



# Qualitative Research Journal for Social Studies

ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

Volume No: 03 Issue No: 01 (2026)

## Collapse of Social Morality in Vijay Tendulkar's Selected Plays: A Lyotardian Reading of Metanarrative Crisis

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### Abstract

This article examines the disintegration of social morality in three plays by Vijay Tendulkar (*Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972)) through the theoretical lens of Lyotard's concept of the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984). We argue that Tendulkar's dramaturgy systematically dismantles the grand narratives of justice, marriage, and political legitimacy, exposing them as historically contingent language games that legitimate domination rather than universal ethical principles. Through close reading and the application of Lyotard's notions of language games, paralogy, and terror, we demonstrate that the plays depict a postmodern condition in which moral authority fragments into localized, often violent mini-narratives. The analysis draws on selected plays to show how Tendulkar anticipates Lyotard's insight that the collapse of metanarratives does not liberate individuals but subjects them to competing, arbitrary claims. Our findings reveal that Tendulkar's ethical vision lies not in proposing alternative moral systems but in exposing the terror that silences dissent and in affirming the dignity of those who struggle to speak their own truths. The article contributes to the scholarship on Indian drama by providing a systematic postmodern theoretical framework for understanding Tendulkar's critique of morality.

Keywords: Vijay Tendulkar, Jean-François Lyotard, metanarrative, postmodernism, Indian drama, morality, power, language games.

### 1. Introduction

In an age when grand moral certainties are crumbling across the globe, when institutions of justice are exposed as instruments of bias, when the sacred bond of marriage fragments into transient contracts, and when political leaders cynically invoke tradition to consolidate power, the plays of Vijay Tendulkar speak with startling immediacy. Written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *Ghashiram Kotwal* anticipated a condition that has since become the defining feature of contemporary life: the collapse of moral metanarratives into a cacophony of competing, often violent, local claims. Yet despite



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Tendulkar's canonical status in Indian drama, scholarship has largely treated his critique of morality as a thematic concern rather than as a radical interrogation of how moral authority itself is constructed, legitimated, and weaponized. A growing body of recent work (Neha & Bharadwaj 2025; Prasad & Saksena 2022) continues to read his plays through sociological and feminist lenses, leaving undertheorized the epistemological rupture that his dramaturgy enacts. This article argues that Tendulkar's work demands to be read alongside Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the "incredulity toward metanarratives", a framework that reveals his plays not merely as social critiques but as prescient dramatizations of the postmodern condition itself.

The urgency of such a reading has never been greater. In India and beyond, we are witnessing the erosion of public trust in institutions that once anchored moral life: courts are perceived as partisan, marriage is increasingly a site of legal contestation rather than sacred union, and political power routinely deploys religious and moral rhetoric to justify authoritarian measures. Tendulkar's plays, which stage precisely these crises, offer a diagnostic toolkit for understanding how moral language becomes a weapon in the hands of the powerful and how those who attempt to invent new ethical rules are silenced by the "terror" of enforced consensus (Lyotard 1984, 63). Yet existing scholarship has not systematically theorized this dimension. While feminist readings have illuminated the patriarchal violence in *Silence!* (Jain 2001; Dharwadker 2005) and political analyses have explored the critique of authoritarianism in *Ghashiram Kotwal* (Vasudevan 1994; Tripathi 1975), they have stopped short of examining the structural logic that connects these disparate institutional sites, the logic of metanarrative collapse. Without such a framework, we risk reading Tendulkar as a chronicler of social ills rather than as a philosopher of moral fragmentation whose work speaks directly to our present.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928–2008) stands as one of the most influential playwrights in modern Indian theatre, with a career spanning over five decades and encompassing more than twenty-eight full-length plays (Dharwadker 2005, 218). His work, written primarily in Marathi and translated extensively into Indian and European languages, is renowned for its unflinching portrayal of social hypocrisy, patriarchal violence, and the corrosive effects of power (Gokhale 1997; Jain 2001). Tendulkar emerged during a period of significant social and political transformation in India, the post-Independence decades marked by the Nehruvian project of modernization, the rise of progressive social movements, and the eventual crisis of democratic institutions during the Emergency (1975–77). His plays capture the tensions of this era, particularly the growing dissonance between traditional moral frameworks and the complex realities of modern life.

Three of Tendulkar's most celebrated works form a triptych that systematically interrogates the foundations of social morality. In these plays, institutions that conventionally anchor moral order; the judiciary, marriage, and political authority, are revealed not as sources of ethical guidance but as instruments of coercion. Tendulkar does not offer alternative moral systems; instead, he stages the failure of existing ones, leaving his characters trapped in a space where no authoritative moral voice can arbitrate their conflicts. This pattern invites theoretical engagement with the postmodern condition, particularly with Jean-François Lyotard's analysis of the fate of metanarratives in contemporary society.



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Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) defines the postmodern as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv), a pervasive scepticism toward the grand stories that once legitimated knowledge, institutions, and social practices. For Lyotard, modernity was characterized by such narratives: the progressive emancipation of humanity through reason, the dialectical unfolding of Spirit, or the inevitable triumph of the proletariat. In the postmodern era, these narratives lose their binding force, giving way to localized, contingent "language games" that produce their own criteria of validity (Lyotard 1984, 10-11). Social morality, we argue, can be understood as precisely such a metanarrative: a totalizing discourse that claims universal authority over conduct. Tendulkar's plays dramatize the collapse of this moral metanarrative and its replacement by competing, often violent, mini-narratives.

Despite extensive critical attention to Tendulkar's work, existing scholarship has primarily focused on sociological, feminist, and thematic analyses of his plays, often reading them as critiques of specific social problems such as caste oppression, gender inequality, or political corruption (Neha & Bharadwaj 2025; Prasad & Saksena 2022; Singh 2015). While these studies are valuable, they tend to treat morality as a relatively stable referent, something that Tendulkar either defends or attacks, rather than examining the *structure* of moral authority itself. The problem, therefore, is the lack of a systematic theoretical framework that can account for the distinctive way Tendulkar's plays dismantle moral metanarratives and depict the fragmentation of ethical discourse. Without such a framework, the radical implications of Tendulkar's dramaturgy remain undertheorized, and his work risks being reduced to a collection of social critiques rather than being recognized as a profound meditation on the postmodern condition of morality.

This study addresses this gap by applying Lyotard's concept of metanarrative to three of Tendulkar's key plays. The significance is threefold. First, it offers a new theoretical lens for understanding Tendulkar's work, demonstrating that his critique of social institutions is not merely sociological but epistemological, a questioning of how moral claims are legitimated in the first place. Second, it contributes to the broader field of Indian literary studies by showing how postmodern theory can illuminate the formal and thematic complexities of post-Independence Indian drama. Third, it extends Lyotard's philosophy into the domain of literary analysis, demonstrating the applicability of his concepts to dramatic texts and to the ethical questions that arise when grand narratives collapse.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The study pursues three objectives:

1. To analyze how Tendulkar's selected plays dramatize the collapse of moral metanarratives (justice, marriage, political legitimacy) through their plot structures, characterizations, and dramatic techniques.
2. To examine, using Lyotard's concepts of language games and terror, the mechanisms by which moral authority is constructed, contested, and enforced within the fictional worlds of the plays.



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3. To elucidate the ethical implications of the fragmentation of moral metanarratives as represented in Tendulkar's dramaturgy, particularly the tension between paralogical resistance and the terror of enforced consensus.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by three research questions:

1. In what ways do *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *Ghashiram Kotwal* represent the judicial, marital, and political metanarratives as unstable, contingent, and subject to manipulation by those in power?
2. How does Tendulkar's use of dramatic forms (play-within-a-play structure, naturalistic domestic space, and folk performance modes) reflect the fragmentation of moral authority described by Lyotard?
3. What ethical position does Tendulkar's work imply in the absence of a coherent moral metanarrative, and how does this position relate to Lyotard's distinction between paralogy and terror?

We argue that Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *Ghashiram Kotwal* can be read as dramatic enactments of Jean-François Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives." The plays systematically expose the contingency and violence underlying moral claims that present themselves as universal, revealing that in the absence of binding metanarratives, moral authority fragments into competing language games that legitimate domination. Tendulkar's dramaturgy; through its formal experiments, its refusal of redemptive closure, and its sustained focus on those silenced by terror, offers not an alternative moral system but an ethical stance of solidarity with those who resist being reduced to the narratives of the powerful.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Tendulkar Scholarship: Themes and Approaches

Critical engagement with Tendulkar's work has been extensive, particularly in Marathi and English literary studies. Early criticism focused on the sociological dimensions of his plays, reading them as accurate depictions of middle-class hypocrisy and the violence embedded in patriarchal structures (Gokhale 1997; Nadkarni 1996). Shanta Gokhale, a prominent translator and critic, emphasized Tendulkar's "unflinching realism" and his refusal to provide moral comfort, noting that his characters "are neither heroes nor villains but complex human beings caught in the web of social expectations" (1997, xv). This line of criticism established Tendulkar as a social realist, though it often treated morality as a stable category that the plays either affirm or critique.

Feminist readings have been particularly influential, focusing on the representation of women in plays such as *Silence! The Court is in Session* and *Sakharam Binder*. Jasbir Jain (2001) argued that Tendulkar's plays expose the "double standards of a society that celebrates motherhood but punishes the unwed mother" (112), while Aparna Dharwadker (2005) observed that Benare "is condemned for exercising the same sexual freedom that men take for granted" (234). Neha and Bharadwaj (2025) extended this analysis to show how Tendulkar's plays "unveil the social



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hypocrisy, patriarchal narratives, and how these combine to suppress women and other marginalized groups” (839). Prasad and Saksena (2022) provided a nuanced reading of *Sakharam Binder*, arguing that the play goes “beyond the simple portrayal of patriarchal society” to show how hegemonic systems are “internalized by those who supposedly oppose them” (19). These feminist approaches have deepened our understanding of gender politics in Tendulkar’s work but have tended to read morality as a content category rather than as a formal structure.

Another strand of criticism has examined Tendulkar’s engagement with power and politics, particularly in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Dharwadker (2005) noted that the play’s use of folk forms “creates a Brechtian distance that invites the audience to see the mechanisms of power rather than simply identify with characters” (229). Vanraj Tripathi (1975) analyzed the folk idiom of the play, arguing that it “subverts traditional forms to critique authoritarianism” (48). Ravi Vasudevan (1994) situated the play in the context of the Emergency, showing how its critique of tyranny “gained new resonance in the mid-1970s” (125). These political readings have illuminated Tendulkar’s engagement with state power but have not systematically theorized the status of morality within that engagement.

## 2.2 Research Gap

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, a significant gap remains: the lack of a systematic theoretical framework that addresses the *structure* of moral authority in Tendulkar’s plays. Most studies treat morality as a thematic element, a set of values that the plays either uphold or subvert, rather than as a discursive system whose legitimacy is itself the object of interrogation. Consequently, they have not adequately accounted for the specifically postmodern character of Tendulkar’s critique: his demonstration that moral claims are not grounded in universal truth but are produced by language games that serve particular interests. While some critics have noted Tendulkar’s formal experimentation and his refusal of moral closure (Banerjee 1992; Karnad 1994), none have applied Lyotard’s concept of metanarrative to explain how this experimentation reflects a deeper epistemological shift. This study addresses that gap by providing a Lyotardian reading that illuminates the collapse of moral authority as both theme and dramaturgical strategy.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) provides the theoretical foundation for this study. Lyotard defines postmodernity as a condition of “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). By “metanarrative” he means a grand, legitimating story that provides a totalizing account of knowledge, history, and social practice. In modernity, such narratives (the Enlightenment narrative of human emancipation, the Hegelian narrative of Spirit, the Marxist narrative of class struggle) served to legitimate scientific knowledge and political authority. In the postmodern condition, Lyotard argues, these narratives have lost their credibility. Knowledge can no longer be legitimated by appeal to universal principles; instead, it is produced within localized “language games” that have their own rules, criteria, and modes of validation.



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Lyotard draws the concept of language games from Ludwig Wittgenstein, but he radicalizes it to emphasize the agonistic character of discourse. “To speak is to fight,” he writes, “in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall into the domain of a general agonistics” (Lyotard 1984, 10). Each language game has its own rules, and moves within the game are evaluated according to those rules. There is no meta-language that can adjudicate between different games; legitimacy is always internal to a particular discursive practice.

Two further concepts from Lyotard are crucial for our analysis. First, *paralogy* refers to the invention of new moves within a language game, the generation of locally valid rules that challenge established norms. Paralogy is the creative, innovative dimension of discourse that resists consensus. Second, *terror* refers to the suppression of paralogy in the name of consensus: “terror is the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him” (Lyotard 1984, 63). Terror enforces conformity by silencing dissent, often under the guise of upholding universal standards.

Applying this framework to social morality, we argue that moral systems function as metanarratives: they claim universal authority, grounded in religion, tradition, or reason, and they provide totalizing accounts of right and wrong. Tendulkar’s plays depict a world where these moral metanarratives have collapsed, leaving characters to navigate a field of competing language games. The plays also stage the tension between paralogy, the attempt to generate new ethical rules, and terror, the enforcement of consensus through silencing. As we will show, each play examines a different institutional site of moral authority: the judiciary in *Silence!*, marriage in *Sakharam Binder*, and political legitimacy in *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

## 4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology grounded in close reading and theoretical analysis. The primary data consist of three plays by Vijay Tendulkar: *Silence! The Court is in Session* (translated by Priya Adarkar, Oxford University Press, 1992), *Sakharam Binder* (translated by Kumud Mehta and Shanta Gokhale, Oxford University Press, 1992), and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (Hindi translation by Vasant Dev, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2007). For *Ghashiram Kotwal*, we have used the Hindi text and provided our own English translations of quotations, citing the original source.

The analytical procedure involves several steps. First, we conduct a close reading of each play to identify passages that exemplify the operation of moral metanarratives and their collapse. Second, we apply Lyotard’s concepts of metanarrative, language games, paralogy, and terror to these passages, analyzing how the plays dramatize the fragmentation of moral authority. Third, we compare the three plays to identify common patterns and distinctive variations in their treatment of morality. Fourth, we synthesize the findings to articulate the ethical implications of Tendulkar’s dramaturgy.

To ensure the robustness of our analysis, we have selected three plays, each serving as evidence for specific claims about the operation of moral language games, the silencing of dissent, or the proliferation of mini-narratives. Quotations are integrated into the analysis with page citations in APA style. The study is limited to the three plays selected, but the findings have implications for



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understanding Tendulkar's broader oeuvre and for the application of Lyotardian theory to Indian drama.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1 *Silence! The Court is in Session: Justice as Language Game*

*Silence! The Court is in Session* opens with a seemingly innocent gathering: a group of amateur actors rehearsing a mock trial in a village hall. The play's central device, a trial within a play, allows Tendulkar to expose the judicial metanarrative as a language game that can be manipulated to serve the interests of its players. From the outset, the group's attitude toward the trial is playful, yet the game quickly turns deadly as they turn their attention to persecuting their fellow member, Leela Benare.

The play establishes the contingency of judicial rules through the characters' casual attitude toward the procedures they are supposed to enact. When Kashikar, playing the judge, announces the charge of infanticide, the proceedings are interrupted by the arrival of pan and cigarettes. Sukhatme, playing both prosecutor and defense, asks for a "quarter minute" to spit out pan, leading to a ludicrous negotiation over whether ten seconds or fifteen seconds should be granted (Tendulkar 1992, 76–77). This opening sequence signals that the rules of the trial are not fixed but are subject to arbitrary negotiation. As Lyotard (1984) would note, the language game of the court is being played without any of the institutional safeguards that normally constrain it; the players are free to invent rules as they go.

The mock trial's transformation from play to persecution is driven by the group's growing investment in the language game of morality. When Benare objects to the direction of the questioning, she is silenced with the judge's cry: "Order! Miss Benare, the accused is not supposed to interrupt the court" (Tendulkar 1992, 76). Later, when she tries to leave, she finds the door locked (Tendulkar 1992, 94). The physical entrapment mirrors the discursive entrapment: Benare cannot exit the language game that is being played against her. Her attempts to speak her own narrative are systematically suppressed by the mechanisms of the court; the gavel, the cries of "Order!", the accusations of contempt.

The most explicit demonstration of the trial's constructed character comes when Samant, a local villager, is brought in as a witness. He is instructed to imagine that he saw Benare in Professor Damle's room, and he reads his testimony from a sensational novel. When Benare protests, Samant says, "Everything I'm saying is out of this!" showing the book (Tendulkar 1992, 93). The "evidence" against Benare is not discovered but fabricated, yet the group treats it as conclusive. This scene reveals that the language game of the court produces its own criteria of validity, independent of any external reality. As Lyotard (1984) argues, "consensus does not have to be the criterion of validity" (66); in this case, the group's desire to reach consensus overrides any concern for truth.

The gendered character of this language game becomes evident in the nature of the accusations. Benare is interrogated about her age, her marital status, her relationships with men, and her pregnancy. When she tries to defend herself, she is interrupted. When she attempts to laugh off the proceedings, she is reprimanded. The male participants (Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, and



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even the adolescent Rokde) each contribute to the persecution, while Mrs. Kashikar provides the voice of conventional morality. Sukhatme's summation explicitly invokes the patriarchal metanarrative: "Woman is not fit for independence... That is the rule laid down for us by tradition" (Tendulkar 1992, 115). Yet the men who invoke this tradition are themselves morally compromised: Sukhatme is a failed lawyer, Ponkshe a failed scientist, Kashikar a petty tyrant. Their attack on Benare is a way of asserting their own fragile authority within a language game they can control.

Benare's final soliloquy (delivered, the stage directions suggest, perhaps only in her imagination) offers a counter-narrative that challenges the group's verdict. She speaks of her life, her desires, her suffering, and her determination to keep her child. "My private life is my own business," she declares. "I'll decide what to do with myself; everyone should be able to!" (Tendulkar 1992, 117). This is a paralogical move: it invents a new rule, that individuals have the right to determine their own lives, that is not recognized within the language game of the court. Yet the play does not allow this narrative to be heard. The soliloquy is interrupted, and the trial proceeds as if she had said nothing. When the group later dismisses the proceedings as "just a game" (Tendulkar 1992, 120), they reveal that for them, the trial was never about justice but about exercising power. The judicial metanarrative has been exposed as a mask for terror: the enforced consensus that silences dissent.

## **5.2 Sakharam Binder: Marriage as Collapsed Metanarrative**

*Sakharam Binder* shifts the focus from public institutions to domestic arrangements, interrogating the metanarrative of marriage through the protagonist's rejection of its conventions. Sakharam, a bookbinder, lives by a personal code: he takes in women abandoned by their husbands, provides them with shelter and food, and expects domestic labour and sexual access in return. When the arrangement ceases to be mutually satisfactory, he sends them away with a gift. He explicitly rejects the institution of marriage, considering it hypocritical. "If you've had enough, if she's had enough, you can always part," he tells Laxmi. "The game is over. Nothing to bother you after that" (Tendulkar 1992, 129).

Sakharam's code appears, at first, to exemplify the shift from metanarrative to mini-narrative. He constructs his own rules, insists on honesty, and refuses to pretend. "No dishonesty allowed," he declares. "If you sin—you must be ready to slap your face and say, 'Yes, I sinned'" (Tendulkar 1992, 130). His house operates on a set of principles that he articulates clearly, and he presents himself as a rebel against social hypocrisy. Yet as the play unfolds, it becomes clear that Sakharam's mini-narrative is not liberating but oppressive. He holds all the power: he decides when the arrangement begins and ends, he defines the terms, and he enforces them with physical violence. When Laxmi tries to prevent Dawood from singing the *aarti* because he is Muslim, Sakharam beats her, saying, "Who dares stop Dawood singing the *aarti*?" (Tendulkar 1992, 144). His "honesty" does not extend to interrogating his own prejudices; it is simply a weapon to enforce his will.

The play dramatizes the tension between different moral narratives through the conflict between Laxmi and Champa. Laxmi represents a traditional narrative rooted in devotion, ritual, and



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stability. She keeps pictures of the gods, fasts on holy days, and tries to create a domestic order. When she is sent away and later returns, she disrupts the household. Champa, the second woman, is more assertive and sensual; she drinks, she defies Sakharam, and she has an affair with Dawood. The two women embody different ethical orientations, and Sakharam is caught between them. When he becomes impotent, a crisis that the play links to his inability to reconcile these conflicting narratives, he reacts with violence, killing Champa (Tendulkar 1992, 196).

The murder scene reveals the limits of Sakharam's mini-narrative. After killing Champa, he is paralyzed, muttering "Murder! Murder!" (Tendulkar 1992, 196). It is Laxmi who takes charge, organizing the disposal of the body and reassuring Sakharam: "I've been a virtuous woman. My virtuous deeds will see both of us through" (Tendulkar 1992, 196). Laxmi's narrative, rooted in religious devotion and the idea of vicarious virtue, is invoked to cover the crime. Yet the play offers no resolution; it ends with Sakharam standing like a statue while Laxmi digs a grave, and Champa's husband howling outside. The competing narratives do not reconcile; they coexist in unresolved tension.

Through this structure, Tendulkar shows that the collapse of the marriage metanarrative does not lead to freedom but to a proliferation of conflicting mini-narratives. Sakharam's code is not an alternative to patriarchal domination but a personalized version of it. Laxmi's devotion, which might seem to offer a more humane alternative, is enlisted to cover murder. The play offers no authoritative perspective to adjudicate between these narratives. As Lyotard (1984) might say, the "little narrative" remains the quintessential form of knowledge in postmodernity, but it does not guarantee justice or liberation. The ethical implication is stark: when metanarratives collapse, individuals are left to improvise, but their improvisations are shaped by the power structures they seek to escape.

### **5.3 *Ghashiram Kotwal*: Power and the Manufacture of Morality**

*Ghashiram Kotwal* expands the critique to the political realm, dramatizing how ruling authorities manufacture moral narratives to consolidate power. Set in eighteenth-century Pune under the Peshwa regime, the play uses folk forms (the human curtain, *lavani* songs, stylized choreography) to create a Brechtian distance that exposes the mechanisms of political manipulation. The central relationship between Nana Phadnavis, the powerful minister, and Ghashiram, a destitute Brahmin who becomes kotwal (police chief), illustrates how moral language can be weaponized.

From the outset, the play establishes the contingency of moral categories. When Ghashiram first appears, he is humiliated by Pune's Brahmins, who accuse him of theft and drive him from the city. His response is a vow of revenge: "I'll come back, come back to Pune. I'll come back as a pig, live as a devil. I'll turn you all into pigs. I'll establish the rule of pigs in this Pune!" (Tendulkar 2007, 47; our translation). This outburst reveals that Ghashiram's later tyranny is born of humiliation; a desire to reverse the power that has been exercised over him. Yet when he does return to power, he does not dismantle the structures that oppressed him; he intensifies them.



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Nana Phadnavis appoints Ghashiram kotwal in exchange for procuring a young Brahmin girl, Lalita Gauri. The transaction is framed in the language of service and loyalty, but its basis is naked exploitation. Nana's instructions to Ghashiram reveal the cynical instrumentalism that underlies his use of moral language. After Ghashiram leaves, Nana reflects:

I have made you kotwal, you outsider, you foreigner. So that all the conspiracies will be cut down on their own, the rebels will be crushed. First, you can't join them; even if you do, you can't be trusted. Why? Because you are an outsider, a foreigner, a dog gnawing at our threshold. Your leash will be in my hands; you will need me. (Tendulkar 2007, 57–58; our translation).

Nana's monologue lays bare the logic of manufactured morality: Ghashiram's authority is granted precisely because he has no organic connection to the community, making him a perfect instrument for enforcing order without accountability.

Once in power, Ghashiram imposes a reign of moral terror. He bans "immoral" activities, demands permits for everything, and tortures those who defy him. The play's chorus, a group of Brahmins who function as both narrator and community, describes the effects:

Ghashiram Kotwal issued orders: if anyone eats the bread of a low caste, it is a crime. If anyone tears clothes, causes miscarriage, turns a respectable woman into a whore, becomes a pimp, commits adultery with a Brahmin woman, steals, beats his wife, brings a lover into the house while her husband is alive, hides his caste, forges coins, kills—all are crimes (Tendulkar 2007, 61; our translation).

This catalogue reveals that Ghashiram's "morality" is indistinguishable from terror: it criminalizes everyday life and subjects the population to arbitrary punishment.

The play's climax occurs when Ghashiram discovers that Nana has had Lalita Gauri murdered. Confronting Nana, he is on the verge of violence, but Nana calmly turns the situation around, praising Ghashiram's loyalty and dismissing the murder as fate (Tendulkar 2007, 85–86). When the Brahmins finally revolt against Ghashiram's tyranny, Nana readily sacrifices him, issuing an order for his execution. Ghashiram is dragged through the streets and killed, while Nana declares a festival to celebrate the city's purification. The play's final image is of the chorus singing "Shri Gajraj" as the community returns to its rituals, while the English observer, a figure who has appeared throughout, stands at the edge, watching. The moral, as the chorus intones, is bleak: "Ghashiram's rule has ended, Nana's continues" (Tendulkar 2007, 99; our translation).

Through this narrative, Tendulkar dramatizes Lyotard's insight that metanarratives are not so much absent in the postmodern condition as they are cynically deployed by those in power. Nana does not believe in the Brahminical moral order he invokes; he uses it to control Ghashiram and, through him, the city. Ghashiram, by contrast, comes to believe in his own narrative of order and revenge, but this belief makes him vulnerable. When his narrative no longer serves Nana's purposes, he is discarded. The play thus exposes the terror that underlies the apparent consensus of moral community. The chorus of Brahmins, who represent the collective voice of tradition, are shown to be complicit in the violence they condemn. Their moral language is a language game that can be turned on anyone who threatens the existing order.



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## 6. Findings

Our analysis yields several findings that address the research objectives and questions. First, each of the three plays dramatizes the collapse of a specific moral metanarrative. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, the judicial metanarrative is exposed as a language game that can be manipulated to persecute an individual. The rules of the trial are arbitrary, the evidence is fabricated, and the verdict is predetermined. The judges are not impartial arbiters but participants in a power struggle. In *Sakharam Binder*, the marriage metanarrative fragments into competing mini-narratives: Sakharam's contractual arrangement, Laxmi's devotional domesticity, and Champa's assertion of sexual autonomy. None of these narratives offers a stable moral foundation; they conflict, and the conflict ends in violence. In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the metanarrative of political legitimacy is revealed as a tool of manipulation. Nana Phadnavis uses moral language to control Ghashiram and the Brahmins, manufacturing a reign of terror that he then discards when it no longer serves his interests.

Second, Tendulkar's formal choices reflect the fragmentation of moral authority. The play-within-a-play structure of *Silence!* blurs the boundary between performance and reality, suggesting that the rules of the courtroom are no more stable than the rules of a game. The naturalistic setting of *Sakharam Binder* forces the audience to inhabit the cramped, violent world of its characters without the comfort of authorial judgment. The folk forms of *Ghashiram Kotwal* (the human curtain, the *lavani* songs, the stylized choreography) create a Brechtian distance that invites the audience to see the mechanisms of power rather than simply identifying with characters. Each form, in its own way, enacts the fragmentation it represents.

Third, the plays consistently stage the tension between paralogy and terror. Benare's soliloquy is a paralogical move that invents a new ethical rule, the right to self-determination, but it is silenced by the terror of the court. Laxmi's devotional narrative offers an alternative to Sakharam's contractualism, but it is ultimately enlisted to cover murder. Ghashiram's attempt to create a new moral order through terror turns against him, and his narrative is discarded by those who manufactured it. The plays offer no examples of successful paralogy; they show only the terror that suppresses it.

Fourth, Tendulkar's ethical position, as implied by his dramaturgy, is not the advocacy of any particular moral system but a stance of solidarity with those who are silenced. Benare, Laxmi, and Ghashiram are all, in different ways, victims of narratives that are not their own. The plays do not offer them redemption, but they do offer them visibility. By giving voice to those who are silenced, even if only in a soliloquy that may be imagined, even if only through the naturalistic depiction of their suffering, Tendulkar aligns his work with the paralogical resistance to terror. His plays ask us to look, without flinching, at the violence that erupts when morality is reduced to a weapon, and to recognize that the struggle for a just life is not a matter of finding the right metanarrative but of resisting the terror that silences those who dare to speak their own truths.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has argued that Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, and *Ghashiram Kotwal* can be read as dramatic enactments of Jean-François Lyotard's



# Qualitative Research Journal for Social Studies

ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678

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“incredulity toward metanarratives.” Through close analysis informed by Lyotard’s concepts of language games, paralogy, and terror, we have shown that the plays systematically dismantle the moral metanarratives of justice, marriage, and political legitimacy, exposing them as contingent, manipulable, and often violent. The collapse of these grand narratives does not lead to liberation but to a field of competing mini-narratives, each claiming its own authority. Tendulkar’s dramaturgy, through its formal experiments, its refusal of redemptive closure, and its sustained focus on those silenced by terror, offers an ethical stance of solidarity with resistance rather than a new moral system.

The implications of this study extend beyond Tendulkar’s work. It contributes to a growing body of scholarship that reads Indian literature through postmodern theory, showing that the fragmentation of moral authority is not merely a Western phenomenon but a condition of post-Independence Indian society as well. It also offers a model for applying Lyotard’s concepts to dramatic texts, demonstrating that the formal properties of drama, its use of voice, its staging of conflict, its manipulation of audience identification, make it particularly suited to exploring the agonistics of language games.

Future research might extend this analysis to other plays by Tendulkar, such as *The Vultures* or *Kamala*, which similarly interrogate moral metanarratives. It might also compare Tendulkar’s dramaturgy to that of other Indian playwrights, such as Badal Sircar or Girish Karnad, to explore how different traditions have responded to the postmodern condition. Finally, it might engage with Lyotard’s later work, particularly *The Differend* (1988), to examine how Tendulkar’s plays address the problem of representing those who have been silenced by dominant discourses. In all these ways, the conversation between Tendulkar and Lyotard opens new avenues for understanding the fate of morality in a world where grand narratives no longer hold.

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