

## GENDER ROLES IN *KAMALA* AND *KANYADAAN* IN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF JUDITH BUTLER

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### ABSTRACT

Theoretical Postulations of Judith Butler are applied in playtexts “Kamala” and “Kanyadaan” to entangle the complex relationships among gender identities. It is argued that the gender roles assigned are constructed. Butler’s theory “Gender is what gender does” is applied to find out the structure behind the creation of identities. Analysis is explained with the help of diagrams and the contours of female identity are formed as the observance of theory. Suppression of gender and reactions to it are also explained and the analysis proves the social roles assigned to help the suppression. Gender suppression paves way for the total destruction and the creation of female identities are critically examined.

### KEYWORDS: GENDER, IDENTITY, LANDSCAPE etc.

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Social roles assign the space for their members and become instrumental in defining their identities in a society. In some cases, these identities are chosen, and in some other cases they are thrust upon. In the latter case, their personal freedom, cultural space and familial bonding are all regulated and restricted. Sometimes they are forced to lead a life of slavery and some other times they are forced to suffer in silence as “gender is constructed and maintained as one of the central meaning structures of society” (Hekman 91).

Women’s idea as dependent of man and inferior to him originates from her realisation that “the world is masculine on the whole, those who fashioned it, ruled it and dominate it are men” (Simone de Beauvoir 298). Woman is conditioned in such a way to become the “Second Sex” and Beauvoir declares that one is not born, but becomes awoman” (273). Man is considered as the norm and women as the “other,” not being different but being inferior and lacking. Women are measured as timid, yielding, emotional, gentle, dependent, self-sacrificing and intuitive and at the same time men are considered as bold, assertive, strong, independent, aspiring, logical and rational (Kudchedkar 333). The social constructs of masculinity and femininity are explained in Kate Millet’s book, *Sexual Politics*. She maintains that sexual politics is a process and she suggests the need for taking social and cultural contexts of a work of art to comprehend the proper perspectives of it. To her, a literary output is not a verbal icon which is autonomous of historical and social reality.

Carol Gilligan’s book, *In a Different Voice* (1982), projects an empirical study on moral decision making by women and explains that women’s style of moral reasoning is not deficient, but equally valid as a moral practice, even though it is different from men. Psychoanalytic critics consider women as a social product than a biological entity and the contributions of psychoanalytic critics like Jacques Lacan helps to formulate the theory in this manner. Even though radical and psychoanalytical critics celebrate difference, the emphasis lies here on the difference between men and women and not between women. This results in a monolithic concept of “women” and forgets the differences among “women.” This reflects in the protest of women of colour against the dominance of white middle class women in the movement. This protest in the 1970s and the 1980s resulted in the split of women of colour from the established feminist organisations to make their own associations. They considered themselves as “different” from the white middle class women of the movement. In an influential book titled *Inessential Woman* in 1988, Elizabeth Spelman argues that the concept of woman is a ‘Trojan Horse’ of feminist theory, which prompts the general women of colour as different. Hence the various ethnic groups like African-American women and Asian-American women have formed political organisations on their respective ethnicities. Lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgendered women formed their own organisations. They formed their own theories on the basis of their associations and sometimes negate theory arguing it as the product of western patriarchal thought. Most of the feminists share Spelman’s view to accommodate all sections in the movement and this also brings forward the idea that an individual is not identified on the basis of gender alone, but also on the basis of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. An exploration to these areas is also necessary along with the exploration to gender bias.

Butler, in her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, analyses “women” as the subject of feminism. She points out: “Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler 2). She negates the entire power system that suppresses women and shows the futility of depending on the same system for any kind of emancipation. Instances from day-today life proves this argument to be right and victim again gets victimised by the same system of oppression. Butler invariably shakes the foundations of

feminist criticism, by challenging the monolithic representation of “women.”

Thus she asks for a feminism which includes all parameters that define identities and negate all kinds of treatments of feminism as a monolithic whole. She also analyses the “solidarity of identity” that “women” enjoy and comes to the conclusion that “gender is culturally constructed; hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that it permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex” (6). The idea of the distinction between “sexed bodies” and “culturally constructed genders” (6) assumes significance in this regard. She establishes gender as a cultural construct apart from the biological existence. She even comments: “There is nothing in her accounts that guarantees that the “one” who becomes a woman is necessarily female” (8). Butler agrees with the arguments of Monique Wittig: “The overthrow of compulsory heterosexuality will inaugurate a true humanism of “the person” freed from the shackles of sex” (19) and argues for a world order of neutral sex. Identity itself is portrayed in such a light that creates a gender consciousness.

Personality itself gets defined by gender and those who strictly follow the heterosexuality restrict personalities to define themselves within those boundaries: “The binary restriction on sex serves the reproductive aims of a system of compulsory heterosexuality” (19). Butler formulates her theory of gender based on what gender does. Hence gender becomes what it does, “gender is always doing” (25); “‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (25). Butler thus negates the existence of the so called “gender.” According to her, apart from the deeds, nothing else exists. In Indian philosophy, there is the concept of *Karma*. Subject is just a tool for the completion of a *Karma* and *Karma* decides between good and bad. Butler puts forward the main idea that “identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (25). Indian marriage can be viewed as a forced system in the light of this theory as Butler says: “The ‘unity’ of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality” (31). This extended analysis may argue for new interpretations in the context of textual representations.

This destruction of a monolithic posturing, leads to the multiplicity in identity construction instead of a single, univocal re[presentation] of a “woman” identity. This deconstruction necessitates the significance of the performance of gender and leads to the conclusion that gender is what gender does. This performance of gender creates the foundation of the identity of gender. Performance of feminine gender is constituted in such a way to create a space for it as a logical “other” of masculinity and this performance as a process reinstates the importance of the latter. Butler points out on relying on the theories of Lacan: “In order to ‘be’ the phallus, the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must ‘be’ ( in the sense of ‘posture as if they were’) precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men” (45). Hence the notion of the performance of feminine gender is restricted in such a way to construct their identities in the desired manner of patriarchy.

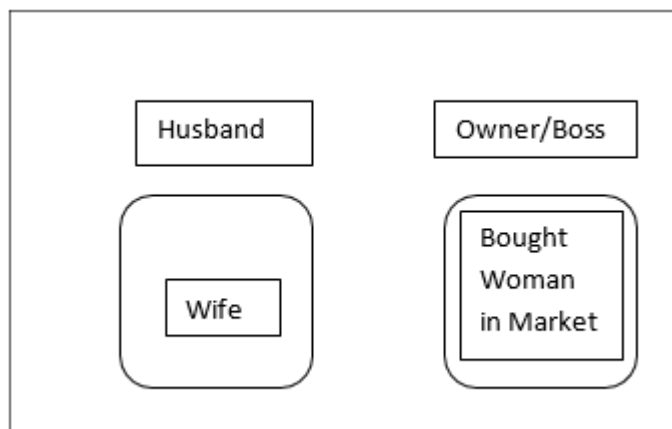
The mechanisms of patriarchy in constructing the identities of women in national and transnational landscapes, express themselves in the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar and Rahul Varma. This chapter aims at a detailed analysis of the plays, *Kamala* and *Kanyadaan* by Vijay Tendulkar.

Gender is a culturally/ socially/psychologically constructed reality apart from “sex,” as put forward by Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* (14). Master-slave relationship is the extreme form in the gender construction. Sarita, wife of Jaisingh, is a bonded labourer, unaware of her condition. She satisfies every need of her husband and fulfilling the role of a “good wife” as put forth by her “social conditioning.” She represents every common woman, who is unaware of her existence. Kamala comes one day as a revelation to her life. She sees herself in Kamala and converses with her as her own image. She assumes herself as a property, bought in some market by Jaisingh for seven hundred rupees. Kamala and Sarita have become two sides of a coin, which has lost its value in every sense. Sarita opposes sending Kamala to women’s home, but gets snubbed by her master for surpassing her limits. For Sarita, losing Kamala is like losing oneself. Then she starts to turn back against her husband and expresses her opinions freely. Her master Jaisingh and uncle Kakasaheb are shocked at this revelation. Patriarchy suppresses womanhood to its maximum only because they fear it and gets shocked at own failure. The arrival of Kamala has created fluctuations in the career of Jaisingh, but it becomes an eye-opener for Sarita and she becomes a “new woman” after Kamala’s exit. The complex ways in which awareness changes the life of a person is portrayed with vigour. A slave-like existence changes to a free individual and Kamala becomes instrumental in it. The awakening of “women power” shocks patriarchy and the last scene is the portrayal of destruction of patriarchy and rise of the “new woman.”

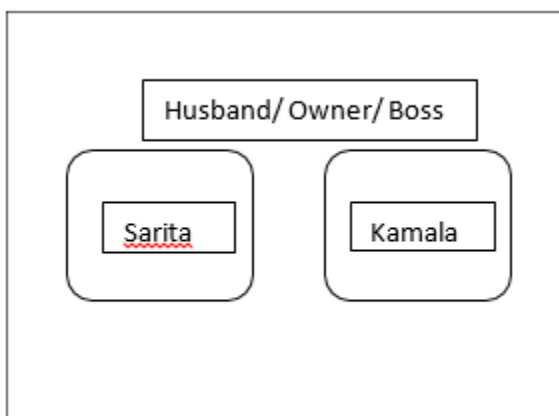
In this play, Jaisingh and Kakasaheb are two characters who follow the legitimised image of manliness, as put

forward by the concept of social construction of reality. “Manliness” is an age old institutionalised concept, which got legitimised. Suppression of wife (woman) is incorporated in this concept of manliness and hence paves way for the “gender.” This proves the existence of a constructed space for gender and womanhood and paves way for the stereotyped creation of identities.

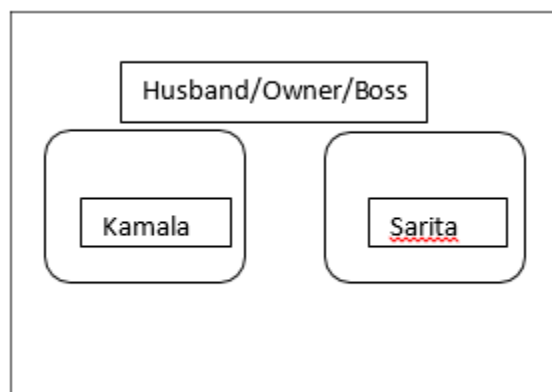
Two women characters are prominent in this play — Kamala and Sarita. Their gender performances are assigned to specific constructed roles. Sarita as the wife of Jaisingh is portrayed as destined to satisfy her gender role as a wife. The term “Wife” includes many things like housekeeping, cooking and serving the husband. This role which is determined by one’s action, decides the gender of Sarita. The other woman Kamala is also a victim of gendered roles. She is destined to be an object for sale by the society only because of her gender role. People who visit the market examine her body to determine whether she is worthy to be bought. Her identity is crushed by her gender role and she falls to the level of an object which can be sold at the discretion of the owner. Institutionalised heterosexuality pressurises Sarita and Kamala to assume a role different from men and by denying the opportunity for education and development, permanently prevents them from raising themselves above the oppression and exploitation which is prevalent in society. The sexuality that emerges within the matrix of power allows them to be the sexual slaves of Jaisingh and they even prepare plans for that. Still they have to succumb to another decision since it is taken by their master. Kamala has to serve the role of a victim in the Press Meet just to fulfill the required need of her master. The commonality in decision making can be seen even in Kakasaheb. Pic.1



Here, Husband/Owner/Boss determines the spheres of his women who fall under two categories — a “wife” and a “woman bought in market.” Husband becomes one with owner or boss and the same person determines the spheres of the women’s existence. Power structure does not concern itself with the names of women — whether it is a Sarita or a Kamala. Even if the names change nothing happens: whether Sarita becomes Kamala or Kamala becomes Sarita, no change occurs in the total scheme of things and it remains the same.



Pic.2



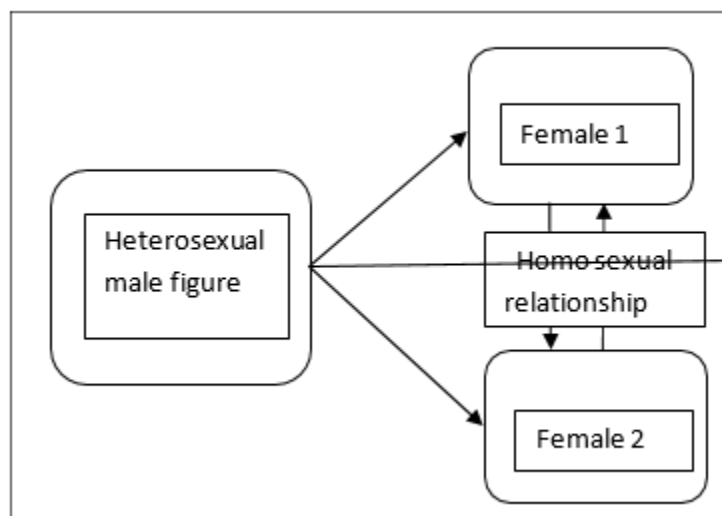
Pic.3

As Butler says, the action/deed determines the gender. The deeds of Sarita and Kamala make even their names insignificant. Even if their names are not there, and even if their gender is not disclosed, anyone can assume it to be that of a “woman.” Hence, like Butler says, gender becomes predetermined according to the function of it. But the power structure itself changes when the power centre, i.e., Husband/Owner/ Boss changes. In other words, the power centre pushes its periphery to a state where it loses its identity.

Hence the identity of feminine gender becomes complex since its very inception is denied by the power centre.

“Power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions” (Butler 30).

In an analysis based on the theoretical postulations of Judith Butler, in the Lacanian perspective, the repudiation of the maternal body is the condition of signification within the symbolic. In effect, the loss of the maternal body as an object of love is understood to establish the empty space out of which the words originate (Butler 68). This refusal of loss results in melancholy and remains in the body as a “dead and deadening part of the body” (Butler 68). She continues, “In the case of the prohibition against homosexual incest through which heterosexual identity is established, however the loss is sustained through a melancholic structure” (Butler 69). In this play, the homosexual incest which can be attributed in the case of Kamala and Sarita gets prohibited by Jaisingh and that results in melancholy in the play. Their homosexual incest is thwarted and directed towards a heterosexual affair through the elimination of “desire of object” (Butler 69), Kamala. This action is resisted by Sarita but the object of heterosexual desire, Jaisingh prevents the development of homosexual objectification in the structure or in fact the identity formations are interrupted and directed by the attributes of gender with the help of the cultural peculiarities of landscape.



Pic. 3

Hence heterosexual male figure cuts homosexual affinities of its female counterparts to establish superiority in power structure and that satisfies Butler’s theory of “Gender is what gender does” (12). This forced heterosexuality differentiates gender and paves way for moulding the identities through gender. Landscape makes a significant cultural intervention in this forced heterosexuality by destroying homosexual affinities for creating gender difference. Indian cultural intervention in the function of gender assures the participation of landscape in the creation of identities.

Tendulkar’s play *Kanyadaan* is of a different stature. In this play, Tendulkar analyses the blind reverence of a female character Jyoti towards the celebrated masculinity of her father Nath and the ways in which it redefines her life. But later it is identified that the masculine characters are just weak and violent. Sudha Rai finds masculinity as weak and constructed: “Masculinity is thereby constructed as a weak and regressive force, prone to violence and corruption” (103).

N.S. Dharan opines on the structure and evolution of the character in the play: “Act I has two scenes, and Act II three scenes, comparatively speaking, it is a shorter play by Tendulkar. Yet, it is the most gripping of all his plays. The evolution of Jyoti from a soft-spoken, highly cultured Brahmin girl into a hardened Dalit girl is really incredible and distressing” (88). Tendulkar’s play *Kanyadaan* is considered as one of the most controversial plays in Indian Theatre.

Jyoti respects Nath in an extreme manner and follows his ideals. She understands his stubborn nature in his ideals and sacrifices her life for it. In this view, this is a play which portrays the conditioning of a woman. Jyoti is conditioned in such a way that she obeys her father and follows that colossal figure in every respect. She is the victim of “anxious self-denial” and lives the life of her father due to her blind admiration. She once rejects her husband and returns home. But when she understands that it tarnishes the dream of her father to practicalise a no caste society, for that big dream, she sacrifices her life and goes with Arun. At the end of the play, when she realises that her father is forced to praise the book of her husband only because of her safety, she undergoes tremendous trauma and dares to question her father. She then understands the reality of life than the glossy model

put forward by her father. She comes out of her shell and faces her life with a bold heart. She understands her new identity as Jyoti Arun Athavale, not Jyoti Yadunath Devlalikar and hence she rejects the identity of her father. This rejection makes Nath weak and he sinks into darkness. Rejection by his daughter is like a death to him. When he gets rejected, he sinks into the sofa in darkness, indicating the posture of his death.

Arun Athavale, who represents the lower classes of society represents all the despair and inferiority complexes of his community. He marries Jyoti, but according to Seva, returns every kick which he proposes to give to the higher community. Jyoti is a tool for him to give vent to his frustration and despair. He is proud of his achievements and ready to go to any extent to blackmail his father-in-law for the successful conduct of the literary discussion of his autobiography. He is portrayed as a cruel and selfish figure, but Jyoti finds real life in him, accepts him with all his shortcomings. She denies her father and gives that place to Arun, underscoring the conditioning of women in the landscape — woman, who are always in necessity of the shade of a man to live “successful” life in the society. She understands that the life with Arun is hell, but she comprehends it as the reality and accepts it. She willingly accepts her fate and is forced to live the life of a slave, suppressed by the chains of a patriarchal society which has nothing more to offer. Tendulkar puts forward the suffering of women in their “mother” land and creates identities apart from the clichés, who dare enough to question the power equations of society just to lead a life of dignity.

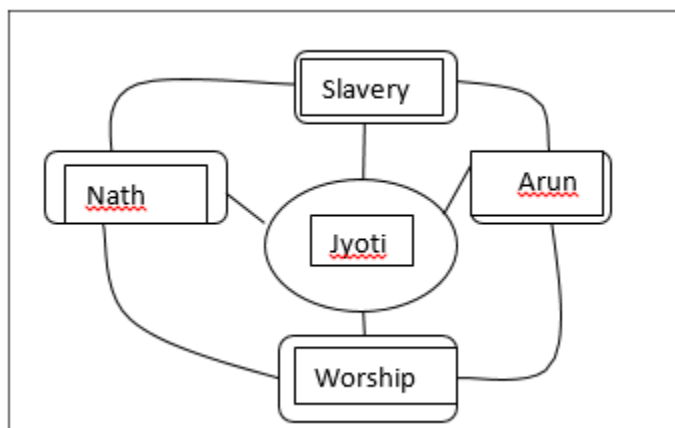
Marriage is an institution, and it is engendered by legitimising the gender roles in the society. As per this concept, marriage, as a social institution, creates certain identities and these identities are “legitimised gender roles” (16). Jyoti is a victim of these “legitimised gender roles” upheld by Arun and a sudden change is not practically possible. “Suppression” is an individual experience, but it is produced as a result of institutionalised gender positioning in society. Hence individual experience is not unexpected as per this concept, but it is the maximum possible outcome of an institutionalised society.

The reason for the failure of Nath is his overdependence on the traditional system of marriage. More than that Jyoti as a character—though at the outset seems so modern and powerful—is a traditional woman who is forcefully put to perform her gender role.

She does it in an unnatural way that Nath at last collapses into his sofa because of his prick of conscience. Jyoti is a figure who is put into a system, which is already arranged and she sacrifices her life for the survival of the power structure. At first she seems to be a bold girl who opens up her mind before her parents. In the beginning, she fights against the inhumanity of her husband, Arun but later learns to adjust with it as with the norms of the gender role. She succumbs to her gender role whenever there is a threat to the existing power centre and at last sacrifices her own life for its endurance.

Judith Butler’s theory of performance assigns the gender role to the part played by the character. Here, power structure assigns role to the character and character is a mere receptacle. Violent love of Arun is portrayed as a gender function and it is portrayed that the function of other gender portrayed through Jyoti is to succumb to it. Challenging the gender function of violence is not treated as a normal thing. Even though Jyoti gets many opportunities to come back to Nath, her colossal father figure, she still returns to the hardships with Arun since he is her husband. Even though Nath and Seva are political workers fighting casteism, they are in a position to change their opinion in the light of their experience. Casteism is justified and the social work against it becomes artificial and insincere.

Worship of gender is another peculiarity of the theme of this play. Jyoti worships her father figure and to an extent her husband Arun at least in early days of their relationship. This worship turns out to be a slavery and gender function is limited only to worship and slavery. In the last scene when she turns her back to Nath and moves to Arun’s life, her worship ends and slavery begins. Seva is another female figure who fails to make any change in her daughter’s life.



Pic. 4

By limiting the gender role, the performance of the gender has been dictated. This indicates the influence of the landscape because this may not happen in the same way in another landscape. This also indicates the creation of an identity which anticipates the role of landscape in it.

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