



International Journal of Innovations in Liberal Arts



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14028395>

Representation of Power Relations in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*

Girija Suri

Amity School of Liberal Arts
Amity University Haryana, India

Received: JUL. 15, 2024

Accepted: AUG. 12, 2024

Published: AUG. 31, 2024

Abstract

This paper explores the representation of power relations in Vijay Tendulkar's plays *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, analyzing how authority and social hierarchies are constructed and maintained. In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, power is depicted as a tool of corruption and control, where political and religious structures are manipulated to uphold dominance and exploit the masses. The paper analyzes how Ghashiram's transformation from victim to oppressor underscores the cyclical nature of power abuse, revealing how those once marginalized can become instruments of tyranny when given authority. On the other hand, *Silence! The Court is in Session* presents a critique of patriarchal power, with its focus on the public shaming of Miss Leela Benare during a mock trial. The paper shows how the legal and social frameworks are employed to subjugate and judge women, emphasizing the oppressive forces that govern personal freedom and morality. Both plays reflect Tendulkar's concern with the ways in which individuals are complicit in sustaining oppressive systems, whether through politics, religion, or social norms. By examining these power dynamics, the paper offers insights into the broader questions of authority, morality, and societal control in Tendulkar's works.

Keywords: Power relations, patriarchy, oppression, Vijay Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*

Introduction

Renowned theatre artist Vijay Tendulkar has made a lasting impression on the Indian dramatic scene with his perceptive and socially conscious performances. Tendulkar, who was born in

1928, was a well-known dramatist, screenwriter, and social critic who was renowned for his dedication towards tackling pressing problems facing Indian society. Over the course of his multi-decade career, he wrote famous pieces that subverted established conventions and hierarchies of power. Beyond his artistic abilities, Tendulkar made a significant addition to Indian theatre by actively engaging with the socio-political milieu of his era and utilising the stage as a potent forum for criticism and commentary. Tendulkar is renowned for his uncompromising examination of social inequalities. His plays, such as *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, are still relevant today because they demonstrate his enduring legacy as a playwright who dared to challenge and reshape the conventions of Indian theatre.

The plays *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* are cornerstones of Vijay Tendulkar's repertoire, representing his dedication to delving into the intricacies of morality, power, and social institutions in post-colonial India. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, which was first published in 1972, is set in Pune in the eighteenth century and tells the story of political power struggles and the fallout from unbridled ambition. The drama tells the story of Ghashiram, a humble outsider who rises to power only to be used as a pawn in the vicious political schemes of the ruling elite. On the other hand, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, written in 1967, examines the power relationships in both society and the legal system. The drama, which is set in a courtroom, examines the oppressive influences that loom large in the lives of its characters, especially the female lead. As Tendulkar's story progresses through a fictitious trial, the deeply ingrained gender prejudices and cultural norms that guide the characters' relationships become increasingly apparent. The courtroom is used in the play as a microcosm of larger societal injustices and the title itself captures the deafening stillness that frequently accompanies institutional tyranny.

Despite having different settings and topics, Tendulkar's characteristic method of exposing the subtleties of power dynamics is evident in both plays. In the backdrop of a quickly changing post-independence India, Tendulkar challenges viewers to face difficult realities about power, morality, and the human condition through engrossing characters and engaging storylines.

Depiction of Power Dynamics in the Writings of Tendulkar

Ghashiram Kotwal and "*Silence! The Court is in Session*," two of Vijay Tendulkar's plays, deftly reveal the complex dynamics of power relations in Indian society. Tendulkar analyses the nuances of power in these works, which provide as an engaging prism through which to view the complicated relationships between authority, exploitation, and resistance.

In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar deftly analyses the relationships between political power in Pune throughout the eighteenth century. The protagonist of the story is Ghashiram, a weak outsider who, driven by ambition, becomes the Kotwal, or chief of police. Tendulkar illustrates how the governing class manipulates and takes advantage of Ghashiram, using the city as a pawn in their political scheme. The play is a critique of the moral concessions people make in order to go up the hierarchical ladder and the misuse of power.

In addition, "*Ghashiram Kotwal*" explores gender dynamics by showing a patriarchal society in which women are frequently objectified and marginalised. Ghashiram's daughter is one example of a female character who must live up to social standards, which highlights the disparities in power that exist in society. Tendulkar asks the audience to consider the

intersectionality of power—the way that political, class, and gender identities interact to influence people's experiences inside the social structure—through the development of his characters and storyline.

Tendulkar changes the emphasis to institutional power in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, particularly inside the legal system. The drama takes place in a courtroom, which functions as a miniature representation of the power structures in society. Tendulkar uses the stage of a mock trial to highlight the repressive forces in place, especially those that are gender-based. The interactions between the characters and the drama playing out in the courtroom highlight the ingrained prejudices, moral preconceptions, and social norms that shape the lives of the accused—especially the female lead.

Both plays depict power dynamics in a complex way that goes beyond the straightforward opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed. The moral ambiguity that Tendulkar's characters face draws attention to the nuanced nature of power relations. The dramatist emphasises how power can be a tool for both emancipation and a force of oppression by using symbolic and metaphorical components to enhance the examination of power. *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* by Vijay Tendulkar provide a detailed picture of the dynamics of power in Indian society. Tendulkar calls the spectator to consider the complex nature of power and the moral and ethical ramifications that these power structures entail by means of deft character development, provocative storylines, and an acute awareness of societal quirks.

Vijay Tendulkar intentionally places his storylines inside certain historical and cultural contexts in both *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, which amplifies the impact of power dynamics within the plays to a greater degree. The events of *Ghashiram Kotwal* take place against the backdrop of Pune in the 18th century, a period that was characterised by the rule of the Maratha Empire. Due to the fact that it represents the political and social institutions that were prevalent during that time period, the setting becomes extremely important while attempting to comprehend power relations. The city of Pune, which is located at the crossroads of political manoeuvring and cultural shifts, serves as a microcosm for Tendulkar's investigation of the misuse and manipulation of power. On the other hand, *Silence! The Court is in Session* takes place in a more modern environment, which reflects the socioeconomic shifts that have occurred in India since the country gained its freedom. Symbolising the institutionalisation of power and justice, the courtroom serves as the primary stage for the performance. The selection of this location plays a significant role in developing an understanding of the complex power dynamics that exist within the legal system and society as a whole. In this setting, characters are forced to contend not only with the legal ramifications of their actions, but also with the moral and societal repercussions of those actions.

Tendulkar's investigation of power is significantly influenced by the nature of the sociopolitical environment that existed during the time when these plays were being written. The drama *Ghashiram Kotwal* was written in the early 1970s, a time period in India that was marked by political unrest and social action. The play addresses topics of governmental corruption and power struggles that were relevant to the present scene, and it resonates with the turbulent conditions that were occurring at the time. Tendulkar, by means of his narrative, offers a critical perspective on the misuse of power. He does this by making parallels between the historical setting of the play and the political context of his own day. The drama *Silence!*

The Court is in Session, which was written in 1967, perfectly portrays the fervour of post-independence India, when the country was struggling to define its identity and the standards of society and culture. In the midst of discussions on women's rights, the play is a reflection of the shifting dynamics inside Indian culture. It also calls into question the traditional gender roles that have been established. Tendulkar is able to create a story that not only addresses the specific concerns that are present inside the judicial system, but also deals with broader societal developments and the impact that these transitions have on power structures. This is made possible by his thorough observation of the socio-political climate.

Tendulkar is able to do a masterful job of incorporating the effect of historical events into the fabric of his plays. When it comes to "Ghashiram Kotwal," the historical context of the rise and collapse of the Maratha empire helps as a basis for comprehending the power conflicts that are depicted in the tale. A detailed portrayal of how historical events create power dynamics is provided by the play, which features individuals and events that are influenced by the political complexities of the time period. In a similar manner, Tendulkar draws inspiration for *Silence! The Court is in Session* from the sociological shifts that occurred when the country gained its independence, including the developing discourse on the rights of women. As a reflection of the larger transformations that occurred in India's sociopolitical landscape throughout the middle of the 20th century, the play illustrates the conflict that exists between ancient customs and the new expectations being developed in society. Tendulkar's investigation of power is made more poignant and thought-provoking by the inclusion of this historical context, which offers additional layers of complexity to the power dynamics that are present within the narrative.

Power Structures in *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*

Throughout the course of *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar delves deeply into the mechanisms of political power, revealing Ghashiram's progression from an outsider to the prominent position of Kotwal. The fact that Ghashiram was initially vulnerable and an outsider, which makes him prone to manipulation, is a defining characteristic of his climb to power. His elevation is not just the outcome of merit; rather, it is the result of the ruling class' crafty exploitation of his goals. His rising to power is a consequence of this. This highlights the malleability of power dynamics and the concessions that individuals make in order to obtain and maintain authority. Tendulkar provides an illustration of how the political landscape creates an atmosphere in which power may be acquired through opportunism and collaboration.

Ghashiram is used as a pawn in the political manoeuvrings of the governing elite, which sheds light on the exploitation and manipulation by the ruling elite. For the purpose of advancing its goal, the ruling class employs Ghashiram in a strategic manner. This is motivated by both self-interest and the need to keep control. The story told by Tendulkar highlights the systemic nature of political power and reveals the harsh strategies that are used to maintain influence. Ghashiram's path serves as a sad commentary on the intricate web of power ties, which depicts the darker aspects of political manoeuvring. This web is characterised by individuals being exploited and discarded by those who are in positions of authority.

Furthermore, Tendulkar presents a cast of female characters in *Ghashiram Kotwal* who negotiate a society that is rife with power inequities. Particular female characters exhibit agency and resilience in spite of the constraints that are imposed on them by patriarchal beliefs and standards. An example of this would be the fact that Ghashiram's daughter defies the norms

of society by exhibiting a degree of independence that was extraordinary for women during her era. Through his representation of these women, Tendulkar is able to challenge the conventional gender roles that have been established, while exposing the possibility of agency even under repressive power structures. The female characters provide a contribution to the more comprehensive investigation of power, demonstrating that resistance and agency are not limited to a certain gender.

The drama sheds light on the widespread influence that patriarchal structures have on the female characters. It is a reflection of the larger cultural norms of the 18th-century setting that women in *Ghashiram Kotwal* are frequently subjected to objectification and marginalisation. Tendulkar's portrayal sheds light on the covert ways in which patriarchal power operates, exerting influence over the lives of female characters and restricting their ability to make their own decisions. It is when gender dynamics cross with political power that the intersectionality of power becomes obvious. This highlights the compounding consequences of several layers of oppression. Tendulkar encourages the audience to engage in critical analysis of the power disparities that are inherent in the social fabric of the play. He does this by inviting the audience to contemplate the repercussions of long-standing patriarchal institutions or hierarchies.

Both in *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar portrays a range of reactions from characters who are attempting to deal with repressive power systems. The rise to power of Ghashiram is characterised by a readiness to conform and exploit, illustrating how people may be prepared to make concessions to repressive regimes in order to further their own personal interests. Characters in *Silence! The Court is in Session* on the other hand are forced to contend with repressive forces that are embedded inside the legal system. They react with a combination of rebellion and obedience, which is reflective of the complexity involved in negotiating hierarchy and power hierarchies. Tendulkar provides a complex analysis of human responses to repressive authority via the portrayal of people who, when confronted with injustice, either give in to it, fight it vocally, or engage in covert acts of rebellion.

Throughout the course of "Silence! The Court is in Session," the characters in the novel engage in a more overt form of resistance within the confines of the legal system, calling into question the authority that is held within the courtroom. These acts of resistance, on the other hand, typically come at a great personal cost, as the protagonists struggle to deal with the repercussions of rejecting existing power systems. Tendulkar sheds light on the sacrifices that individuals make when fighting oppressive situations by analysing the difficult balance that exists between resistance and survival while confronting oppressive forces.

Tendulkar explores the intersectionality of power in both plays, drawing attention to the interlocking oppressive structures that the characters are subjected to all throughout the plays. Throughout the course of *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the protagonists traverse many types of oppression concurrently, which brings to light the intersectionality of gender, class, and political power. Not only do women, such as Ghashiram's daughter, have to contend with gender-based prejudices, but they also have to contend with the larger society standards that are imposed by political and socioeconomic systems. In the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the characters go through the experience of the intersectionality of gender prejudice within the judicial system. This means that the repercussions of their acts are formed not just

by their gender but also by the expectations which society has for them. The intricacy of power dynamics is brought to light by Tendulkar's investigation of overlapping systems of oppression. This investigation demonstrates that individuals are subjected to a multitude of limitations that are based on different aspects of their identity. A narrative that goes beyond basic depictions is crafted by Tendulkar via the examination of issues of oppression and resistance. This narrative presents a multifaceted tapestry of human responses to power. The audience is encouraged to contemplate the complex relationship that exists between power systems, resistance, and the repercussions that result from questioning oppressive standards via the many performances.

Both *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* feature characters who, in their own unique ways, struggle against oppressive authority systems. There is a range of activities that individuals take in response to political persecution in the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*, spanning from compliance to insurrection. In the beginning, Ghashiram was an outsider who was looking for inclusion. However, he eventually gave in to the deceptive activities of the ruling class. On the other hand, characters such as Ghashiram's daughter and other marginalised persons exhibit varied degrees of resistance, which helps them challenge the repressive existing quo. In the play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the protagonists are subjected to persecution from both society and the legal system. In particular, the accused lady navigates the harsh atmosphere of the trial, demonstrating perseverance in the face of prejudice and judgements from society. Tendulkar depicts a wide variety of answers, bringing to light the intricate ways in which individuals have to deal with and manage repressive power structures.

Conclusion

Ghashiram Kotwal and *Silence! The Court is in Session* are two of the significant works that Vijay Tendulkar has produced. In these works, the detailed investigation of power relations inside Indian culture is presented as a gripping narrative tapestry. The profound comprehension of historical settings that Tendulkar possesses makes it possible for him to conduct complex assessments of political power, gender dynamics, and the intersectionality of suppression. A variety of emotions, ranging from acceptance to revolt, is displayed by the characters in both plays as they struggle with repressive systems. By employing powerful symbolism and metaphor, Tendulkar expands the scope of the investigation of power, so encouraging viewers to contemplate the intricate relationship that exists between authority and morality. Tendulkar's capacity to initiate critical talks about societal standards and the human experience is demonstrated by the fact that these plays continue to have an influence on current audiences, which demonstrates that their relevance is ageless.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, A. B. (2008). *Dramatic technique of Vijay Tendulkar's plays*. In A. N. Prasad & S. Barbuddhe (Eds.), *The plays of Vijay Tendulkar critical explorations*. Sarup & Sons.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (Ed.). (2003). *Vijay Tendulkar collected plays in translation*. Oxford University Press.
- Banerjee, A. (2003). Note on Kamala, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Sakharan Binder, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland. In S. Bandyopadhyay (Ed.), *Vijay Tendulkar collected plays in translation* (Introduction). Oxford University Press.

- Babu, M. S. (1997). *Indian drama today: A study in the theme of cultural deformity*. Prestige.
- Chakrabarti, D. (2008, January 9). *Ghasiram Kotwal*. *India Interacts (World Section)*, 4.
- Dharan, N. S. (1999). *The plays of Vijay Tendulkar*. Creative Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-77* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
- Limaye, M. (1978). The archetypal identity of Lakshmi in Sakharam Binder. *Modern Asian Studies*, 12(01), 135–143. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00000647>
- Suri, G. (2024). Aspects of "Indianness" in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry: An analysis of *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.* and *The Night of the Scorpion*. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 12(9), 91-94. <https://doi.org/10.35629>
- Suri, G. (2024). Representation of female subjectivity in Kamala Das' "Introduction," "The Freaks," and "The Sunshine Cat". *International Journal of Innovations in Liberal Arts*, 4, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10999351>