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Research Article

Gender Equality Through the Lens of Patriarchal Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the theme of gender equality through the lens of patriarchal literature, focusing on the works of Vijay Tendulkar, Mahasweta Devi, and Kamala Das. Each work reveals how patriarchy has shaped differences among gendered lives, silencing voices and restricting freedoms not only for women but also for society as a whole. In Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the play exposes the cruelty and rigid mindsets of societal institutions, particularly the courtroom, which shows gender differences and suppress women's situation and voices. Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* highlights the intertwined oppressions of political and patriarchal forces, where a mother's grief becomes inseparable from the larger struggle for justice. Kamala Das's poems, especially *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse*, portray the tensions of self-expression and identity under marital and societal expectations. Her husband's disapproval of her writing in English and his possessiveness underscore the emotional suffocation imposed on women. Through these analyses, the paper demonstrates how patriarchal systems perpetuate inequality through mechanisms of silence, control, and suppression. At the same time, it shows how literature functions as a space of resistance, offering voices of dissent and reimagining the dynamics of power, equality, and justice.

KEYWORDS: Gender Equality, Patriarchy, Feminist Literature



FULL PAPER

Introduction

Patriarchy is a system that puts men in positions of power, often ignoring or silencing women's voices and choices. This leads to gender inequality, where women's freedom to act, speak, and live as they wish is restricted. Over time, literature has reflected this reality by either supporting or questioning these oppressive systems. This paper will focus on how the works of Kamala Das, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mahasweta Devi challenge patriarchal structures by showing the silencing of women. Through their poems, plays, and stories, these authors reveal how patriarchal systems take away women's ability to speak up and act on their own. Their works advocate for women to regain their voice and identity. For generations, women have been oppressed in many ways, with little regard for their feelings, desires, or individuality. In patriarchal societies, the opinions and needs of men are prioritized, while women are often ignored or forced to follow rules made by others. Even when people are aware of the struggles women face, patriarchal systems still silence them, denying them the freedom to live as they wish. As a result, women suffer in silence and feel they can't challenge the unfairness around them. This lack of female agency, or the ability to act on one's own, is at the heart of gender inequality, and it is a major theme explored in patriarchal literature.

Kamala Das, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mahasweta Devi show this silent suffering in their works. In their stories, women are often questioned for their choices while men's actions go unchallenged. In some cases, a mother's love is overshadowed by a father's rigid control, and in others, women are reduced to mere objects of pleasure without the chance for personal growth. Through their portrayals of women's struggles, these authors criticize how patriarchy controls and limits women's lives.

This paper will explore how these literary works show the connection between gender inequality and patriarchal control. It will focus on the ways women are denied agency, marginalized, and silenced by societal norms. By closely examining Das's poems, Tendulkar's plays, and Devi's narratives, this study will highlight how literature becomes a space to challenge these entrenched norms and resist patriarchal power. Even today, women face unfair treatment. They continue to be blamed for things outside their control, and the way they are treated is often different from how men are treated. For example, parents are more likely to blame their daughters for problems, even when the situation is not their fault. This ongoing inequality shows that the fight for true gender equality is far from over, which makes studying these authors' works not only relevant but necessary.

This paper is organized as follows: the first section looks at Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*, exploring how institutions like the court system reinforce the

silencing of women. The second section discusses Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*, examining how political and gender oppression intersect. The third section analyzes Kamala Das's poems *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse*, showing how language and personal identity can become acts of resistance against patriarchal control.

Gendered Double Standards in *Silence! The Court is in Session*

In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Vijay Tendulkar brings to light the deeply rooted gendered double standards in a patriarchal society through the character of Leela Benare. She is unknowingly pulled into a mock trial organized by her theatre group, which quickly turns into a harsh interrogation of her personal life. While she is forced to defend her actions and morality, the man who is equally responsible for her pregnancy — a married professor — remains entirely absent from the discussion. This omission powerfully critiques a society that chooses to shame women while protecting men.

Leela's pregnancy becomes the focal point of judgment, and the male figure responsible is neither named nor held accountable. In fact, his identity and actions are deliberately erased. This reflects the societal tendency to ignore male responsibility while harshly punishing women. As one character remarks during the mock trial,

"What is a woman? A woman is the root of all sin" (Tendulkar 38).

Such statements expose the misogynistic attitudes disguised as moral concern. Benare, despite being a victim, is made to feel like a criminal. She is repeatedly humiliated and judged for stepping outside traditional gender roles. When she tries to assert her independence, she says, *"I want to live. I want to live freely. I want to live for myself"* (Tendulkar 72). But her desire for freedom is turned into a reason to condemn her. Her emotions are dismissed, her choices are mocked, and her identity is reduced to her reproductive status. The silence surrounding the male character who impregnated her — a professor who exploited his position — further reinforces the gender imbalance. His status as a married man in a respectable position seems to protect him from scrutiny. Meanwhile, Benare is stripped of her dignity, her privacy invaded, and her character assassinated. This glaring imbalance shows how patriarchal systems excuse men's actions while holding women to impossible moral standards.

Even the courtroom setting, though fictional, mirrors a real-world justice system where women often face social trials far harsher than legal ones. Benare's voice is drowned out, her pain overlooked, and her worth questioned — all while the man responsible remains invisible. As Benare painfully expresses, *"A woman's life is always full of such unnecessary things. Why? Why should it be?"* (Tendulkar 68). Her words echo the silent suffering many women endure due to societal hypocrisy.

In this light, *Silence! The Court is in Session* becomes more than a play — it is a searing commentary on how patriarchal norms punish women for the consequences of male actions. By centering the trial around Benare and ignoring the man involved, the play holds up a mirror to society's failure to ensure gender justice. The burden of shame, guilt, and consequences is placed entirely on Benare, making her both the accused and the victim in a system that refuses to hear her side. *Tendulkar, Vijay. Silence! The Court is in Session. Translated by Priya Adarkar, Oxford University Press, 1978.*

Analysis Of Mother Of 1084

Analysis of Mother of 1084 from the Perspective of Gender Equality and Patriarchy Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* is a searing exploration of gender inequality and patriarchal suppression. Through the shattered life of Sujata Chatterjee, Devi brings to light how women's pain is systemically ignored, their agency systematically eroded in the name of family honor, tradition, and societal image. Sujata's journey is not just a mother's story of loss; it is the portrait of every woman silenced by a patriarchal world. Silencing of a Mother's Grief In the aftermath of her son Brati's death, Sujata is not allowed the basic human right to mourn openly. Her sorrow is treated not as a natural outpouring of love, but as an inconvenience to the family's prestige. She is forbidden to attend her son's funeral, a decision taken not for her wellbeing, but for the sake of appearances: "*You cannot go there. It's not fitting. There are people, journalists... You must understand.*" (Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*, p. 19)

Here, Sujata's maternal grief is controlled by patriarchal norms that prioritize public image over private agony. Her mournful existence becomes something she must hide, suppress, and endure quietly. In a society where even death is politicized, a mother's tears become an embarrassment, a weakness to be concealed. Emotional Abandonment and the Burden of Isolation Even as she grieves, Sujata finds no solace within her family. Dibyanath Chatterjee, her husband, embodies the patriarchal figure concerned only with maintaining his social standing. Sujata's emotional turmoil is invisible to him; he has already moved on, treating Brati's death as a minor disruption rather than a life-altering tragedy: "*They had moved on... as if Brati had never been.*" (Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*, p. 32)

In this household, Sujata's pain is her own to bear, in silence and solitude. Her grief is not shared—it is isolated, reinforcing how women are expected to absorb emotional trauma without disturbing the peace of the male-dominated order. Her mourning becomes an act of rebellion, a quiet protest against an uncaring system. Suppression of Professional Identity and Dreams Sujata's life is not just defined by the loss of her son; it is marked by the slow erasure of her own dreams and ambitions. Once a bank employee, Sujata had sought some independence, some personal achievement beyond her role as a wife and mother. Yet the lack of emotional support

and patriarchal resistance forced her to abandon her professional life: "*Dibyanath didn't like it much, my going out. After Brati... I stopped altogether.*" (Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*, p. 76)

Her resignation from work was not a choice born of free will, but a consequence of emotional neglect and systemic oppression. Sujata's career, her self-worth, and her independence were all sacrificed silently at the altar of familial duty and societal expectation. Gendered Expectations and the Culture of Suppression Throughout the novel, Sujata's existence is defined by unspoken demands placed upon her simply because she is a woman. She is expected to maintain dignity, patience, and silence, even when her soul is breaking apart. Her pain must be hidden; her loss must be buried. Devi writes: "*A woman's pain has no place. It must be hidden, must be swallowed.*" (Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*, p. 47) This quote encapsulates the brutal gender inequality that pervades Sujata's life. In the patriarchal structure she inhabits, a woman is allowed to survive, but not to feel; allowed to serve, but not to rebel; allowed to exist, but not to live fully. Sujata's Silent Strength Yet, despite this overwhelming suppression, Sujata's resilience shines through. Her quiet mourning, her refusal to erase Brati's memory, and her insistence on understanding his revolutionary ideals become small but powerful acts of defiance. In a world that demands her silence, Sujata chooses to remember, to mourn, and to confront uncomfortable truths. In doing so, she becomes not just a mother broken by patriarchy, but a woman awakening against it.

Conclusion In *Mother of 1084*, Mahasweta Devi masterfully unveils the oppressive dynamics of patriarchy through Sujata's tragic journey. Sujata's silenced grief, emotional abandonment, and the suppression of her professional aspirations illustrate the multifaceted ways in which patriarchal systems limit a woman's voice and agency. The play demonstrates that in such systems, women's pain is not just ignored but actively suppressed, leaving them to carry the weight of emotional burdens alone. Devi's work urges the audience to reflect on the larger societal structures that marginalize women, forcing them to mourn quietly, suffer in isolation, and lose their individuality and independence. Through Sujata, Devi calls for a recognition of the need to break these silencing chains, granting women not just a voice, but also the autonomy to live, mourn, and exist on their own terms.

Analysis Of Kamala Das's Poems:

An Introduction and The Old Playhouse

Kamala Das, one of the most notable and courageous voices in Indian literature, was never afraid to speak her truth, even when it was difficult or unpopular. Through her poetry, particularly in *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse*, she explored themes of personal identity, the oppression of women, and the limitations placed upon them by societal and marital expectations. What makes Kamala Das stand out is her

willingness to share deeply personal aspects of her life, revealing the inner workings of her emotions, struggles, and frustrations as a woman confined by the roles assigned to her by patriarchal society.

In *An Introduction*, Kamala Das expresses her frustration with the constraints imposed on women, especially within marriage. She declares: *"Then... I wore a shirt and my / Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored / My womanliness"* (Das, *Selected Poems*, p. 7). This act of rebellion symbolizes her refusal to be boxed into the narrow definitions of femininity. Through this, Das questions how women are expected to silently fulfill roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. She boldly asserts: *"I am sinner, I am saint. I am the beloved and the / Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no / Aches which are not yours"* (*Selected Poems*, p. 8).

These lines highlight her connection with all women who have suffered under patriarchal expectations, turning her personal experiences into a collective voice.

Her anguish intensifies when she reflects on being shaped by others:

"I was child, and later they / Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs / Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. ... Dress in sarees, be girl, / Be wife, they said" (*Selected Poems*, p. 6).

This conveys how a woman's life is dictated from childhood, suppressing her voice and desires in order to meet traditional expectations.

In *The Old Playhouse*, Das continues to explore emotional and intellectual suppression within marriage. The poem's imagery suggests she feels trapped:

"You called me wife, / I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and / To offer at the right moment the vitamins" (*Selected Poems*, p. 36).

This line painfully captures the mechanical and domestic role imposed on her, stripping away her individuality and emotional needs.

She compares herself to a puppet in her own home:

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her / In the long summer of your love so that she would forget / Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but / Also her nature, the urge to fly" (*Selected Poems*, p. 36).

This powerful metaphor reflects how women in patriarchal marriages are expected to forget their true selves and surrender their freedom for the sake of love—a love that is often controlling.

Kamala Das was not just frustrated with her own circumstances; she was frustrated with the broader societal expectations placed on women. Her poetry is a

blend of personal confession and social critique, urging women to reclaim autonomy and refuse imposed silence.

She ends *The Old Playhouse* with a voice that is neither subdued nor defeated:

“Cowering / Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and / Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your / Questions I mumbled incoherent replies” (Selected Poems, p. 37).

These lines reveal the psychological erosion women undergo in suffocating relationships and become a cry against the silencing forces of patriarchy.

Kamala Das’s *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse* are not merely poetic confessions but feminist manifestos. They critique the ways in which women are conditioned to accept silence and submission in a society that defines them only through others. By drawing on her own life experiences, Das gives voice to every woman who has been forced into obedience and invisibility. Her work is a reminder that the personal is political, and that reclaiming one’s voice is the first step toward true liberation.

Conclusion

This research paper has explored how women are silenced and judged in the works of Vijay Tendulkar, Mahasweta Devi, and Kamala Das. Through *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Mother of 1084*, and the poems *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse*, it is evident that women are often blamed for both their personal and professional choices, facing judgment not just from society but also from their own families. They are labeled immoral, expected to remain quiet, and rarely allowed to express their pain or desires. Despite this, the characters of Miss Benare, Sujata, and the poetic speaker in Kamala Das’s work try to reclaim their voice and resist the silence forced upon them. Their struggle becomes a form of resistance, questioning the unfair norms that define womanhood. These issues still exist today—many women continue to be scolded, judged, and questioned for their choices around relationships and motherhood, while men often escape such scrutiny. This study stresses the importance of listening to women’s stories and recognizing the strength behind their voices and questions. These voices deserve to be heard, respected, and remembered.

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