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Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session*:  
*A Re [writing] of History of Women*

—Shalini Attrи

Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1878) represents a woman bidding adieu to aesthetic fantasies, and positioning herself to become much more than a wife and a mother. Harold Pinter’s play *The Homecoming* (1965) exhibits a subversive female protagonist whose actions change the lives of the men in the home she takes over. Italian playwright Dacia Maraini’s postmodern play *I Sogni di Clytemnestra* (1979) exemplifies the writer’s attempt to rewrite and transform the misogyny of plays like *Oresteia*, giving Clytemnestra a loud and clear feminist protest, putting greater premium on women being able to “come home” to their authority and power. Illustrating whole passages unswervingly from Aeschylus, Maraini reassesses the supremacy of patriarchy that *Oresteia* records. All these texts examine the ways in which patriarchal ascendancy is first questioned and then subverted, thereby articulating how and in what kind of circumstances the female power could possibly come to life. Vijay Tendulkar, the ‘pioneer playwright’ (Wadikar), has attempted something similar in his conception of Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Often regarded as an extremely controversial play, *Silence* marks a complete break with the traditional notions of how a woman is either understood or represented in the Indian society. Benare, pointing finger at virtually every male in the play, not only communicates Tendulkar’s support for the suffering womanhood in Indian society, but also marks a complete reversal from its conventional, stereotypical representation(s).

Through this paper, my attempt is to trace and explore various methods Tendulkar has adopted, in this play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, for re-writing the politicized historical representation of women in India. Tendulkar had been a witness to various reform movements in Maharashtra, aimed at strengthening and consolidating the underprivileged status of women. Inspired by them, he has challenged the traditional notions that often give legitimacy to the ‘order’ established by men. In the act of making his woman protagonist more articulate and assertive in describing her injustice, even exploitation at the hands of men, judiciary and even fellow women, Tendulkar not only externalizes the stark and bare realities of the condition of women, but also ‘the silenced history of women’. By using an extremely potent theatrical metaphor of a
mock-trial, Tendulkar has triggered off a process of unmasking the multiple layers of patriarchy, hidden behind the façade of religion, politics, law, society and history.

Rewriting of history is a continuous process where an ideological frame or a new analytical insight is deployed by the historians. Although this frame or analytical insight or the methodology may fundamentally differ, yet a certain common ground is always shared that constitutes the craft of the historian. Whenever there is reconstruction of the past, this insight or methodology is strictly adhered to. It is another matter that departure from these norms often removes the distinction between myth and history. Despite the undeniable connection between history and myth, there is an important distinction between the two. Myths are essentially illusionary representations, thereby tending to be marked by reality. Still reality is embedded in every myth in some form or the other. Although myths are not verifiable like historical facts, they represent the reality symbolically and metaphorically. These symbols and metaphors pass from one generation to another, and thus become an integral part of the collective memory of a particular society and culture. To that extent, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are integral to the lives of the Indian people. The images of women present in these myths become the prescriptive norms or ideals for the contemporary Indian women.

These representations, often meant to delimit the status of women, are controlled by men. In his *Nineteen Eighty Four*, George Orwell brings forward the significance of this control saying, 'who controls the past controls the future: Who controls the present controls the past'. (309) In a patriarchal society, men control the present as well as future, thereby writing and rewriting past according to their own dogmas. In *Mythologies*, Barthes defines myth as a mode of communication, a form of mythical signification and 'a type of speech'. (109) In his preface, he opines that it is a message of naturalized ideology channeled through collective representations like 'the newspaper, art and common sense' and also through meta-language. It shares the nature of spectacle, which is highly-encoded. Mythology is a science of reading that involves ideological critique that has a bearing on language of mass culture and semiological analysis of the mechanics of this language (9-11).

The position of women in contemporary Indian society is largely the result of their position and status inscribed in these myths. During the times of *The Mahabharata*, the ideal of a woman’s loyalty to her
husband was markedly different from the one that was sanctified by the successive generations. It was customary then to acquire a son through contact with another man, especially in situations where the husband was either dead or physically incapable of producing an heir. This was called 'niyoga', a method often considered superior to adoption. In the days of Mahabharata, a woman was considered a 'passive field' and all that she had to do was to produce children on demand. This compulsion to produce sons disappeared later, once adoption had become popular. Along with it, the attitude of men towards any lapse on part of a woman also became harsher, even less tolerant.

It is pertinent to mention that the position of women, as reflected in the Indian scriptures, Hindu folklore and tradition provide a realistic representation of women of those times. In Manusmriti, Manu mentions the laws that governed the women in society:

\[\text{Pita rakshati kaumarai, bharta rakshati yauwanai,}
\]
\[\text{Rakshanti sthaviray putra, karyakshetre cha swaminah. (as qtd Rama Jois 33)}\]

The traditional status of a typical Indian woman is depicted in the above couplet, where a father protects her until her marriage; husband does so after marriage, a son in her old age; thus different men dominating her work-field at different times. In fact, she does not have an independent, status or position, as she is always dependent upon men for her identity, status or value. Similarly, Tulsidas in Sunderkand of Ramacharitmanas undermines the value of woman and treats her with contempt. A woman is compared to a drum that produces sound, only if it is beaten. She is also equated to an illiterate, obstinate and a mean person: dhola, gavara, sudra, pasu, nari, sakala tarana ke adhikari. (802) Similarly, Satapatha Brahamana compares women with shudras, dogs and crows and declares them to be the personifications of untruth and impurity. (as qtd Jhingran 91) The Aitareya Brahamana gives the story of Harishchandra's desire for a son instead of a daughter and justifies it by saying: "The father who looks upon the face of his son, born living to him, discharges his debt in him...the son is to him a rescuing boat...in him you have the blameless world of heaven. The daughter is a sorrow, while the son is light in the highest regions of heaven to his father" (as qtd Jhingran 92). With the invasion of Aryans, the concept of beeja-kshetra overruled India, established patriarchy and destroyed matriarchal organizations. In Manusmriti, Manu evolved a general code of conduct for society.
According to him, women are naturally lustful and ever ready to seduce men. They are frivolous, heartless and full of untruth. (as qtd Jhingran 94) Manu further relates “women with bed, seat, ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct” (Buhler 330).

Hindu women come from diverse cultural, linguistic, geographical and social backgrounds and their roles have been varied in history, literary tradition and society. The mythological, sociological, and philosophical perspective on women is responsible for their cultural construction, and its perpetuation. The Aryan pastoralists, who came to India from the North West around 1500 BC, were a part of Indo-European tradition. In *Hinduism*, Kim Knott states, “the focus on the uplift(ment) of women was one aspect of the trend by Orientalists and Hindu reformers to reclaim the Aryan past. The argument related to position and upgradation of women progressively became associated with Hindu nationalist cause and repeated by the Arya Samaj and later campaigners. It met with its critics, however, who doubted the historical accuracy of the claim to an Aryan golden age, and dismissed the divisiveness of favoring the Aryans above all other religious groups”. (74) The Vedic pantheon was dominated by male deities, whereas pre-Aryan and post-Vedic periods were dominated by feminine images of divine. There came a change in the roles and image of women with a passage of time. This change certainly brings forward an argument, relating it to ‘masculine politics’.

It is this politics that Vijay Tendulkar’s deals with when he chooses to represent Leela Benare in an altogether different light, totally opposed to the position women have occupied in myth, tradition and history. It is the result of various challenges and protests taking place in India during 19th and 20th century. At that time, India was a British colony, and was also experiencing a social, political and cultural transformation. In this phase, liberal reformers concentrated on issues of women such as removal of sati, reasonable age of marriage, rehabilitation of widows and their right to remarry, property rights, right to education etc. Various articulate intelligentsias became the pioneers of all progressive democratic movements with emancipation of Indian women on their agenda. Raja RamMohan Roy, the founder of *Brahmo Samaj* (1828) advocated equality between the two sexes and declared that women were in no way inferior to men morally and intellectually. Supporting female education, inter-caste marriages, widow remarriage, right of inheritance and property in 1822, he published a pamphlet on ‘Brief remarks on Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Women’ (as qtd Suguna 25).
Dealing with the similar issues, Eshwar Chandra Vidyasagar often referred to a sloka in *Parasara Smriti* and advocated widow remarriage: a woman can remarry if her husband’s whereabouts are not known or if he is dead or if he becomes a *sanyasi* or a depraved person. (as qtd Suguna 97) Arya Samaj (1875) established by Dayanand Saraswati emphasized compulsory education for boys and girls. There appeared reformers in Maharashtrian society like Mahatma Phule who questioned the injustice of Brahmin superiority and worked for women education. Ranade and Bhandarkar, the pioneers of *Prarthana Samaj* (1867) sponsored uplift of women, widow remarriage, raising the age of marriage and spread of education. Dr Ambedkar strongly believed in the ‘liberation of women’ and attacked the ideological foundation of ‘notion of enslavement’. Supporting women’s equality, Mahatma Gandhi believed that their role is complimentary to that of men, and also believed that equal rights for men and women were necessary to create a just and equitable social order. His call to women to join the national movement served as a catalyst for their wider participation in public affairs. According to him “only an inner revolution can intensify women’s right against injustice” (as qtd in Chandrababu and Thilagavathi 291).

A product of these historical contingencies, Vijay Tendulkar advocated the cause of women, by giving a feminist representation to some of his plays. He admits: “It was my brother who brought the fiery spirit of nationalism into our house ….My mother told me stories of Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak” (Choudhary and Rajan 18). *Silence* is not the only play in which Vijay Tendulkar has introduced a strong woman protagonist in Leela; in *Kamala*, too, he encourages the protagonist to step out of the narrow confines of her domestic space. In *Sakharam Binder*, we encounter assertive, vocal woman, on the one hand, and a strong, irrepressible moral force, on the other. In *Kanyadan*, the central character deals with her circumstances quite decisively. In *Encounter in Umbagland*, the protagonist is a ‘new woman’ who turns the tables and begins to dictate terms to helpless men, whereas in *A Friend’s Story*, Tendulkar removes the masculine gender from the scene in his attempt to project complete authority of women over their situation. Such representations from Tendulkar, a Marathi iconoclast, actually create conditions in his plays where re-writing of the history of women becomes a reality in an otherwise conservative, orthodox patriarchal set-up.

The history of literature, right from the ancient epics to the modern times, illustrates that all literary creations are inherently ideological.
and, in that sense, social and political, too. None can deny the affiliations of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost* with the politics of their times. In a sense, once we look at the origin of drama, tracing it back to Kalidas’s *Abhigyaana Shakuntalam*, we become aware of the concept of female exploitation, where a husband has no qualms about forgetting all about his wife. The gradual relocation of religion (an important component of culture) as the sustaining principle of life and society made some writers admit to politics as one of the constituents of literary writings. As the nationalistic stirrings gained momentum in India, literature, too, changed its direction away from romances, history, sociology and culture to politics, thus revealing a new kind of awareness and relationship of the individual with his specific surroundings. During the 1930s, the inevitable impact of the Gandhian Movement on Indian English literature did lead to the blossoming of realistic novels and plays.

The representation of women in Indian literature was one of the major concerns during the 19th and 20th centuries. By the start of 20th century, ‘woman question’ was raised by writers and critics, whose situation was governed by three components. One component was the portrayal of women within domestic space. The women were viewed within domesticity and marital framework that conditioned and governed their behaviour, attitudes, emotions and relationships with the members of a given family and the world outside. Second component was the emergence of forces challenging the tradition, generated by different organizations and movements for and by women themselves. The third component was the construction of ‘new image’ of Indian woman, necessitated by the spread of education, impact of Western knowledge and socio-political movements (Das 323). The representation of women challenging and protesting the existing structures of family and patriarchal ideology became an important feature of the 20th century literature (Das 324).

Joining hands with Indian women, some male feminists raised their voice by projecting women issues in literature. Rabindranath Tagore’s play *Citrangada* (1892) questioned the polarity of the male and the female worlds, the public and the domestic spaces. Sarat Chandra’s *Narir Mulya* (1922), a challenging prose work, is considered to be one of the stimulating feminist works of 20th century, initiating the argument with a scathing note ‘value of women is not much because she is not scarce.’ (Das 340) Vibhavari Shirurkar’s *Kalyance Nisvas* (1933), a collection of short stories caused mayhem in Maharashtra for potent and blunt exposé of suffering women. 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of the ‘women question’ in
Indian Theatre, particularly with the performance of street play *Aurat* (1979) by *Jan Natya Manch* of Safdar Hashmi. Another Marathi woman to astonish masculine world was Geeta Sane who, like Sarat Chandra, did an exposition on *Bharatiya Stri Jivan* (1985), building a case for Indian women. Ismat Chughtai wrote *Lihaf*— is a story on homosexuality — and registers a revolt against the feudal morals and forbidden ethics preserved and sanctified by the Muslim society.

With the production of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe (Silence! The Court is in Session)* in 1967 originally in Marathi (later translated into English by Priya Adarkar), Vijay Tendulkar (1923-2008) emerged as a rebel against the established order of a fundamentally orthodox society. This is why the play became a subject of massive controversy. In this play, the heroine Leela Benare is not an acquiescent woman who is at the receiving end of scathing male gaze or assault, but an aggressive transgressor of the sexual mores of her community. As a rebel, she challenges her executors/persecutors and also militates against the levers of patriarchy operating in the play largely in absentia (Bandopadhaya in Introduction CPT xlv). Leela Benare is a school teacher, who is cross-examined in the court with absolute mockery. As the trial gets underway, all the witnesses and authorities become inimical towards her over for being ‘an unmarried single mother’ and her audacity in entering into illicit relations with several men. The charges against Leela Benare are levelled by the men who represent the ‘collective mindscape’ of the society to which she belongs. Leela struggles very hard to break free of this enslavement to ‘collective prejudice’, as she firmly believes that the truth and reality are experienced only when the difference between the mask and the face is finally exposed.

The play explores real life incidents of a group of amateur players, who meet for a rehearsal of a play, a la Pirandello, but end up initiating a mock-trial, deftly handled and steered by Tendulkar. It focuses on the human mind and detects the ugliness latent in it. The play is divided into three acts. The title signifies the power of coercive, imposed silence of Leela Benare, the protagonist, which descends on her during her mock trial. She is charged with crime of infanticide in the mock trial. She is a young middle-class woman of 34 years, who is working as a school teacher to earn her livelihood. She is punctual, loved and appreciated by her students in school. One of her declarations to co-actor draws the applause from the feminists: “I never had been behind with my lesson! Exercises corrected on time too, not a bit of room for disapproval, I don’t give an inch of it to anyone!” (CPT 57). In her article *Tendulkar on his Own*
Terms, Shanta Gokhale remarks that ‘Leela Benare is young, single, unconventional, full of laughter, full of pride in her dedication to and skill in teaching, and always happy to attack hypocritical facades and watch them crumble. In her view, men aren’t superior beings by definition. They must prove themselves before they can begin to command her respect (Chaudhary and Rajan 81). She admits to Samant, a local villager, who escorts the amateur dramatic troupe members to the village hall, that little children are much better than the adults. She says: “They don’t have the blind pride of thinking they know everything. There is no nonsense stuffed in their heads. They scratch you till you bleed, then run away like cowards” (CPT 57). Grown-ups in her scheme of things lack the spirit of living with utmost dedication to life itself. Later, she condemns Damle, the man responsible for her pregnancy and also deceiving her, by saying:

I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went his way He didn’t want my mind, or my devotion- he didn’t care about them!

He was not a god. He was a man, for him everything was the body, for the body? That is all (CPT 118).

Benare enjoys the company of Samant, too, who accompanies her. Tendulkar has created an outspoken woman in her person. She admits to him that: “I felt even more wonderful coming here with you. I am so glad the others fell behind” (CPT 55). She has her own philosophy of life and loves her independent ways. Tendulkar has made her enjoy life to the fullest. She is critical of hypocrisy in everyone’s attitude. Benare is a very serious and confident woman, who hates hypocrisy and falsehood, loves life to the hilt and is passionate about living each moment intensely. In one of her conversations with Samant, she says:

Benare: I am the soul of seriousness! But I don’t see why one should go around all the time with the long face... we should laugh, we should play, we should sing! If we can and if they will let us, we should dance too. Shouldn’t have any false modesty or dignity? Or care for anyone! I mean it. When your life is over, do you think anyone will give you a bit of theirs? What do you say, Samant? Do you think they will?

Samant: You are quite right. The great sage Tukaram said... at least I think it was him...
Benare: Forget about the sage Tukaram. I say it-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 is a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious... (CPT 61).

A total foil to Leela Benare is Mrs. Kashikar, another female character who colludes with the patriarchal system, supposedly due to lack of economic power. Shanta Gokhale observes that “to retain a shred of self-esteem, the least she must do is to glorify her own state” making her “testimony against Benare such a bitter diatribe.” (Chaudhary and Rajan 83) Benare was smart, educated and good looking and was unmarried, all of which Mrs. Kashikar found objectionable and contemptible. How she has surreptitiously internalized the process of patriarchal dominion is what is revealed to us when she says this about Benare:

Anyone who really wants to can get married in a flash... when you get everything without marrying....they just want comfort. They could not care about responsibilities. In my time even if a girl was snub nosed, sallow hunchbacked or anything whatever, she could still got married. It's the sly new fashion of women earning that makes everything go wrong. That's how promiscuity has spread through our society... look how loudly she laughs, how she sings, dances, cracks jokes...and wandering alone with how many men, day in and day out (CPT 99-100).

That a woman’s economic dependence deprives her of any political control is one of the major feminist arguments. Mrs. Kashikar couldn’t have ever disclosed that she is at the receiving end of Mr. Kashikar’s continuous tirade of abuse and snubs. This is what makes her into a potential victim of a habitual victimizer, who asserts his rights of being a man and a husband over her. Confirming this internalization by a married Indian woman, John Stuart Mill states, ‘No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word’, ‘as a wife is’ (Ruthven 29).

Leela Benare doesn’t spare these criticizing men and even Mrs. Kashikar, and responds to them in the same tone. She introduces all her co-stars to Samant in their absence. She sarcastically refers to Mr. Kashikar as ‘Mr. Prime Objective’, Mrs. Kashikar as ‘Mrs. Hands that Rocks the Cradle’ and that the ‘Hands that Rocks the cradle has no cradle to rock’(CPT 59). They adopted Balu to get away from boredom and made a
slave out of him. She sarcastically introduces Sukhatme, one of her co-stars as: ‘An expert on the law. He’s such an authority on the subject; even a desperate client won’t go anywhere near him! He just sits alone in the barristers’ room at a court, swatting flies with legal precedents! (CPT 59). According to Ms. Benare, Ponkshe is ‘Scientist, Inter failed’ (CPT 59). She gets critical of even Prof. Damle: “And we have an intellectual too. That means someone who prides himself on his books, learning. But when there is a real life problem, away he runs, hides his head. He’s not here today. Won’t be coming, either? He won’t dare” (CPT 60).

The actual play was scheduled to be staged in the night. The other characters who want to have a rehearsal of the play, a pretext for the mock trial, eventually find an opportunity to dig up Leela’s past life. Sukhatme, one of the characters suggests the theater artists to make Ms. Benare the main accused in the mock trial, wherein she has to perform the role of a woman indicted of infanticide. Benare carries a child in her womb, and is condescendingly reminded of this fact by her co-actors. She is incessantly reminded by Kashikar of the traditions and the role she is expected to play in the society: “You’ve forgotten one thing. There is a Sanskrit proverb, ‘janani janmabhumishcha svargadapi gariyasi”. “Mother and the Motherland, both are even higher than heaven” (CPT 79). In her Stri Purusha Tulna, dealing with a full-fledged feminist argument, Tarabai Shinde ridicules all the men who used the shastras, Puranas and pothis to justify the superiority of women represented in mythologies (as qtd Feldhaus 205). The traditional role and images of women as ideals have been projected by males, making her state more pathetic. Tendulkar, on the contrary, challenges such notions by adding a touch of irony and sarcasm, especially when Leela Benare remarks: “Order, order! This is all straight out of a school composition book” (CPT 80).

Patriarchy, rule of the father, allows room not only for physical dominance, but also for psychological and emotional advantage of the male so that all possible avenues of female resistance are shut off. This is analogous to Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952), which talks about invisibility of black people, denial of equal opportunities, and apartheid. Tendulkar raises his voice against this apartheid against women. The relationship of Leela Benare with Prof. Damle is seen by other men only from one perspective, as all of them blame her and teach her the Gospel of morality and/or values. But the real question is: What about Prof. Damle or other male members who all secretly wish to possess Leela Benare, even lust for her? It is with a view to expose the duplicity and hypocrisy

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of men in general that Tendulkar’s has sought to re-inscribe the image of Leela Benare, a New Age Woman, in his play.

Men dominate speech everywhere, and they decide the rules for a woman’s articulation, too. It is the male taste that decides the agreeability and propriety of her utterances. The linguistic wherewithal with which he can possibly subjugate her is also in his control and complete possession. It is he who leads the fields of political power, administration, public relations and media, with all the parameters of judgment under his belt. Through the repression of the other, the male characters not only wish to reclaim their hegemonic position in Indian society, (in the process, acting as guardians and representatives of colonialism/imperialism), but they also get established as pawns and victims of the ordained patriarchal system. In course of the mock trial, Sukhatme (the lawyer) says, “Mr. Ponkshe, how would you define the moral conduct” (CPT 81). A male asks another male for the relevance and reasonable conduct of a woman in the society. Males in this play are domineering and ridicule their female counterpart with harsh comments. The Judge, Mr. Kashikar, orders Ms. Benare to abort her child. According to him, to have the child without marriage is against the tradition of Indian culture. The judgment passed against Ms. Benare seems to be absurd. Mr. Kashikar says:

The crimes you have committed are the most terrible. The morality which you have shown in forgiveness for them... through your conduct was the morality you were planning to impart to the youth of tomorrow. It must be said that the school officials have done a work of merit in deciding to remove you from the job... There is no forgiveness... No memento of your sin should remain for the future generation. Therefore the court hereby sentences that you shall live. But the child in your womb shall be destroyed... (CPT 67-68).

The other characters including Rokde and even Prof. Damle, in absentia, stand against Benare; witness to her several privations, which according to them are the result of her misdemeanor and transgression. On one such occasion, Sukhatme, the performing lawyer, poses very personal questions, which Benare has to answer in presence of the court: “Can you tell the court how you came to stay unmarried to such a mature - such an advanced - age?.. Let me frame my question somewhat differently. How many chances of marriage have you had so far in your life? And how did you miss them? Tell the court” (CPT 98).
Leela Benare does not respond to the questions posed to her. Rather she prefers to maintain silence. In fact, it would be apt to say, she is forced into silence. Analyzing the silencing of women, Robin Lakoff argues that it is directly related to allocation of power. Silencing is always political (As qtd Kira Hall 250). Being a dignified teacher, Benare fights and protests up to a point, but after that, her protest is of no use. What use is her raising the voice, when a woman is not ever going to heard? Whether it is Mahabharata or Silence! The Court is in Session; women’s voice is not heard. She is silenced, either by male gaze as mentioned by Laura Mulvey or her body is used as an instrument for controlling her language. Draupadi, the heroine of The Mahabharata was fiercely vocal and with her powerful articulation could silence the wise and the aged. When she was pawned in the game of dice/power, she lost her fierceness in face of immutable silence of the attendants; as all her desperate pleas for help had fallen on deaf ears.

While analyzing Tendulkar’s creativity in his portrayal of women characters, Veena Noble Dass confirms the importance of the absence of Prof. Damle in this play, especially when the charges of infanticide are being leveled against her. She states: “If he were present, the typical backbiting attitude of the self righteous Indian male would not have helped reveal the truth. Miss Benare was thrown into the dock and there she remained trying to yoke herself out of it, but trapped too murderously by the male vultures around her. Witness after witness, charges upon charges was heaped upon her. The defense lawyer was so frightened that he only asked for a little mercy on her behalf. Miss Benare who is on the offensive at the beginning found herself trapped at the close of the play” (as qtd Pandey and Barua 10).

In Tendulkar’s play, silence, at one level, characterizes the agony of muteness of the colonized Leela. The very act of silencing Leela reminds us of Helen Cixous’s description of a Chinese story in her essay Castration and Decapitation, where General Sun Tse’s decides to use the beheading of two women commanders as a war strategy that forces the rest into total compliance, and they never make a mistake of repeating that offence, again. It is a form of education, a conditioning that consists of trying to make a soldier out of a woman by force, the force that the history reserves for women, the “capital” force that is effectively “decapitation.” Women have no choice other than to be decapitated, and in any case, the moral is that if they don’t actually lose their heads by the sword, they only keep them on condition that they lose them- lose them, that is, to complete
silence, turned into automatons (Annette Kuhn 42-43). There are two images of Leela Benare, one of an extremely, fiercely articulate woman, and the other is that of a coercively silenced, decapitated woman. It is her second image that reminds us of Lacan’s notion of “phallocentrism”, which explains why a woman always exists outside language.

For G.C. Spivak the Kolkata born feminist, the subaltern as a female cannot be heard or read and she cannot speak either. She uncovers the instances of doubly oppressed native women caught between dominations of native patriarchy and foreign imperialist ideology. Whereas in her critique of Western Feminists writing, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in Third World Women argues that ‘discourse of representation should not be confused with material realities. Since the native woman is constructed with multiple social relationships and positioned as a product of different class, caste and cultural specificities, it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women voice’ (as qtd Ashcroft 44). A woman here protests only in form of resolutions that are shattered with a passage of time. There are occasions in the play, where Benare gets tormented by the comments of the other characters.

Ms. Benare has been loyal to her profession. She declares in the final act that she has always kept her professional life away from her personal life. She also justifies her role of being a teacher. Ms. Benare states: “I just put my whole life into working with the children… I loved it, I taught them well… Emotion is something people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. It was burning through me. But do you know? I did not teach any of this to those tender, young souls. I swallowed the poison, but did not let the drop of it touch them. I taught them beauty. I taught them purity. I cried inside and made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair and I taught them hope” (CPT 117).

Benare is a progressive contemporary woman, who despite being psychologically tortured strives to search for meaning in her life and existence. Tendulkar debunks the myth that women’s subordinate status is a result of their inherent psychological and biological traits by revealing through the trial how the inner workings of the male-domination are actually put into practice. (Maya Pandit 9) Benare, the principal character in the play, is as sprightly, rebellious and assertive as the heroines of Shakespeare romantic comedies…Of course, Benare is a lovely spark from the thunder bolt of Tendulkar. She is a ‘new woman’ pleading for freedom from the social norms…” (as qtd Dhawan 36).
It can be claimed that, though Indian patriarchy sandbags women into silence, it simultaneously gives them a powerful instrument with which the "weaker sex" can threaten the allegedly stable identities that men enact or legislate about. In his construction of textual gender identities, it is these patriarchal codes of silence that Tendulkar plays with. In the male-oriented system of signs, woman's meanings are distorted and prevaricated; her truth misinterpreted and falsified; and for her rights, she must get concurrence from a super male ego. Her voice is ignored, unheard or contradicted. "The contradiction between women's centrality and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition" (Lerner 5).

Kashikar, the man sitting in the patriarchal judgment seat in the play, usurps a higher position in the hierarchy with the help of other males and presents Leela 'the other' as deceitful and indulgent. Accordingly, he controls her by subjugating her to his own imperial power. In this way, his speech or the decision announced by him in the mock court trial adheres to the father-text, the male paradigm of thinking in colonial India. The father-text must be understood as a set of normative rules, which, having been socially, legally and culturally sanctioned, not only invest total control in male citizens but also require from them an acceptable conduct. The ultimate demonstration of Kashikar's (representative of all males) deafness to the female (Leela's) voice is articulated when looking at his watch, he says, "The time is up. The accused has no statement to make. In any case, it would be of no use" (CPT 118). This refusal to listen to someone is closely related to the cultural deafness of men to female self-articulation and testifies to a deliberate separation of the two discourses, which, socially imposed, prevent their mutual exchange and influence, thus guarding the patriarchal hierarchy of gendered subjects. Contemptuous of Leela Benare, his patriarchal views are discernible as he claims that the marriageable age for a girl should be lowered down to their puberty.

Kashikar. All right. She's not less than thirty four. I'll give it to custom of child marriage. Marry off the girls before puberty. All this promiscuity will come to a full stop. If anyone has ruined our society it's Agarkar and Dhondo Keshav Karve. That's my frank opinion, Sukhatme, my frank opinion (CPT 98).
Various women characters in Tendulkar’s theatre undergo a series of torments and tortures as the victims of the hegemonic power-structure. In her seminal work, *Colonialism/Post colonialism* (1998), Ania Loomba theorizes that the female body is an object of male sexual fantasy and desire, which has been theatrically presented by Tendulkar as a close scrutinizer. Tendulkar’s women are essentially marginalized objects in the interlocking system of ‘sexual politics’ and ‘power politics’. There is undoubtedly politics involved in making women silent and not allowing their voice to be heard. This is deliberately done by the dominant voice, the masculine one. Those who are in power deconstruct the conventional thought and values. It is evident through the evolution of women’s silence that ‘being silent’ and ‘becoming silenced’ are two entirely different things.

Vijay Tendulkar admits that his perception of reality, drawn from personal experiences of life, forms the basis of his writings. Unlike the “Raw realism of John Osborne and Joan Littlewood, which gave expression to marginal voices in England at this time, in Bombay” realism ....carried, not the voices from neglected margins of society, but from the mainstream, the educated middle class, the upholders of norms, and also those who carefully defied them, in whom was invested the responsibility for creating a modern society in their newly independent country” (Gokhale 116). In an interview *Face to Face with Vijay Tendulkar*, Wadikar shares Tendulkar’s viewpoint:

A man can superficially enter into any relationship and step out of it, but so is not the case of a woman. Even if she is a downright feminist, progressive, conscious, having put up the relationship for some time, she cannot come out of it like changing clothes. The relationship is life-long and goes deep into the very skin. Many a time, it acts as a hurdle for her. Even now, it is happening, repeatedly. When she has been advised for divorce, when women’s groups are formed from demonstration against her husband, (whether in the play or in actual life), who has set her on torture, she is reluctant to act, Why is it so? Because she is still entangled in that relationship (Wadikar 150).

The construction of an ideal Indian woman had both political and religious aspects — political aspect being the outcome of colonial rule which made Indians defensive thus constantly reaffirming Indian cultural superiority, a part of political agenda. The ‘New Woman’ became the object of ridicule
as some of the writers made Western woman stand against traditional Indian woman. Tendulkar believes that women themselves ought to be determined to liberate themselves; otherwise, there remains a vacuum which is very painful for a woman. For him, men and women are only two elements psychologically with a superfluous distinction. The availability of these elements varies from one individual to other. On his feminist stance about his writing, he states that some men have feminine sensibility; surprisingly, some women don’t have that as the sensibility doesn’t seem to be shared, which, in fact, is shared (Wadikar 152).

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Traditional Indian cultural narratives are insidious and serve to exemplify individual identity thereby analyzing its intricacies. Indian woman as a wife and mother who is nurturing, obedient, forbearing, soft-spoken, and the primary transmitters of the national culture is portrayed through these cultural narratives. In modern global world the integration of various cultures form the identity of human being and this amalgamation adds another feature to identity formation of women in particular. In Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Kanyadan* (1983) audience are introduced with a nuclear family where the relationships of its members with one another advocate democratic attitude in their personalities. “Kanyadaan”, the father’s gift of the daughter in marriage to a suitable groom, is a central ritual within the Hindu marriage ceremony, completed before the couples recite their wedding vows around the ceremonial fire. By offering their loyalty and obedience to deserving male guardians, women thus earn their respect and protection; the object of this reciprocity is to create the ideal family through which society may successfully perpetuate itself (Dharwadker 286-87).

In Tendulkar’s *Kanyadan*, the domestic and social depiction of this ancient norm collides against existing social practices. The very purpose of this practice has been to subject patriarchal control, encoded gender roles and caste distribution. In Hindu religion the term “kanyadan” has colossal significance as it is related to custom and traditions. Under this ceremony a girl is believed to perform all duties towards her husband and is supposed to remain in his home, till her death. The social position—defined by gender, class, and race—affects the outlook of an individual on cultural organizations. He adheres to the ethics and interpretations that are promoted by rituals/customs/rites and other socially produced cultural
forms. The feminists see many cultural discourses as impositions, pushing women and men to behaviour compatible with structures and institutions. The ceremony or custom of Kanyadaan which for an Indian woman is an important ritual would not let her leave her husband’s home whatever may be the situation thus shaping her personality. Tendulkar questions this religious custom in his play which is an important asset for the formation and construction of identity of an Indian Woman. This paper will explore Identity formation of Indian Women owing to social institutions which act as catalysts thus naturalizing her exploitation. An effort would also be made to understand the (politics of) construction of identity of the woman protagonist named Jyoti, who followed the footsteps of her father’s ideals.

The play starts with the announcement made by Jyoti, the twenty-two-year old daughter of Nath and Seva Deolalikar about her decision of marrying Arun Athavale, a young aspiring writer and journalist from the Dalit community. The decision comes out of a short get together and does not invite any real objection from family members. A bit of reluctance is shown by the mother who asks Jyoti to rethink her decision of marrying Arun. Tendulkar critically analyzes the institution of marriage and its relevance in Indian context, though here it turns out to be an experiment in his efforts to proceed against caste issues. Through the course of the play we see that Jyoti, the protagonist though has a voice, it is not of raising question but of an obedient daughter. Ramesh Dhongade calls her ‘loose, hollow and lacking backbone’ (as qtd Wadikar 31). Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nath, Jyoti’s father is very happy at the proposal made by his daughter and says that: “but if my daughter decided to marry into high caste it would have not pleased me much” (CPT 504). The words of Nath clearly suggest that he wishes his daughter to be considerate towards his feelings and he is trying to give a different shape to his daughter’s personality. If Jyoti, the father’s daughter has decided to choose her life partner she also has the mettle to declare the fact to her parents. There is an affirmative response from her father for her decision and he calls Jyoti with parental affection to discuss the issue of marriage. He says to his wife:

Seva, our Jyoti here, she wants to tell us something. To us means—to you and to me. And we are simply never able to meet these poor
children together. Therefore this girl has taken an appointment with us today. Fifteen minutes. [To Jyoti] Only fifteen, right...? We will now talk to her. Sorry. We will listen to her...[to Jyoti] Right? Yes. So now [to Seva] Seva, please sit down calmly for fifteen minutes.

....

First we listen to you, everything else afterwards. We do so much for the world, and we don’t have time for our own children?! We should be ashamed to call ourselves [Jyoti’s] parents. (CPT 502-03)

Though Jyoti belongs to an educated family but it can be presumed that she is unaware about the importance of marriage even at a marriageable age. She takes up the issue in a very casual manner as if testing herself against life itself. It is also suggested by her demeanor that she has decided for her marriage in haste and ignoring consequences. Still she asks for her marriage: I don’t even know if it is a matter of such importance or not. I am still unable to make up my mind...that is...I have decided to get married (CPT 503). The hesitation while declaring her decision is not out of the distance from her parents rather it is an experiment of the author himself. Jyoti too asserts that it is not her decision to go for this marriage since it happens haphazardly. She therefore becomes a medium, a representation in the hands of playwright experiencing the vicissitude of life.

Women’s identity construction posits at least two positions for women in relation with discourse: either as objects of male discourse or as subjects/agents of their own. Historically too identity question and feminism have always been the most discussed issues in the literary world because their very polemical nature makes them open to endless arguments. Thus, approaching the question of identity from a feminist perspective, feminists and women writers construct a sense of unified selfhood, a rational, coherent, and an effective identity. They all seek a “subjective identity”, a sense of effective agency, and a history for women that they had been denied because of male domination. The status of a woman as the eternal victim of the social order contributes to the perpetuation of the stereotypical image of woman as a subject deprived of agency. Feminism has particular constituency (woman) and a particular goal (liberation). Carolyn Heilbrun in Reinventing Womanhood inadvertently illustrates some current confusion about female identity and claims that successful women are “male-identified” but that it is a “failure” for a “woman to take her identity from her man” (46). Tendulkar
substantiates the implicit call made by Simone de Beauvoir to woman to assert her autonomy in defining herself against men. John Charvet in *Feminism* describes the essence of Beauvoir’s ideas thus: “The goal is not so much to claim that man has his rights. Nor to participate with men in a common socialist liberation, but to win her existence as free subject by defining her own identity, giving herself a past and creating for herself solidarity with other women” (100).

For Chodorow boys and girls are produced, not on the basis of anatomical distinction between the sexes, as reflected in Freud’s Theory of Sexuality, but on the basis of object relationships and the cultural construction of family dynamics. The family introduced in the present play by Tendulkar corresponds to the idea of Chodorow of personality formation. Girls follow their mothers inadvertently and they are made to prepare for their conjugal knot and course of their future life. Here Jyoti, the daughter of the house is given a clear advantage over her male sibling, Jaiprakash. It is the son who prepares tea and becomes a helping hand in domestic chores whereas the daughter is awarded due freedom of thought and action. For a marital match in Indian context proper queries are made and generally these questions are posed from the groom side. Such a practice points to the nonchalant attitude towards the feminine gender in traditional Indian culture. The mismatch of Jyoti and Arun in the present play corresponds to the contrasting upbringing of the duo. Seva, the mother seems to be more understanding and worrying for the future of her daughter whereas the daughter feels more inclined to her father’s ideology. The concerning mother however asks a number of questions from the boy prior to their marriage:

What does he do? Where does he live?... Where did he meet you?... His parents, what do they do?... How many children do they have?... What does his elder brother do?... The other brothers, what do they do?... There must be debts as well?... How long have you known him?... Is the boy intelligent?... What is he like as a person?... Is he trustworthy? (CPT 505-06)

The mother is quite anxious about her only daughter: But your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this overnight is just not possible. But is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it (CPT 509). She also confirms to her daughter the obligation in marital contract for sticking to one’s decision throughout: Saying something is easy, but
doing it is very difficult.... And later there is no chance for a woman to hide or to run away (CPT 509). Seva is aware of cultural deformity which can foster the problem of identity crisis causing problem in marital disharmony. She is rational and pragmatic whereas Jyoti and Nath are idealists. Jyoti asserts: I made a commitment and now I can't run away...I will marry him.... My decision is final (CPT 525). The kind of confidence and her voice regarding her choice clearly indicates that she is well aware about her decisions nonetheless it is product of the ideology embedded in her personality.

The dominant male in Jyoti’s father gets ready to experiment with his daughter while agreeing at the proposal of this marriage in order to fulfill his political ambitions. V. Geeta in *Patriarchy* discusses that in a patriarchal society women have to struggle to be educated, to have property made over to them and to choose their partners in marriage. For men, these choices appear more given, less fraught and even flexible (5). Nath experiments this inter-caste match apprehensively only to get collapsed. He says:

> Look, Seva, society can’t be transformed through words alone. We have to act as catalyst in this transformation. The old social reformers did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow remarriage. Many of them actually married widows. Why did they do it...? That was also an experiment, a difficult experiment. But they dared to risk it. (CPT 524)

The mother does think the other way for her daughter and refutes his argument. She opposes her husband by stating that males have different opinions:

> Does it mean that my daughter’s life is to be used for an experiment? Is that what you are saying? You may have your views. I can’t accept them. I am her mother. If you ask me I will say that Jyoti can never be happy with that man.... If you like take it from me in writing. (CPT 524)

The concern of mother is overlooked as Arun, Jyoti’s husband proves to be a wife beater, drunkard and useless person. Nath, her father in an effort to save this marriage proposes to the family members that the son-in-law should be invited to stay with them in their own house. For him whatever happens, it should be happened before their eyes and it may work as a kind of restraint (CPT 536). A typical patriarchal male may propose for such an equation as suggested by her father. A possible restraint on Arun’s behavior in presence of his family members attests his
fragility. In the due course he even compels Jyoti to go with her husband
since he is firmly bound with his ideals citing his belief: No man is
fundamentally evil; he is good. He has certain propensities towards evil.
They must be transformed, completely uprooted and destroyed. And
then the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the good
slumbering within man (CPT 563). For him the reformation of society
needs certain sacrifices as maintained by the nation builders. The
experiment of an inter-caste marriage is only one step for such kind of
a social development and he wants to start it from his own house with
an initiative from his daughter. He doesn’t want this experiment to fail
as the revelation is made in his passionate conversation with his wife:

Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! This dream which is
struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust before our eyes!
We will have to do something. We must save this marriage. Not
necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake…. This is not just a question of our
daughter’s life, Seva, this has…a far wider significance…this
experiment is a very precious experiment. (CPT 537)

According to Nancy Chodorow, in the family structure, “mothers are and
have been the child’s primary caretaker, socializer, and inner object;
fathers are secondary objects for boys and girls” (Rivkin & Ryan 470). On
the one hand there is Jyoti who is free to take the decision of her marriage
with mere liking while on the other hand there is her husband who has
grown up watching torture of her drunkard father. For Chodorow however
a male child learns the domination from his father with a close identification
when social structure is taken into consideration. Arun naturally learns the
domination of his father who comes drunk late in the evening and beats his
mother. It is the same treatment he gives to his wife Jyoti. At one instant
in the play he apologizes from Nath and Seva for his bad temper and ill-
treatment of his wife and finds faults with his own personality:

When have I claimed that I am civilized and cultured like you
people? From childhood I have seen my father come home drunk
every day, and beat my mother half dead, seen her cry her heart out.
Even now I hear the echoes of her broken sobs. No one was there
to wipe her tears. My poor mother! She didn’t have a father like
Bhai, nor a mother like you. (CPT 540)

Jyoti complains in a philosophical manner to her father when she
understands the full circle of life. It is not possible for her to back out
from her promise to her ‘self’ her identity. When her father agrees for a
felicitation meeting for her husband, Arun, she gets confrontation with him for his ‘hireling speech’ at the occasion. The very values he had instilled in his children, she tells him, have made it impossible for her to turn her back on Arun, but she cannot survive in Arun’s world if she continues to inhabit her parents’ civilized sphere (Dharwadker 288). Her inability to return to her paternal house also corresponds to the internalization of cultural values for a woman in Indian social system. She clamors:

I don’t have the time, nor a cool head. I have to go and get on with the struggle. Come and watch Arun at night when he staggers home roaring drunk, if you have the guts. There is a savage beast in his eyes, his lips, his face...in every single limb.... I have to accept him as he is, because I cannot reject him. (CPT 563-64)

Some feminists have argued that women in patriarchal societies have been induced to adopt a depreciatory image of them. They have internalized a picture of their own inferiority, so that even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they may be incapable of taking advantage of the new opportunities (as qtd Tolan 39). But here Jyoti gives it to her father’s teaching through all her life for not bowing down to circumstances:

The truth is, you knew very well that man and his inherent nature are never really two different things. Both are one, and inseparable. Either you accept it in totality, or you reject it if you can. Very often you don’t have a choice. Putting man’s beastliness to sleep, and awakening the godhead within is an absurd notion. You made me waste twenty years of my life before I could discover this. I had to learn it through my own experience. (CPT 563)

Home is the place where all the values and education of life are imparted to children and they are considered to be most vulnerable thus forming a shape whatever they acquire from family. As Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” argues:

It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable,’ squeezed between the family State apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state. (155-56)
Althusser further notes the “ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a “birth” i.e. the forms of family ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal) in which the unborn child is expected: it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father’s Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is always—already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived (176).

Jyoti too is expected to follow this configuration and she lives a life of illusion as propounded by Nath, her father since he wants to make his home a place for democracy. The realistic exposé of life is not made known to her thereby making Jyoti aggravated in the end as her dreams and reality come into clash when she frequently becomes the victim of violence by her so-called educated husband.

The streaks of independent thought or assertion or protest which was less visible in the beginning finds its place by the end of the play where the playwright through Jyoti questions the social and patriarchal structure which force the woman to succumb to family and societies’ wish. Ibsen’s Nora, a beautiful lady and mother of three children is referred to as ‘squirrel’ by her husband thereby exemplifying the typical family structure finds confirmation with Trevor May who in her *An Economic and Social History of England* explains:

> The role of husband and wife, as indeed of children and servants, were strictly delineated, and all were assured of their place in a hierarchal structure. The undisputed head was the husband […]. Wives were subordinated (legally as well as socially) to their husbands, as were children to their parents. In the idealized version all were happy in their allotted place, but in reality the home could subject its members to insufferable pressures. (204)

But Jyoti’s realization and protest poses a question to dominating father who wants her to start life all afresh and think over it again. A cursory looks validates it to be the ‘internalization’ of patriarchal structure but a feminist angle points towards the stability and determination of Jyoti with her own provisions. Jyoti is willing to rather put up with a marital life of misery and humiliation and doesn’t leave her husband:

> You think about it, I have to stop thinking and learn to live. I think a lot. Suffer a lot. Not from the blows [of husband], but from my thoughts, I cannot bear them much longer…forgive me, Bhai, I said things I shouldn’t have. But I couldn’t help it. I was deeply offended.
by your hypocrisy. I thought: why did this man have to inject and
drug us every day with truth and goodness? And if he can get away
from it at well, what right had he to close all our options? (CPT 565)

If Jyoti would have remained fragile she would have bowed down to the
circumstances and join her parents. But she refuses to come to the house
of her father with a certainty:

No. When I come here I begin to hate my world. I want to ignore that
truth which I have come to perceive, though rather late in life. I want
to become blind once again. Hereafter I have to live in that world,
which is mine...[pausing] and die there. Say sorry to Ma. Tell her
none of you should come to my house...this is my order. (CPT 566)

Finally, Jyoti refuses to go back to her father’s home. It is her way of
avenging her father who brought her up to believe that no man is evil,
that some instincts within a man could be evil subject to correction and
modification. Shailaja B. Wadikar in Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer
Playwright states that Kanyadan may be seen as an indirect comment on
the evil consequences of father’s obsession with idealism and husband’s
obsession with caste consciousness (3). Towards the end of the play she
comes to identify her futile ‘self’ in ordained patriarchal structure though
in a different house which is of her husband as she states:

I have my husband. I am not a widow. Even if I become one I shan’t
knock at your door. I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devlalikar now, I am
Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger. ...don’t touch me. Fly from my
shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable values. [Jyoti
goes away. The latch clicks as the door bangs shut.] (CPT 566)

When Ibsen’s heroine of A Doll’s House left her home and family ‘to
think things out’ for herself and ‘get things clear’ the noise of door
slamming behind her is said to reverberate the whole of Europe (as qtd
Tancred 218). Tendulkar’s Jyoti ‘slams the door’ but that of her father’s
house may be to find solutions. But the playwright, Tendulkar has done
his work by sowing seeds of protest in Jyoti and her rejection of her
father’s values and excessive idealism. Nora a promising heroic figure
becomes ‘a threat for the family’s bourgeois equilibrium’ for borrowing
money is barred from her children and marital bed. Nora then seriously
begins to question the authority and values of those who control women’s
lot (as qtd Tancred 219). Nora’s husband Torvald is a ‘good’ match by
nineteenth century standards as Nath, Jyoti’s father is shown to be a
‘perfect’ father figure with democratic ideals in twentieth century. Nora
rejects her husband’s concept of marriage whereas Jyoti rejects her
father’s superficial idealism, values, education. While breaking ties with the family Jyoti reminds her father that she is following his principles into practice she reverses the very notion of marriage and Kanyadan. Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in *Theatres of Independence* states that the ritual meaning of ‘Kanyadan’ undergoes a double reversal [as in the play] the father condemns his daughter to a far worse than death by giving her away thoughtlessly “to a man who has no good qualities,” but it is the daughter who reminds him of the irrevocable nature of the gift (289). Tendulkar as playwright has not specified any solutions here but has heaved questions vis-à-vis Jyoti’s going back. Tendulkar’s heroine has been a victim because she has internalized the idealism and cannot come out of the web of family values inculcated in her from childhood and thus accepting her suffering and her identity again becomes a part of social values and norms from which she cannot break away with.

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