S. Naipaul notes that his plays reveal how middle-class respectability and progressive ideals often conceal systems of domination. Institutions like the family, marriage, and media appear modern and reformist, yet they continue to reproduce gender hierarchy and social inequality.

Studies of *Kamala* highlight the commodification of women and the illusion of male liberalism, showing how patriarchy adapts to urban modern life through domestic roles, economic dependence, and social expectations. Sarita’s growing awareness of her subordinate position is often viewed as the beginning of feminist consciousness

rather than open rebellion. Criticism of *Silence! The Court in Session* focuses on middle-class moral hypocrisy, with feminist readings interpreting the mock trial as a symbolic process through which patriarchal society disciplines female sexuality and autonomy. *Kanyadaan* is frequently discussed for its treatment of caste, patriarchy, and ideological idealism, revealing how progressive ideals collapse in lived reality and how patriarchal values may be internalized, as seen in Jyoti’s loyalty to an abusive marriage.

This study applies feminist and intersectional perspectives to understand how patriarchal authority functions in these plays. Simone de Beauvoir explains that woman is constructed as the “Other,” helping clarify why Sarita and Miss Benare are judged according to male-defined norms. Poststructural feminist insights from Judith Butler show how society enforces acceptable feminine behavior, while Michel Foucault helps explain how surveillance and public judgment regulate women’s bodies and conduct, as seen in the public shaming of Miss Benare.

An intersectional approach further shows that women’s experiences are shaped by overlapping inequalities. In these plays, caste hierarchy, gender norms, and domestic authority combine to reinforce patriarchal control. This control works not only through force but also through social beliefs and everyday practices that make inequality appear natural. Through realistic situations and dialogue, Tendulkar portrays how women negotiate, resist, and reshape their identities within oppressive social structures.

Textual Analysis: In *Kamala*, Vijay Tendulkar presents patriarchal authority as a system that operates not only through visible violence but through professional prestige, domestic hierarchy, and normalized gender roles. The character of Jaisingh Jadhav embodies institutional power: as a journalist, he claims to expose human trafficking, yet his actions replicate the same structure of exploitation. His declaration, “**I bought her just for two hundred and fifty rupees**” (p. 14), reduces *Kamala* to a purchasable object and reveals how media spectacle, masculinity, and authority intersect. What appears to be a moral crusade becomes a performance designed to enhance his professional reputation.

Jaisingh’s power extends beyond the public sphere into the private domain of marriage. Sarita’s daily routine illustrates how patriarchal control functions through ordinary domestic expectations. She is required to manage his calls, record messages, anticipate his needs, and maintain household order; failure to do so invites his displeasure. Despite being educated and economically secure, she internalizes obedience and shapes her identity around his preferences. Her uncle Kakasaheb, a Gandhian idealist, and Jaisingh’s colleague Jain both express unease about his conduct, suggesting that professional success masks ethical insensitivity.

The arrival of *Kamala* exposes the structural similarity between public exploitation and domestic subordination.

Jaisingh purchases Kamala from a rural flesh market in Bihar and intends to display her at a press conference to prove the persistence of trafficking. Although he presents the act as investigative journalism, Kamala becomes an exhibit rather than a rescued individual. Sarita recognizes that the press conference serves Jaisingh's ambition to counter government claims and elevate his reputation rather than to restore Kamala's dignity.

The interaction between Sarita and Kamala reveals the internalized logic of patriarchy. Kamala asks practical questions about land, labor, and fertility, assuming that Sarita's role is defined by productivity and service:

"How many children do you have, Kamala?"

"I'll have as many as you want... I can work hard... from morning to evening."

"Does he have property of his own, memsahib?"

"My master? No..."(p.34-35)

Kamala's reference to Jaisingh as "master" and her willingness to work and reproduce on command expose the commodified understanding of womanhood within agrarian and patriarchal economies. Sarita's hesitant responses and repeated "No" highlight her discomfort and growing awareness of her own position within a similar hierarchy. The conversation collapses the perceived divide between the urban middle-class wife and the rural trafficked woman, suggesting that patriarchy operates across class boundaries through different forms of control.

Sarita's consciousness deepens when Kamala asks what price Jaisingh paid for her. This moment forces Sarita to confront her own status within the marriage. She realizes that she too functions as an object—displayed at parties to enhance her husband's status and expected to satisfy his emotional and physical needs. Her resistance surfaces when she refuses his sexual advances after the press conference celebration, disrupting the assumption of conjugal entitlement and provoking his anger.

Sarita's awakening reaches articulation in her anguished self-questioning: **"What am I? A slave? A bonded servant?"** (p. 46). This moment marks a shift from passive compliance to critical awareness. Her dialogue with Kakasaheb further exposes the normalization of patriarchal privilege. When Kakasaheb insists that Jaisingh is "no different from other men" and merely proud of his achievements, Sarita challenges the logic that professional success entitles a man to domination. She responds, **"And therefore he's entitled to keep a slave... If a man becomes great, why doesn't he stay a great man? Why does he become a master?"**(p.47) This statement reframes patriarchy as a socially sanctioned extension of male achievement rather than an individual moral failing. Sarita's declaration that she will never again think of the house as her home signals a psychological break from domestic ideology. The home, traditionally constructed as a site of security and belonging, is revealed as a space structured by authority and gendered control. Her refusal

to accept this arrangement marks the emergence of resistance, even if it remains incomplete.

Through the parallel positioning of Kamala and Sarita, the play demonstrates how patriarchal authority operates through both overt commodification and subtle domestic regulation. Kamala represents visible exploitation in the marketplace, while Sarita represents invisible subordination within respectable middle-class life. Tendulkar thus exposes patriarchy as a pervasive system sustained by institutional prestige, cultural norms, and internalized obedience. Sarita's awakening suggests the possibility of resistance, showing that gendered identity is not fixed but negotiated through awareness, confrontation, and the refusal to accept normalized domination.

In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Vijay Tendulkar constructs a powerful dramatic space where patriarchal authority is exposed through performance, law, and social morality. The "mock trial" staged by the Sonar Moti Tenement Progressive Association begins as a rehearsal game but gradually transforms into a symbolic courtroom representing patriarchal society. What appears playful becomes an instrument of psychological violence, allowing male participants to interrogate, shame, and discipline Miss Leela Benare under the guise of legality and moral order. Benare, a schoolteacher and an independent woman, becomes the target of collective scrutiny. The trial reveals how institutions such as law, education, and social respectability collaborate in regulating female behavior. She is placed in the dock not for a legal offense but for violating social expectations governing female sexuality, motherhood, and obedience. The male participants—Kashikar, Sukhatme, Ponshe, Karnik, Rokde, and Professor Damle—assume judicial authority and convert rumor, gossip, and moral suspicion into "evidence." Through this staged procedure, patriarchy legitimizes its power by adopting the language of law and justice.

The accusations against Benare rely on character assassination rather than facts. Ponshe dismisses her behavior as irrational: **"The prisoner sometimes acts as if she were off her head. That is, there's sometimes no sense at all in her actions"** (p. 83). Such statements frame her as emotionally unstable, reinforcing stereotypes used to undermine women's credibility. When Rokde claims to have seen her in Damle's room and others repeat gossip about her past, the trial becomes a mechanism of social surveillance rather than justice.

Benare resists the intrusion into her personal life and challenges the legitimacy of the proceedings. She protests: **"There's no need at all to drag my private life into this. I can visit whom I like. Damle wasn't eating me up"** (p. 87). Her insistence on personal freedom challenges the collective right claimed by society to regulate a woman's body and relationships. When she realizes the conspiracy against her, she accuses them directly: **"You have deliberately ganged upon me! You've plotted against**

me!” (p. 93). This recognition exposes the trial as a coordinated act of patriarchal aggression rather than a neutral inquiry.

Benare’s assertion of autonomy reaches its clearest articulation when she declares, **“My life is my own... My will is my own. No one can decide for me”** (p. 58). This statement challenges patriarchal authority by asserting bodily autonomy and the right to self-determination. However, her resistance is gradually undermined as the mock trial intensifies. The male characters reassert control through moral rhetoric and legalistic procedure, turning her private experiences into public evidence of moral failure. The revelation of her pregnancy becomes the central point of condemnation. Instead of addressing the responsibility of Professor Damle, who exploited her admiration and abandoned her, the trial focuses solely on Benare’s “immorality.” She is accused of infanticide, denied dignity, and forced to relive past trauma, including earlier emotional betrayals and a failed suicide attempt. The proceedings expose a double standard in which male misconduct remains unquestioned while female sexuality is subjected to moral judgment.

The final verdict, pronounced by Kashikar, declares that **“the child in your womb shall be destroyed”** (pp. 119). This symbolic sentence represents patriarchal control over female reproduction and motherhood. Benare is punished not for breaking a law but for violating social codes governing chastity and maternal legitimacy. Her collapse at the end signifies emotional devastation rather than guilt, emphasizing the cruelty of a system that punishes women for their vulnerability while absolving male responsibility. Through the structure of the mock trial, the play demonstrates how patriarchal authority operates through collective participation, institutional language, and moral policing. The courtroom becomes a metaphor for society itself, where surveillance, gossip, and social norms discipline female identity. Benare’s resistance—her defense of personal freedom and refusal to accept moral judgment—reveals the struggle to negotiate gendered identity within oppressive social structures. Although she is ultimately silenced, her assertions expose the injustice of patriarchal control and reveal how morality, legality, and social respectability function as tools for regulating women’s bodies and autonomy.

In *Kanyadaan*, Vijay Tendulkar examines how caste, patriarchy, and progressive idealism intersect within marriage. The relationship between Jyoti Devalikar and Arun Athavale shows that gender identity and power are shaped not only by social structures but also by emotional commitment and ideological beliefs. Jyoti, raised in an educated and socially active Brahmin family, believes that marrying across caste lines is a humanitarian act. Her faith in love and reform is clear when she reflects, **“I thought love would change everything”** (p. 540). This statement shows her liberal idealism and her belief that personal

relationships can overcome social inequality.

Jyoti’s parents represent progressive public life. Her father Nath, a legislator committed to social reform, supports the marriage as a challenge to caste barriers, while her mother Seva fears that cultural differences and lived realities may cause suffering. Jyoti, however, remains firm in her decision, confident that she can face any consequences. Arun, a poor but educated Dalit youth and aspiring writer, initially appears to represent resistance to caste oppression. Yet his speech reveals deep anger shaped by historical humiliation and social exclusion. His resentment toward Brahmin privilege exposes unresolved tensions within caste relations.

Even before marriage, Arun’s aggressive behavior hints at future conflict. When he violently twists Jyoti’s arm during an argument, it foreshadows the violence that later defines their relationship. After marriage, Jyoti returns to her parental home exhausted and emotionally broken, declaring: **“He... he will not enter this house... I have left him... I am not going back to him again... never”** (p. 535). This moment reveals the severity of abuse she has experienced. However, Arun arrives intoxicated and apologetic, threatening self-harm as a gesture of remorse. When questioned about his violence, he explains:

“What am I but the son of scavengers. We don’t know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives... we make love to them... but the beating is what gets publicized” (p. 540).

This statement reveals how caste humiliation is internalized and transformed into aggressive masculinity. Arun presents violence as a social inheritance, suggesting that systemic oppression can reproduce violence within domestic life. His words also show how masculinity becomes a way to reclaim power in a society that denies dignity to marginalized men.

Despite the violence, Jyoti continues to defend Arun. Instead of rejecting the relationship, she interprets suffering as part of her social commitment and personal responsibility. Her response reflects internalized patriarchal expectations that encourage endurance and sacrifice within marriage. Even when pregnant and physically vulnerable, she refuses to stay with her parents and returns with Arun, determined to preserve the relationship.

Arun’s behavior exposes contradictions between political rhetoric and personal conduct. Though praised as a powerful autobiographical writer exposing caste injustice, he remains economically dependent on Jyoti, expects her to work, and verbally abuses her for her caste background. Seva condemns him as exploitative, arguing that his criticism of injustice is hypocritical because he reproduces domination within marriage. Nath, once an idealist supporter of the union, eventually recognizes Arun’s vindictive anger and ideological inconsistency, revealing the limits of abstract reform when confronted with lived reality.

Jyoti’s final position reflects both resilience and tragic

commitment. She refuses parental protection and insists on facing life with her husband, asserting loyalty despite suffering. Her concluding affirmation echoes her father's teachings on courage and perseverance:

"It will not happen... you yourself have taught us that one must not turn one's back upon the battlefield... 'Cowards stay ashore, every wave opens a path for me'(564-565)

This statement reveals the paradox of ideological inheritance. Jyoti transforms her father's progressive ideals into personal endurance, interpreting suffering as moral duty rather than defeat.

Through Jyoti and Arun's relationship, the play shows that patriarchal authority operates not only through caste hierarchy but also through masculine control within marriage. Arun's violence reflects internalized oppression and wounded masculinity, while Jyoti's endurance reveals the emotional labor expected from women in sustaining relationships and ideals. Tendulkar presents oppression as both structural and intimate: caste injustice shapes male anger, and patriarchal norms legitimize control over women's bodies and choices.

Within the broader framework of negotiating power and patriarchal authority, Kanyadaan demonstrates that resistance is complex and deeply personal. Jyoti's choices illustrate a difficult form of agency in which love, ideology, endurance, and suffering coexist. The play ultimately shows that progressive ideals alone cannot erase deeply rooted structures of power, and that gendered identity is shaped through ongoing negotiation between social justice aspirations and lived realities.

Discussion: The selected plays reveal that patriarchy operates not only through physical violence but through ideology, social institutions, and everyday practices. In Kamala patriarchal power appears in the form of liberal male hypocrisy. Jaisingh sees himself as progressive and socially aware, yet he silences Sarita and displays Kamala as a professional achievement. This contradiction shows how patriarchy adapts within modern urban society. Kamala's purchase exposes the harsh marketplace logic that reduces women to commodities, while Sarita's role as a dutiful wife reflects emotional and psychological confinement within respectable middle-class life.

The contrast between Kamala and Sarita broadens the understanding of gendered power structures. Kamala represents visible exploitation, where oppression is direct and economic. Sarita, however, represents invisible oppression within domestic space, where control operates through expectations, dependence, and emotional authority. Sarita's growing awareness of her condition signals an emerging feminist consciousness. She does not openly rebel, but her questioning of her role challenges patriarchal norms at the level of thought and identity. This subtle shift suggests that resistance may begin with self-realization rather than confrontation.

In Silence! The Court is in Session, patriarchal authority operates through social participation, public opinion, and moral policing rather than overt violence. The mock trial becomes a symbolic social mechanism through which society regulates women's bodies and choices. The collective humiliation of Miss Benare demonstrates the consequences faced by women who assert autonomy. She is judged not for a legal crime but for violating expectations of chastity, motherhood, and obedience. The trial exposes how morality becomes a tool for discipline, supported by social consent and public scrutiny.

At the same time, Benare's resistance reflects the emergence of feminist consciousness. Her assertion of personal freedom challenges social control and affirms female individuality. The conflict between her personal will and collective judgment reflects broader tensions in modern Indian society, where traditional moral values confront changing gender roles and women's increasing autonomy.

Kanyadaan expands the discussion by showing that patriarchal violence transcends caste boundaries and can be reproduced within marginalized communities. The play challenges the belief that progressive ideology alone can dismantle deep-rooted social hierarchies. Jyoti's marriage, inspired by liberal and humanitarian ideals, exposes the limitations of reformist thinking when structural inequalities remain unchanged. Her experience reveals how caste oppression and patriarchy intersect within intimate relationships.

Jyoti's endurance reflects the internalization of patriarchal expectations such as sacrifice, tolerance, and marital loyalty. Rather than rejecting violence, she attempts to interpret suffering as part of social commitment and personal responsibility. Meanwhile, Arun embodies the psychological scars of caste humiliation. His aggression and emotional instability illustrate how systemic injustice can shape identity and distort personal relationships. The play suggests that oppression can reproduce itself in private spaces, even among those who are themselves victims of social inequality.

Taken together, the plays demonstrate that patriarchy is sustained through social norms, institutional authority, economic structures, and internalized beliefs. Tendulkar shows that modernity does not eliminate gender oppression; instead, it transforms and disguises it. Resistance therefore emerges gradually—through awareness, questioning, and the assertion of identity—rather than through immediate rebellion.

Conclusion: The plays Kamala, Silence! The Court is in Session, and Kanyadaan collectively demonstrate that patriarchal authority continues to operate beneath the surface of modern society. Although social institutions appear progressive and democratic, they often reproduce gender inequality through normalized roles, moral expectations, and institutional practices. Vijay Tendulkar presents patriarchy not as a single act of violence but as a

system sustained through ideology, social approval, and everyday behavior.

In *Kamala*, the commodification of Kamala and Sarita's growing self-awareness reveal how media power, masculinity, and domestic hierarchy intersect. Jaisingh's liberal image contrasts with his control over the women in his life, exposing the hypocrisy embedded in modern male progressivism. Sarita's awakening does not take the form of open rebellion, but her questioning signals the beginning of resistance and the emergence of feminist consciousness within everyday domestic space.

Silence! The Court is in Session exposes how patriarchal morality is enforced through social performance, public opinion, and legal symbolism. Miss Benare's humiliation reflects the policing of female sexuality and reproductive autonomy. Yet her assertion of personal freedom challenges this control and affirms female individuality. The play highlights the hypocrisy of moral authority and emphasizes the need to recognize women's agency in a society governed by surveillance and judgment.

Kanyadaan extends this critique by revealing the intersection of caste politics and patriarchal power. Jyoti's idealistic belief in social reform confronts harsh reality, exposing the persistence of gendered violence within marriage. Arun's aggression reflects internalized oppression shaped by caste marginalization, while Jyoti's endurance illustrates how patriarchal expectations of sacrifice and loyalty are internalized. The play demonstrates that patriarchy operates across caste boundaries and may be sustained by ideology, emotional attachment, and social conditioning.

Taken together, these plays support the central argument of this study: gendered identity is shaped through negotiation with patriarchal authority, and resistance often emerges gradually through awareness, questioning, and assertion of selfhood. Tendulkar's work reveals that modernity has not eliminated patriarchal control; instead, it has transformed and disguised it within social institutions and everyday relationships. By exposing these hidden

structures, the plays emphasize the importance of recognizing women's agency and the ongoing struggle for gender equality within contemporary society.

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