CHAPTER FOUR
An Analysis of Responses to Social Injustice

4. Introduction

Chapter Four addresses various aspects raised by Soyinka in relation to social injustice, and ensuing manifestations of violence. In order to do so, this chapter will first offer an analysis of two of Soyinka’s more recent plays, namely *A Play Of Giants* (1984) and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995). The central theme of both plays is political dictatorship, suppression of democratic rights and the malaise of corruption. The second half of the chapter will then examine two of Vijay Tendulkar’s plays namely, *Kanyadaan* (1996) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). These plays deal with incidents of social injustice perpetuated by and on the Indian middle class. The chapter will attempt to demonstrate how Wole Soyinka and Vijay Tendulkar are committed writers and artists who address the central questions: Is violence endemic to human nature, or do circumstances make human beings violent? How do conditions of fear, suppression and humiliation perpetuate acts of violence?

The Soyinkan concept of ‘soul deadening habits’ has been discussed in detail in Chapter One. The term ‘soul deadening habits’ in the play *Dance of the Forest* (1960) sums up the human lot. According to Soyinka, human beings repeat folly after folly, birth after birth. To break this cycle of repetitive living and making similar mistakes over and over again one, has to transcend to the ‘fourth stage’ and view oneself as an objective observer and come out of one’s weaknesses. Individual evolution will only make the society take a leap forward in a positive direction. In other words, in order to overcome the violent tendencies of human nature, one has to rise above the ‘Soul deadening habit’ of repeating follies made age after age. Soyinka employs the figure of Ogun, as the symbol of creative and destructive energies in a human being. Similarly the violence caused by the destructive
energies has to be overcome by the creative energies of human beings, just as Demoke in *The Dance of the Forest* has to overcome his ego (which is synonymous with his vertigo) to reach his heights of creativity. As J. Krishnamurti points out: ‘If we know how to look at violence, not only outwardly in society, the wars, the riots, the national antagonism and class conflicts – but also in ourselves, then perhaps, we shall be able to go beyond it’ (Jan.26, 2009).

In an interview with Mita Kapur during the Jaipur Literary festival in 2010, Soyinka explains how the lives of ordinary human beings caught between opposing forces of creation and destruction form the basis of his writing. He states: “I’m passionate about the whole issue of human liberty, human freedom and that all human beings are born with a fundamental attribute of the spirit of choice, to formulate one’s principles of existence and follow them, as long as they are not inimical to the right of others. I live in a continent, which is my immediate constituency and is confronted by a robbery of fundamental rights, then I use literature as my weapon with which I fight them” (2010:4).

Soyinka’s heart bleeds to see Nigeria in the hands of dictators, who are totally obsessed with their own selves. He explains that the frustration of Nigerians “in addition to the lack of fulfillment in every facet, is a deep seated sense of hurt about the quality of leadership in Nigeria. The average Nigerian thinks - how do you expect me to stay in a place where someone like this is not only in charge of the nation, but actually thinks that he alone is entitled to rule the country?” (2005:1). Soyinka attempts to transmit this frustration, and modes of resistance to the present day situation in his two plays *A Play Of Giants* (1999), and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995).

Soyinka explains in *The Man Died* (1972): “when a dictatorship is imposed on your country the very first thing you feel, the very first day-and it is a feeling that has a totally spontaneous immediacy, free from all mental
elaboration—the first feeling is humiliation. You are being deprived of the right to consider yourself worthy of responsibility for your own life and destiny” (1972:14). Soyinka’s answer to this humiliating and unjust state of living is to strengthen the civil society. In an interview with Nigerian linguist and poet Michael Mbabuike, he states, “that the salvation of society rests more on civil society than on government. And so we begin strengthening civil society, whether one is talking about women’s organizations, civil liberties organization, committees for civil defense, lawyers, and so on” (2005).

According to Chuke Mike, “When Soyinka created the Ife Theatre Gureilla Theatre Unit (GTU), his vision was that it would act as an agent for socio-political awareness, and as a vehicle for bridging the gap between ‘town’ and ‘gown’. It would address social issues in performance within the township, and amongst the university surroundings outside of the theatre department” (2005:76).

In *Climate of Fear* (2004), Soyinka asserts that the demeaning of human dignity is an act of violence. Dignity is simply another face of freedom, and the opposite of power and domination, which are equally sustained by fear. The kind of physical violence perpetuated by military dictators in Africa, as shown in *A Play of the Giants* (1984) and *The Beatification of the Area Boy* (1995), results in a violation of self and society through multiple acts of corruption.

In *Climate of Fear*, Soyinka explains that all great thinkers, believe in the pursuit of dignity as one of the most fundamental defining attributes of human existence. He also discusses how the concept of dignity is central to the Yoruba culture. There is a Yoruba saying ‘sooner death than indignity’. This expression finds equivalence in many cultures and describes the essence of self worth. As Soyinka puts it:
The sheer integrity of being that animates the human spirit, and the inscription of equal membership in the community. This does not in any way belittle other human virtues – integrity, love, tenderness, graciousness, generosity or indeed the spirit of self-sacrifice. Dignity however appears to give the most accessible meaning to human self regarding. It’s loss in many cultures, Japan most famously, makes even death mandatory, exile coming as second best. (2004:98)

Therefore to violate the principal of human dignity is to lower human prestige and freedom. Soyinka has spent his life striving for human freedom. He was made a war hostage in the civil war of Biafra, his dignity was violated, yet he survived and realized the value of non-violence. He is against dictatorship of any kind, be it of the military ruler who ruled Nigeria or of the British who dominated the tribes of Nigeria in the name of colonization. Colonization was a manifestation of the violence of human dignity as it perpetuated the dominance of a culture, which posed itself to be superior to the native culture.

Describing fear as ‘the biggest enemy to human liberation’ Soyinka states that:

The cold reality of power is of course that it has to be endured. Even when it is culpable and seems to be so, its effective reality is that it cannot be escaped for a duration, be this regulated by constitutional agreements, or subject to abrupt termination by a contending interest. All that is left then to the populace over which it is made manifest, is an attitude towards it outwardly expressed or internalized. It is this and this alone which constitutes the accessible arena of public activity - for activity is acknowledged to be also of the mind as of public expression - media criticism, street
demonstrations, civil disobedience, etc. None of these various forms of overt activity occurs without prior preparation towards the destruction of the mystique of the inviolability and above all the impregnability of power” (1972: xiv).

This power, unchecked power, such as military dictatorship in Nigeria, leads to fear and suppression. But brave hearts who can take the suppression no more and whose ‘chi’ goads them to revolt against the negative use of power lead to great revolutions in the world, like the dethronement of the ‘divinely appointed’ kings and despots by the public. For example “the execution of King Charles of England, Louis XVI of France or the last Tsar of Russia. The violent dethronement of modern day despots on the African continent should be recognized as an inevitable development of its political sophistication and, all forms of preparatory exercises of the public mind towards ‘willing’ the ‘hitherto unthinkable’ seen as contributions towards the freeing of an enslaved public psyche” (1972: xvi).

In 1973, Soyinka wrote a much more serious sequel to The Trials of Brother Jero entitled Jero’s Metamorphosis which objected to the extreme measures taken by the Nigerian government against criminals. Soyinka’s more recent writing have been satires directed against corrupt African leaders such as Bokassa and Amin, whose predecessors in various African states were targets of such plays as Madmen and Specialists.

Wole Soyinka implores African writers to become the “conscience” of their nation or be forced to withdraw “to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon”. Wole Soyinka’s lifelong occupation is for human liberty and dignity. Femi Osofisan’s lists two major forces in Soyinka’s plays; they are the Ogunian love for life, the amalgamation of opposites in people and the struggle for the down trodden, for victims and outcasts.
Mpaliwe Hangson Msiska’s compares Soyinka’s stance to fellow writers Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe. “It needs to be noted” he states, “that he does not practice the realism of detailed and historical representation seen in the work of his compatriot, Chinua Achebe; neither does he engage with questions of class in the unfettered revolutionary manner of Kenya’s Ngugi Wa Thiong’o”. He adds that Soyinka “is certainly not a Buchi Emecheta when it comes to the politics of gender. Rather, Soyinka’s politics has the forthrightness of a Ngugi wa Thiong’o without the latter’s obvious ideological partisanship, it has the moral authority of Achebe, but without what the poet Odia Ofeimun describes as the ‘patriarchal teacher’ of Achebe’s work. His brand of satire is also reminiscent of, among others, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope whom he acknowledges as being among his influences.”(1998:4-5)

In Nigeria every dictator, since independence in 1960 has, squeezed the last bit of revenue for himself from the oil-rich nation. As Ipshita Chanda asks, “What is it in the soil of the hapless post colonial nations that defeats the very logic off nationhood by turning it into an instrument of repression and exploitation in the hands of the state?” (2004:130).

In Soyinka’s play From Zia with Love, Zia is the name borrowed from the Pakistani President Zia-ul-Huq, who ignored every body’s protests and hanged Prime Minister Bhutto like a common murderer. Here Soyinka points out to the crux of the matter: “the nation, democracy, elected government all depend upon the common people’s desire to and decision to accept them. This consent and acceptance make them institutions that act as checks and balances that protect the space of the nation, the space that is effectively administered in the name of the people by the state”(2004:129-130).

As Soyinka points out again and again, the Nigerian people in 1993 wanted to assert their nationhood, and they did so by electing their leader
and protesting the abrogation of the election. This they did in the name of representative government not as Yoruba or Igbo but as Nigerians. The paradox was that the election was abrogated in the name of the nation itself. So the question that recurs is who is really the nation here? The people or the rulers? The answer too seems clear: nation is as nation does”(2004:129-130).

Kolawole Ogungbesan rightly mentions this in regard of Wole Soyinka, ‘A speculative thinker, his persistent call to African writers to demonstrate that they have a vision shows that he sees the literary artist as a redeemer. He believes that the writer possesses an inner light unavailable to the mass of his people, and that it is his duty to guide his society towards a beautiful future’(1979:78). This is the role of an artist which Soyinka till date is emulating.


Wole Soyinka states in the notes to the play, A Play of Giants, that the power crazy dictators depicted here are modeled on Field Marshal Kamini, (the real life character Idi Amin, the deposed President of Uganda), Emperor Kasco (Jean – Baptiste Bokassa, former Emperor of the Central African Republic), Benefacio Gunema (late President Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea) and General Barra Tuboum (late President Mobutu Sese Koko of Zaire, now the democratic Republic of Congo).

Wole Soyinka comments that: ‘unlike many commentators on power and politics, I do not know how monsters come to be, only that they are, and in defiance of place, time and pundits. According to some of these last, our grotesqueries are the product of specific socio-economic histories, yet no
one has ever satisfactorily explained why near identical socio-economic conditions (including a similar colonial experience), should produce, on the one hand a Julius Nyerere and on the other an Idi Amin”(1984:3). What Soyinka finds remarkable is that these subjects remain in power even after they have been unambiguously exposed for what they are.

Idi Amin was a certified psychopath, and was sustained in power because he had the support of super powers like Britain, America and the Soviet Union. He was also kept in power by the organization of African Unity. His megalomania was also because of all the backing that he had. All these super powers used him for their own selfish goals.

As Soyinka states “Power, we have suggested, calls to power, and vicarious power i.e. the sort enjoyed by the politically impotent intelligentsia, responds obsequiously to the real thing. Apart from self identification with success, there is also a profound love which is perverse” (1984: 5). The dictators, Kamini, Kasco, Bokassa and Barra Tuboum with their thirst for more and more power, resort to violent ways. Their fear of being overthrown makes them maniacal in their approach to power. They kill, rape, torture and terrorize, to remain in power. These were the leaders, after liberation from colonization, who took to tyrannical ways of ruling like the colonizers. Therefore writers like Soyinka in depicting their atrocities in his play, convinces the audience of their ouster from power for the well-being of the general public.

These dictators are totally self centered, and their pursuit of power is only self gratification. They have no vision to develop their nation into better countries. Wole Soyinka, in his book, Climate of Fear (2004), states that power in itself should not be mistaken for vision. He further continues, “true vision may eschew power, may totally repudiate power, seeking to fulfill itself by that hardy, self – sacrificial route that does not lean on the crutch of power. There are individuals in every field of human endeavor who have
pursued their vision, and in a multiplicity of fields – to the benefit of millions and tens of millions around the world, without that promiscuous facilitator named power” (2004:57).

In contrast to leaders who rule their nations honestly and self-sacrificingly, the protagonists of The Play of Giants (1984) are mere caricatures. Gunema states their image of absolute power,

But sometimes I look at country like Italy. Red Brigade or Germany. Or these new people, the Armenian brigade who assassinate and bomb airport no matter where. I do not think they seek government. Because why? Because they already enjoy, power. Secret power. They strike, hold hostage, bomb office, kill person they do not know before, total stranger – is that kind of power I talk about. I think that kind, he only seek to redress history, not take government. But he enjoy secret power. (1984: 13)

Kamini tells Professor Batey, that imperialist press was spreading bad propaganda against him. They announced that he killed and tortured people and locked them in prison. Kamini knew that if word spread about his violent deeds, then he could be easily overthrown. So the fear of being thrown off from the seat of power lurks behind the dictator’s mind.

Wole Soyinka raised his voice against dictatorship, for which he was put into incarceration for twenty-one months. Even the writer Ken Saro Wiwa, a Nigerian, like Soyinka, was hanged to death for raising a voice against the atrocities of the military dictatorship. The dictators were scared of intellectuals, writers, political activists and journalist. They knew the voice of the pen is mighty and is capable of overthrowing tyrants.

Therefore as Soyinka mentions in the Notes to the play of A Play of Giants (1984), the Uganda nation lost its cream of professionals and its productive elite. Thousands of workers, peasants and unknown people were
destroyed in the mindless terror of the Dictator, Idi Amin. As Soyinka further writes, “the attendant economic disaster is still with Uganda, compounding her political instability” (1984:6).

The play is set in the Bugaran embassy in New York city. Kamini’s penchant for megalomania and grandiose living has made him deplete the material resources of his country. His frivolities cost the country its economy, which is in doldrums. Kamini has asked the Chairman of the Bugara Central Bank to source for a World Bank loan of 200 million dollars. When the Chairman informed him that the Bugaran money is worthless and the World Bank refused to give loan, Kamini gets into all sorts of schemes to get the loan. And the Chairman’s comment that, “our national currency is not worth its size in toilet paper” (1984:17), invites Kamini’s wrath. He instructs his Task Force to punish the Chairman for showing disrespect to the National currency, by shoving his face in the toilet bowl and flushing the tank again and again when it was full. This perverted and violent image shows the double standards practiced by these monsters. They can waste the Nation’s money in what ever way they wanted, but no one else can slander the nation. Kamini knows nothing about economics and financial management and he does not like anyone educating him on such issues.

Another negative quality of this bloodthirsty dictator is his lust for women. He comments that “a leader should have many wives on whom to practice his sexual power and demonstrate his virility” (1984:14). Gunema the second dimwit - compatriot of Kamini - agrees with his views on sexuality. Gunema links sexual power and the power of voodoo magic. Soyinka draws out the nexus between politics and sexuality. Lust for power and lust for sex go hand in hand.

The picture of self aggrandizement is complete when Kamini thinks of a “community” sculpture of the four dictators to be presented as a memento to the UN Council. But the idea of installing those statues meets with some
difficulties at the United Nations. The Ambassador, informed Kamini that the Secretary-General of the UN, has sent two members of the Russian Delegation to approve the statue. The moment the two Russians set their eyes on the statue, “they stop- dead” (1984:55).

The first Russian, “(speaking in Russian) Ask the buffoon if really thinks he deserves an honour which is yet to be bestowed on our own national hero, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.”(1984:56).

Professor Batey, who understands Russian realizes the double standards these super powers practiced. They violated the sense of trust Kamini had in them.

Batey comments, “ …You train his secret service and condone the so called acts of suppression against his own people. Yet in your heart of hearts, you despise him”.

Second Russian. Yes. A common butcher…We had close studies of him sent regularly by our own men, not just Western reports. But in any case, we did not create him- the British did. They sustained him in power, backed by the Americans….The Pupil had more than mastered the game of his masters. (1984:66)

These are the images of dirty politics, showing the machinations of power and politics. Kamini neither gets the bank loan or the space for his statue, or a platform to address the U.N. Council. Kamini is never at peace because the violence in which he has indulged is self – perpetuating. Kamini has come to power by shedding blood, and now his ouster will also lead to more blood shed. In a coup in Bugara, Kamini is overthrown. The Bugaran Embassy which was earlier serving the purpose of a studio for the sculpture being made, now becomes a fortress and a battle field. These images symbolize the suffering of Bugaran people under Kamini. One man’s monstrosities will cause death and devastation in the entire country.
Kamini goes mad when he realizes that the coup is going to divest him of all powers and he blames the U.N., in accompaniment with the super powers, for staging his ouster. Kamini - hits out at the diplomacy and double standards practiced by the superpowers.

He says “when you are making disarmament talk, you are making more and more atom bomb. Why you not give me atom bomb when I ask you ?......... I want to destroy South Africa. South Africa is practicing apartheid which is wrong. So I want to fight South Africa, but South Africa has atom bomb. I beg you for atom bomb, all of you. You smile. You think Kamini big fool…..” (1984: 73-74)

His diabolic ways make him feel that he can take revenge against the super powers by bombing the U.N. building, “I have wired everywhere with bomb. You know I always travel with my suicide squad and they have taken over the Embassy” (1984:79-80). This maniacal dictator gets more and more violent, as he is losing his power. As Mahadeva Kunderi mentions in “Modern Rituals and African Dictator,” “a small time dictator like Kamini surely cannot bomb the U.N. building situated in the heart of New York city. The scene merely dramatizes the anger of the playwright at such a farcical institution, which dances to the tune of the super powers” (2004:159). This play is actually, a power play of the super-powers, the giants, who make dictators like Kamini their pawns. These pawns sold their oil rich nations to these super powers for the satisfaction of their desires and egos. And violating the faith of the people, of the state of which they have become the head, is an unpardonable crime.

We can conclude this play by quoting Soyinka’s lines from his autobiography, The Man Died (1972):

Violence in politics takes many forms. All dead-end approaches to political goals-that is, political acts which create
a cul-de-sac for all participants in the political process, including even those who initiate the process, constitute a violence which in itself breeds counter-violence. The nature of violence can be purifying or it can be obscene. The violence which preceded, accompanied and was the predictable aftermath of Nigeria’s 1983 election, was ironically, a gross obscenity. The first thing to note is that it was unleashed by the party which was already in power. The purpose was to cow the populace into retaining the status quo, terrorizing voters away from manifesting their political allegiances. (1972: xxi)

Artists like Soyinka and Vijay Tendulkar portray violence in their writings with the belief, that the act of viewing violence will in some ways purge the audience of its violent ways and to compel them to raise their voices and react. As Wole Soyinka states in *The Man Died* (1972): “the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny”.

The second play discussed in this chapter is *The Beatification Of Area Boy* (1995). The play is subtitled “A Lagosian Kaleidoscope” as it created an illusion of putting the entire city of Lagos on stage. In this play, corruption and violence are a means to an end, but not an end by itself. Area Boys are distinct from the seriously dangerous gunmen and armed criminals who trouble the people of the city, in more destructive ways, than these Area – Boys, who do petty extortion and small-time drug-pedaling. This play focuses on a day in the life of the Area Boy, Sanda. He is an intellectual drop-out and a shopping plaza security guard whose small-scale scams and rackets seem to hold a peculiar kind of intrigue. But his gang running is so much more innocent, than the corrupt and perverted leaders of Nigeria, who execute political prisoners at the slightest excuse.
The conversation between Sanda and Miseyi, the main characters in the play clearly demarcate the lines of corrupt behavior of the Area Boys and the corrupt Military Governor and his soldiers.

Miseyi: Those bullies? Enforcers and extortionists? Thugs, yes, shear thugs. Ready to serve the highest bidder. They make potholes in the middle of the road, the motorists for their public spirited – service in filling them up. They break your wind screen if you don’t pay up or slash your tyres. They rip the necklace off your neck in a traffic hold up, or snatch your watch. They’re robbers. Daylight robbers. No better than armed robbers. (1995: 102)

Miseyi accuses Sanda of being an Area Boy instead of just a security guard. The Area Boys indulge in the crimes which Miseyi points out to. She asks Sanda whether he was into drugs too. To which he replies that he has not gone so far up on the social ladder. The social ladder is a metaphor for corruption and violence.

He further states,

“Certainly not on the same rung as your father or your would be father-in law for that matter. You heard them and the military Governor at their bickering. I am not a pen robber. I don’t lift oil illegally. I have never traded off import licenses and I have never looted the treasury” (1995: 102).

This shows the difference in the level of corruption in the Area Boy circuit and the top level military rulers of the country. These military rulers could do anything from mortgaging their country to barbarism of killing innocent people for their selfish motives. These military Dictators could take their nations to senseless wars, in order to keep their control.

Through this play, Wole Soyinka also points out to the permanent scars caused by the civil wars in Nigeria. The violence which these wars
perpetuated left indelible marks on the souls of individuals who witnessed these wars. The conversation between Sanda and Mama Put clarifies this point. Wars are the most unjust ways of propagating power because a lot of innocent people lose their lives, livelihood and homes for no fault of theirs.

Sanda (softly). You’ll never get over that war. Not ever.
Nobody does. It would be abnormal. But you must forget the fish – ponds, Mama. And the orange groves. This is Lagos, city of chrome and violence. Noise and stench. Lust and sterility.
But it was here you choose to rebuild your life. You’ve done better than most, made a new home for your children. Sent them all to school and to university, just from frying and selling *akara* and concocting superlative bean pottage, not to mention the popular brew. You deserve a medal.(1995:21)

Wole Soyinka portrays the ravages of the war. Wars are always unjust. The war mentioned in this play is the civil war of Nigeria. After two military coups in 1966, conflicts over political power over the North led to massacres of the Igbo and other people from the east working in commerce and administration in the area. Nigeria is situated in West Africa. The three largest tribes of Nigeria are the Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the south-west, and the Igbo in the south-east. The killings in the north led to a mass exodus back to their Igbo homeland. This area contains the countries rich oil fields. Thus this area decided to secessed from the rest of the country. The south east declared itself independent from Nigeria under the name of Biafra in May 1967. The Federal government would not permit a secession, and a war began which Nigeria fought not only in the name of national unity but also over the significant oil deposits. This Biafran war claimed thousands, mainly civilians. The war ended with the unconditional subjugation of Biafra in January 1990. The wounds of the war may have healed, but the scars remain. The memory of cruelties experienced, and
psychological traumas will probably last a lifetime for the people who went through this war. Mama Put is Soyinka’s image of the ravages of war.

Mama Put: Medal! And what would I do with that? Keep your medals and give me back—yes even the mangrove swamps (Sudden harshness. She waves the bayonet violently around). And don’t remind me of medals! They all got medals. Those who did this thing to us, those who turned our fields of garden eggs and prize tomatoes into mush, pulp and putrid flesh – that’s what they got – medals! They plundered the livestock, uprooted yams and cassavas and what did they plant in their place? The warm bodies of our loved ones. My husband among them. My brothers. (1995: 21)

The grief of losing one’s dear ones has left a perpetual fear in Mama Put’s heart. She carries a bayonet with her always. She points out that the bomb-shells that fall down on people from the pilot’s hands have no one’s name written on them. The youth of the nation was massacred and then came the plague of the oil rigs, which caused the death of the farmlands and fish sanctuaries. This was the reality of Lagos and a number of other African nations. Every human life had lost its meaning. It could be extinguished in a moment, without a warning.

Wole Soyinka is vehemently trying to promote the cause of Nigerian democracy. After Nigeria’s independence in 1960 from the British, it has been governed by military dictatorship. Nigeria, saw two short periods of democracy-between 1960-66 and 1979-1983. In 1995, the ruling head of state, General Sani Abacha, declared that transition to democracy would take another three years. The General wanted to extend its stay in power, so he doled its benefits to the civil politicians. These politicians knew that to stay in power and enjoy material benefits, the General’s goodwill was required. So, they instead of ousting the tyrant, supported his military spoils.
Protest of the Ogoni against environmental destruction by oil companies in their Ogoniland, attracted international attention. Ken Saro Wiwa (writer, civil rights activist, and Ogoni ethnic supporter) brought international focus to this destruction. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his compatriots were executed. This misdeed of the Nigerian military, damaged their reputation considerably in foreign politics. It is these military monsters, that Wole Soyinka wanted divested of all power.

4.2 Critique of Social injustice in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar

In the Indian context, a playwright who has devoted his life to highlight social injustices is, Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar is a realist, who presents the injustices due to endemic violence in attitudes of the Indian middle class, in the hope that some day they will react against their indifference. In an interview to Sumit Saxena, Tendulkar once said, “I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open, my work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can’t do it, I have to speak the truth”(2006:1).

Soyinka suffered a number of exiles from Nigeria because he spoke the truth against the ruling dictators of the state. Tendulkar witnessed a number of bans on staging of his plays because he attacked the injustices present in his society, like caste and gender inequalities and violence meted out by those in power. There has hardly been a play by Tendulkar that has not ended up in controversy. Most of the calls for banning his plays did not come from the government but from particular segments of the public who saw in his dramatizations attacks on their power positions-challenges to caste, gender or class structures.

Vijay Tendulkar died on May 19, 2008. He was a playwright, who will always be remembered for his plays dealing with varied social themes. As mentioned in the homage paid by *Mumbai Mirror*, of 20th May 2008, the day after his death, he was, “a forthright commentator on human violence, a firm believer in theatre and the performing arts, a true patron of numerous young writing talents”(2008:8). Satish Alekar, noted playwright himself paid a glowing tribute to Tendulkar on his death by stating, that it because of Tendulkar that Marathi theatre was transformed into ‘Indian theatre’ and also came to be recognized internationally. Alekar further adds that there was hardly a language in which Tendulkar’s works had not been adapted. According to Shanta Gokhale, Tendulkar was the first playwright of the new age, “Without a single background look, he discarded the flourishes of the theatre of mythology, history and sentiment, and turned everyday speech into a forceful dramatic tool. People who saw his *Shrimant* (*The Wealthy*) forty years ago still remember the excitement with which they responded to it. Though *Shrimant* broke new ground in dialogue writing”(2004:114). According to Gokhale, Tendulkar’s plays were ‘realistic in strain’. Gokhale states explains that in Mumbai, realism carried not the voices from the neglected margins of society, “but from the mainstream, the educated middle-class, the upholders of norms, and also those who carefully defied
them, in whom was invested the responsibility for creating a modern society in their newly independent country”. (2004,117).

As an essential being, what does man look for? Tendulkar’s answer has the echoes of Wole Soyinka. They both emphasize upon human dignity, human feelings and self-respect. Another aspect which both playwrights highlight is the freedom of man and the free will of the individual against society.

Vijay Tendulkar’s controversial plays are *Gidhade*(1961), *Sakharam Binder*(1972) and *Ghashiram Kotwal*(1972). These plays were controversial because they violated the sensibilities of the educated middle class, they questioned the accepted societal norms of the middle class, the backbone of the Indian society. *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1974), is a brilliant satire on political violence. The play is also an indictment on the caste system. This play highlights the eccentricities of the Brahmins and excesses of power. The behavior of the keepers of Hindu dharma, the Brahmins is delineated as most corrupt and undignified.

Plays like *Gidhade* (1961) and *Sakharam Binder* (1972) hit out at the sensibilities of the urban middle class. Their sense of propriety and their accepted morality was questioned. This middle class which saw Tendulkar’s plays, prided itself on not coveting material goods and paying great value to education and culture. The middle class at that point of time looked down at most Hindi commercial cinema. When this section of society was exposed to a warm hug between a bare chested man and a woman, as in *Gidhade*, their middle class values were put at stake, they reacted negatively. The play was banned. Similarly when the protagonist in *Sakharam Binder* brought destitute women in his house and started treating them as his wives, middle class eyebrows were raised.
The second controversial play, *Sakharam Binder* (1972), created an uproar stronger than the previous one. This play was described as ‘beyond impropriety’, it was downright immoral or rather it encouraged immorality. As states Shanta Gokhale, “the play challenged the very foundation of the middle-class values—the institution of marriage. Moreover, Sakharam confesses that he was born a Brahmin. Many Brahmins tend to believe in the genetic superiority of Brahmins. Was it possible that such a base specimen could exist in their tribe? And even if a stray example did, how could they allow such an unrepresentative example to be presented on the stage?” (2004:201). Sakharam says, “I’m a drunk. Anybody who wants to know what I’m about, I’ll tell him. I’ll show him if he wants, which room I’ve gone to, how many times. The men in this town all screw, but on the sly.” (Act 1.i).

The Chapter will focus on Tendulkar’s third controversial play, *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). This play confirms Tendulkar’s place as one of the country’s finest playwrights. Shanta Gokhale states that there is not one line, word or movement indicated in the text that does not resonate theatrically. And this ability is outstanding in *Ghasiram Kotwal*. Tendulkar could envisage every move from curtain up on the stage to curtain down. In this play movement carries as much narrative force as do speech, song and action. As stated by Nilu Phule in “Tendulkar and His Controversial Plays” “the human curtain of a dozen rhythmically-swaying Brahmins, which closes to hide or parts to reveal action, is not merely a theatrical device. It is integral to the creation of an environment of intrigue, hypocrisy, greed and brutality, in which the story of Nana Phadnavis, the chancellor of the Peshwa in Pune, Ghasiram Savaldas, and the latter’s daughter, Lalitagauri, unfolds. Every song in this play adds meaning, every word indicates gesture or tone of voice, every speech pattern marks character, and the juxtaposing of scenes provides ironic comment” (2004: 206).
Vijay Tendulkar, in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, seeks to interpret the relationship between Nana Phadanvis and Ghasiram, Nana’s minion. The relationship is timeless and crosses national boundaries as it is fuelled by power and patronage. *Ghasiram Kotwal* too had to face protests against its staging. The protests indicate the power of theatre to challenge and perhaps to change. The second point that these protesters raised was to open a debate on the freedom of the artist, the freedom of the individuals to see and judge works of art for themselves, to decide for themselves whether history was to be treated as sacrosanct. During the days of protest against the staging of the play, Tendulkar was again and again saying that *Ghasiram* was not an attempt to write a historical play. *Ghasiram Kotwal* uses folk forms like “Khela”, “Dashavatar”, “Tamasha”, and “Bahurupee”. Songs are also integrated into the play. Tendulkar had not consciously set out to use the folk form. This was part of his story telling.

Nana Phadnavis was the Minister of the Peshwas. The Peshwas were revered by the Maharastrians because they were successful in keeping the Moguls, and later the British, away from the Indian soil for a long time because of their brilliant military strategies. Tendulkar however shows their dirty underbelly. Nana had nine wives but no children. He was always eyeing young girls. Nana Phadnavis, in the deep of the night comes to Gulabi’s place. Gulabi is the courtesan. Nana too sways to the rhythm of the tabla. Nana twists his ankle while dancing. Ghasiram takes his sprained ankle on his bent back, later in his hand.

Ghasiram the sycophant wins over Phadnavis with his articulate speech. He holds Nana’s twisted foot in his hand and says:

In my hands has fallen-grace!
All here envy me my place.
This is a gift to last me all my days.(1972:10)
Nana lysts for Ghasiram’s young daughter, Gauri. Ghasiram uses the opportunity to his advantage, and becomes the Kotwal of Pune. Nana is a shrewd man, and knows how to use Ghasiram. He is aware that Ghasiram can be used as a pawn in the game of politics, and, that all the misdeeds of the Brahmins, and, also the soldiers, can easily be pinned on his head.

The Sutradhar, points out to Ghasiram the extent of corruption in police:

The thief is a simple thief.
The police are official thieves.
If a thief wants to live
to the police he’s got to give.
You need protection money
and on top of that their mercy might end any time
and so will you. You’ll get kicks and blows,
You’ll see the cell. (1972:16)

The above lines of the play show how easily the police can resort to violence. Ghasiram on becoming the Kotwal of Poona, eventually resorts to all kinds of violence to curb debauchery, immoral behaviour like the Brahmins going to the courtesans.

Ghasiram requires a legal sanction for his acts and he begins to the harass Brahmins for every small thing.

Sutradhar: Ghasiram says, to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit a misdemeanor, to steal, to live with one’s divorced wife, to remarry if one’s husband is alive, to hide one’s caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide without a permit, is a sin. A good woman may not prostitute herself, a Brahmin may not sin without a permit. (1972:26)

There is no pity shown toward ‘wrong doing’. The city of Poona is compelled to be moral. The Brahmins can not go to prostitutes without a
license, they can not drink without a permit. Ghasiram becomes a menace to the Brahmins of Poona. His violent ways and terrorizing rules have to be done away with. The Brahmins complain to Nana, who orders the execution of Ghasiram.

“use a thorn to remove a thorn, the disease has to be stopped.
Anyway, there was no use for him anymore.”(dances a little as he moves off stage). (1972:52)

Ghasiram’s only pain is that Nana has misused his daughter, Gauri, making her pregnant out of wedlock, and then getting her killed. He himself is also killed by a violent mob after Nana gave the Brahmins permission to punish him.

This play jolts society out of its stupor. It made the audience sit up and realize the extent to which human beings can fall.

Ghasiram is an outsider in Poona. He is a brahmin from Kanauj. He needs an identity for himself. He becomes the Kotwal of Poona, and that becomes his identity. To become the Kotwal, he sacrifices all his humanity. He becomes completely insensitive to others needs. His identity was linked to terrorizing others, and his violent nature took the better of him. As Amartya Sen, writes in his book Identity and Violence- “The incitement to ignore all affiliation and loyalties other than those emanating from one restrictive identity can be deeply delusive and also contribute to social tension and violence.” (2006:21). Amartya Sen further “explains that the intricacies of plural groups and multiple loyalties were obliterated by viewing each person as firmly embedded in exactly one affiliation, replacing the richness of leading an abundant human life with the formulaic narrowness of insisting that any person is “situated” in just one organic pack”(2006:21).
This is exactly what happens with Ghasiram. In keeping the identity of a Kotwal, he became so violent, that he stopped being a sensitive Brahmin, a loving father and a caring husband. Many a time, his daughter would be seen dancing with Nana, but he was least concerned. He is not going to be disturbed from his image building of a Kotwal. He sacrifices everything for it. Nana is also responsible for making Ghasiram the violent person that he becomes. As Amartya Sen writes in *Identity and Violence*, that “violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror” (2006:2). Here the artisan of terror is Nana, and he turns the gullible Ghasiram into a terrible, violent Kotwal, who is killed by the brahmins, after serving Nana’s purpose. Ghasiram begins to kill his “own people” i.e. Brahmins. He was indirectly led to this by his commander, Nana. And this kind of cultivated violence, as Amartya Sen puts it is “associated with identity conflicts seems to repeat itself around the world with increasing persistence” (2006:3). Ghasiram, because of his violent behaviour has the Brahmins up in arms against him.

Sutradhar. The way a wounded tiger becomes addicted to blood so the Kotwal has come to love the smell. (1974:46)

These unjust killings that the Kotwal is indulging in shows the undignified state he has brought the Brahmins of Pune too. The Brahmins too give him a very undignified end.

Sutradhar. They beat him.
They shaved his head.
They *sindured* his head.
They rode him around on a camel.
They tied him to the leg of an elephant. (1974:53)

This humiliating end of Ghasiram, brings into focus Soyinka’s concept of “dignity”, “and why it appears to mean so much to the sentient human, almost right from childhood. Why has it been entrenched in so many
social documents across cultures, civilizations, and political upheavals? In one form or another, the quest for human dignity has proved to be one of the most propulsive elements for wars, civil strife, and willing sacrifice.” (2005:91) Pursuit of power makes one loose ones dignity.

4.3.1

Another playwright who deals with issues of social violence is Girish Karnad. In Girish Karnad’s play Tale Danda (1993), the twelfth century Veer Shaivite poet, Saint Basvanna visualizes a casteless society, a society where women are treated as equal to men and, where there are no Brahmins and no Shudras. Basvanna’s disciples, the ‘Sharanas’ emulate his principles by getting a ‘Shudra’ boy to marry a ‘Brahmin’ girl. Hell is let loose at this leap forward in time. Violence and bloodshed prevail, still the wedding takes place. Therefore Karnad too reiterates Soyinka’s stance that for any society to move forward, the human will has to confront the said injustice squarely. Societies have to be jolted out of their ‘soul deadening habits’.

Basvanna firmly maintained

that some day, this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison house of varnaashram will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as a human being. As a ‘bhakta’. As a ‘Sharana’. But we have a long way to go. You know the most terrible crimes have been justified in the name of ‘sanatana’ religion. (1993:46)

While Basvanna’s idealism is not impractical, it is volatile, he believes in action and asks, “What use is bhakti if it only hides its face” (1993: 76).

He advocates the growth of the human spirit and the human mind, an experimental reawakening and rising against the redundancy in the caste system. The Virasaiva communitarians (the ‘sharanas’) thus exchange the bonds of caste system with bonds of friendship, equality, humanity and
social change. Changes in social values are always preceded by confusion and violence, Basvanna’s movement too ends in bloodshed but it at least made people react to the negative aspects of the caste system. Violence is depicted so as to give a vital message about the nexus between politics and religion. The religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today has only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the pointers offered by the ‘sharanas’, Basvanas followers. Caste and communalism persist as the main source of contemporary political violence in India.

Tendulkar’s *Kanyadaan* also deals with the social issue of inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a Shudra boy. The play depicts how violence is endemic to human nature, and how, suppression of the Shudras over centuries in India, leads to violence in human nature. In this play, the Shudra husband Arun, beats his Brahmin wife Jyoti regularly. The unjust act of wife beating also highlights gender inequality and domestic violence.

Jyoti, a Brahmin girl, the daughter of Nath Devalikar and Seva Devalikar is in love with Arun Athavle, a Dalit poet and writer. Jyoti has a brother, Jayaprakash. Jyoti’s parents are involved in active politics. Nath is a member of the state legislative council, and his wife keeps taking part in rallies promoting women’s and social issues. Jyoti’s decision to marry a Dalit, worries Seva.

Seva (to Jyoti), “My anxiety is not over his being a Dalit. You know very well that Nath and I have been fighting untouchability tooth and nail, god knows since when. So that’s not the issue. But your life has been fathered in a certain manner. You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it.” (1996, 13)
Seva, Jyoti’s mother is worried for her daughter, here her sentiments match Wole Soyinka’s words from *Climate of Fear* (2005), “certainly we have learned to associate the emotion of fear with the ascertainable measure of a loss in accustomed volition. The sense of freedom that is enjoyed or, more accurately, taken for granted in normal life becomes acutely contracted. Caution and calculation replace a norm of spontaneity or routine.” (2006:7) The mother because of her age and experience is warning Jyoti of the consequences of her marriage. The mother’s fears are justified when she sees her daughter being beaten by her dalit husband, Arun.

When Arun’s comes to Jyoti’s house for the first time, he realizes that he is from a different world.

Arun: I feel uncomfortable in big houses.
Jyoti: Uncomfortable? Why? This is not a big house.
Arun: If you will understand. Ten of us, big and small, lived in that eight feet by eight hut. The heat of our bodies warmed us in winter. No clothes on our back. No food in our stomach, but we felt very safe. Here these damn houses of the city people, they are like the bellies of sharks and crocodiles.

Arun Athavale paints the picture of the different world than that of Jyoti’s

Arun: Our grandfathers and great grandfathers used to roam Barefoot, miles after miles in the heat, in the rain, Day and night,…..till the rags on their backs fell apart. Used to wander shouting Johaar, Maayi – baap! Sir – Madam, sweeper, and their calls polluted the Brahmins’ ears. (1996:17)

Arun, the educated untouchable, is seething with violence towards the high class Brahmins. When he can no longer behave like an educated civilized human being, then the inner violence takes over and he speaks thus.
At times the fire blazes – I want to set fire to the whole world, strangle throats, rape and kill, drink the blood of the beasts, your high caste society. Then I calm down like the tartaric when he comes out of his trance…….(1996, 18)

But Jyoti loves him for the different being that he is. He may be rough and uncivilized, but he can write the most sensitive poetry. Jyoti feels Arun is not bad at heart. Neither is he vile, but he is just complex. She says ‘Human beings’ are complex. “It is possible that his complexity has been generated by his circumstances. I must understand that complexity. It is no use running away. Once I understand it, I can dispel it, it would no longer have the power to scare me” (1996:29).

Jyoti’s father Nath supports her decision to marry Arun, in spite of his violent and complex nature. Nath feels that his life long struggle to ‘break the caste system’(1996:23) is finally bearing fruit.

Nath says: Remember, it is we who are responsible for the age old sufferings of these people. We have betrayed them for generations. We should feel guilty about this…………
What you are doing could be both wise and foolish. But one thing is certain, it upholds the norms of civilized humanity, and therefore I stand by you. Go ahead my child, let us see what happens. (1996:31)

These reforms were important, and individuals who had idealism in them, could give it a practical turn. This was a positive outcome from the ‘soul-deadening habit’ of discrimination based on caste in the Hindu society.

As Amartya Sen mentions:
“the assertion of human commonality has been a part of resistance to degrading attributions in different cultures at different points in time. In the Indian epic Mahabharata, dating from around two Thousand year ago, Bharadwaja, an
argumentative interlocutor, responds to the defense of the caste system by Bhrigu (a pillar of the establishment) by asking: “We all seem to be affected by desire, anger, fear, sorrow, worry, hunger and labour: how do we have caste difference then?” (2006: 7-8)

Amartya Sen further states that the foundations of degradation include not only descriptive misrepresentation, but also the illusion of a singular identity that others must attribute to the person, to be demeaned” (2006:7-8).

Jyoti and Arun get married. But it is not a happy marriage. Jyoti becomes pregnant and continues to work. Arun resorts to the age old evil of ‘wife – beating’. His answer to this violent habit was:

What am I but the son of a scavenger we don’t know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives…we make love to them…but beating is what gets publicized...

Seva : Drunk or sober, wife beating is called barbarism. (1996:44)

Balwant Bhaneja comments on *Kanyadaan* (1996) thus: “Tendulkar unmasks and debunks the so-called radical Dalits who use caste as a trump card, playing the same old game of balancing hypocrisy and vested interests. He raises some extremely pertinent questions, which call for retrospective thinking about means and goals of the Dalit movement and the uncomfortable relationship between the Savarn (higher Class) and Avarn (oppressed) classes in the society” (2003).

In *Kanyadaan* (1996) Tendulkar considers the inter-caste marriage a step towards social upliftment. But he also shows clearly the consequences which are chaotic by disturbing the natural order of society.
Seva is appalled at Arun’s behavior towards her daughter. “Doesn’t his wife belong to the high caste? Is this the way he is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste. It appears that this is the monumental mission he has set out to fulfill” (1996: 48).

Just as Wole Soyinka is appalled by injustice done to innocent children, Tendulkar is horrified by atrocities against women. In an incident which is narrated in *Climate of Fear* (2005), Wole Soyinka draws a picture of children robbed of their dignity. In *Kanyadaan*, Jyoti is robbed of her dignity when her husband beats her. Wole Soyinka states, “acceptance of any such violation makes moral cowards of us all, and leaves us in complicity with other cowards of any struggle who lay siege on the helpless” (2005: xiv).

Jayaprakash, Jyoti’s brother is also trying to analyze Arun’s psychology in beating his wife. Centuries of suppression of the shudras and the Dalits by the Brahmins has also inculcated a deep rooted hatred in them for the upper class, and it pours forth in ways like ‘wife beating’.

Jayaprakash: Just this, that those who were being massacred are now indulging in massacre. (1996:51)

Jayaprakash is justified in his analysis as he sees Arun behaving like a victim, who is now making his wife the victim.

Jayaprakash: violence may go on to perpetuate brutal violence upon others. Perhaps those who are hunted derive great pleasure in hunting others when they get an opportunity to do so. The oppressed are overjoyed when they get a chance to oppress others….In other words Yesterday’s victim is today’s victimizer. Therefore there is no
hope of a man’s gaining nobility through experience, he can only become a greater devil. (1996:51)

Jayaprakash’s father does not agree with his son. He says that it is not right to come to a perverse conclusion on the basis of a single example. Nath further says that to show disrespect to anyone, is being uncultured, and uncivilized. He is saddened to see his daughter’s condition. All his ideals of uprooting the caste system seem to be futile. He cannot see his daughter suffering, at the hands of her husband. Arun, the sensitive Dalit poet, is the most insensitive and bestial husband, he kicks his pregnant wife in the stomach. Nath is disoriented, he blames himself for sacrificing his daughter at the altar of his idealism.

Nath : I had this maniacal urge to uproot casteism and caste distinctions from our society. As a result I pushed my daughter into a sea of misery…. (1996:61)

The utter confusion of idealism on seeing the result of it is heart breaking.

Vijay Tendulkar, makes Jyoti his mouthpiece and gives the most pertinent speech on the duality in human nature, and the acceptance of the destructive element with the creative. Jyoti blames her father for feeding her on too much of idealism. Her confrontation with reality, in the form of a marriage proved to be otherwise. She discovered that humanism, idealism and liberalism were good in speeches, heard and read. But life has to be lived, which is very different from the preaching she has imbibed.

Jyoti: Hatred, not for the man, but for his tendencies. No man is fundamentally evil, he is good. He has certain propensities towards evil. They must be transformed. Completely uprooted and destroyed. And then the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the god slumbering
Jyoti is angry with her father because she has discovered, that there are no fixed formulas by which one can live life. Life has to be faced squarely with all its misery. Jyoti’s husband, is both a saint and a sinner at the same time. He staggers home, roaring drunk, like a savage beast whose bestiality cannot be separated from him. “In the beginning, like an idiot, I used to search for that Arun who is above and beyond this beastliness, I used to call out to him, take him in my arms. Hard experience taught me I would always fail. Arun is both the beast, and the lover. Arun is the demon, and also the poet.” (1996:68). The creative and destructive elements in human nature have to be accepted as part of a whole.

Wole Soyinka explains the behaviour of people like Arun thus, “in short, power is, paradoxically, the primordial marshland of fear, from which emerges the precipitate of man’s neurotic response to mortality”(2005:58). By showing the transformation of a daughter, Jyoti into a wife and a mother, Vijay Tendulkar poses significant social and moral questions in front of the audience, which are thought provoking.

This gripping play which has undercurrents of violence, uncertainties and anger, shows a society that is trying to break social barriers of caste. Through Jyoti’s life, the playwright is trying to show that aggression and violence are latent in human nature. Education may curb them and human beings may appear civilized, but these latent tendencies come forth without a warning, and even the aggressor is not able to control it.

Jyoti, with her maturity, is able to accept her fate. She does not leave her husband, even when the father wants her to come back. She tells her father that the drug of idealism fed by him every day, has numbed her entire consciousness. An inner compulsion will make her lose her life as guinea pig
in the experiment, which her father was conducting, to arouse the god sleeping in man.

In the ‘After word’ to the play, Tendulkar states that *Kanyadaan* (1996) “is not the story of a victory: it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion. It gives expression to a deep rooted malaise and its pains” (1998:71). Domestic violence is an issue, which has no answer. Society will have to confront it again and again, till men learn to treat women, their wives as their equals. And harmony amongst human beings will come when they treat each other as a reflection of themselves.

Another Indian playwright who is preoccupied with the theme of social injustice is Mahesh Dattani. Dattani’s plays mainly deal with social issues regarding the family. But as critic Angelie Multani says in her essay, “Inner and outer space in the plays of Mahesh Dattani”, that the spaces in his stage are not only the literal ‘realistic ’living rooms of the urban middle class families that inhabit his plays, but also the hidden and sometimes treacherous spaces of the past, of memory and of desire’ (2006:22). Mahesh Dattani’s play *Thirty days in September*(2005), which deals with the sensitive issue of child abuse, also takes up the issue of the violation of human dignity. Dattani’s plays bring the skeleton out from the cupboard of families to highlight the baser instincts of man, which are very much a part of his being. These items-shock the audience, and make them reflect upon why such acts of violence occur.

Lillete Dubey, the well known theatre personality and director of this play, writes in the Note to the play, “after every performance, women have come backstage with their own traumatic stories writ large on their faces, grateful for the catharsis the play offers, but even more, for, the expiation of their own guilt which they have carried as a heavy burden for so long”(2005:4).
The play is a story of Mala who has been sexually abused in her childhood. This incidence has scarred her psyche. She is unable to get close to any man barring the closeness of bodies. Her mother has taken refuge in god, an escape route. Mala’s friend and fiancé Deepak instills faith in her once again. Makes her realize that a man can love a woman without lusting for her body. Through many sessions with the counselor she is healed. Mala tells her mother Shanta: “I am not talking about a bad dream! I am talking about the time when Uncle Vinay would molest me. When I was seven. Then eight. Nine. Ten. Every vacation when we went to visit him or when he came to stay” (2005:26). Then Mala was sexually abused by her cousin, ‘your uncle Vinay has given me your reference’(2005:28). Mala is a bold girl but the pain of her childhood memory is always there. This boldness is a cover to the deep fear within. This fear, which she lives with, has to be evacuated from her psyche. J. Krishnamurthy cites his surmise on combating fear in Beyond Violence (2008), “You have never looked at fear, have you? You have never said, ‘Well, I am afraid, let me look. ‘Rather you have said, ‘I am afraid, let me turn on the radio, or go to church or pick up a book, or resort to a belief-any movement away”(2008:69). He further states that you have never looked at fear without running away, without trying to overcome it.” Just be with it, without any movement away from it and if you do this, you will see a very strange thing happen” (2008:69). He observes that “you are fear, only thought has separated itself from fear” (2008:69).

An abstract analysis about fear but definitely a valid step in overcoming it. Wole Soyinka writes on what constitutes fear. “We have learned to associate the emotion of fear with the ascertainable measure of a loss in accustomed volition. The sense of freedom that is enjoyed or, more accurately, taken for granted in normal life becomes acutely contracted” (2005:7).