Chapter-6

Conclusion

Questions why Tendulkar is regarded as the most original and yet the most controversial of modern Indian playwrights get answered once the reader appreciates the new depths, dimensions and directions he has given to Indian theatre by his powerfully fascinating and thought-provoking treatment of the reality of violence in human life. If the ruthless exposure of pain, coarseness and cruelties has offended against the sensibility of many of his audiences, his honesty of perception and skills as a dramatist have cast a spell on his critics and admirers alike. This amazing, sometimes puzzling fusion of the horrible and the hypnotizing, the ugly and the attractive is an evidence of Tendulkar’s power of transforming even the phenomenon of violence into works of great aesthetic value and appeal.

A detailed study of Tendulkar’s aesthetics of violence suggests that what makes him a successful playwright is his wide and windswept view of the realities of human life, nature and the world around. The main area of his focus is, of course, the human relationships among men and women of middle class in particular, but what he depicts tends to represent the realities of the larger social world with its systems of meanings and values. He dramatizes his firm belief that basically humans are like other animals in the kingdom of Nature and violence is something innate to them, men or women. The instinct to control and dominate is, therefore, something that determines all human pursuits and relationships. This is true of man-woman relationships not only within but also outside the bond of matrimony. Individual behaviours, working of social, political, cultural and economic institutions and structures are illustrative of the fact that violence is central to them all, though it may often appear normalized in forms of rules and routines of conduct. Patriarchy, for example, has been depicted in his plays as a system of domination and control over woman by man, legitimizing, among other things, even the use of violent ways and means by him to impose on her his own will, needs and desires. This implies a dispossession of woman of her self as a subject and her relegation to the status of a mere object for man, denying her rights even to her own body and freedom of mind. The way Jaisingh in *Kamala* treats both Kamala and Sarita is amply revelatory of this insidious nature of violence against women, integral to patriarchal order prevalent in most of the societies.
The system of patriarchy also victimizes men like Kashikar and his group, though in a different way. It demands from all men like them to live up to the image and roles, defined and prescribed for their gender even if it entails painful stresses and struggles. Feelings of hurt and humiliation these male characters in *Silence! The Court is in Session* suffer because of the tormenting consciousness of their failures as men is an apt illustration of how this system often proves to be callous to the sensitivity of individuals both males and females. Plays like *Ghashiram Kotwal, Encounter in Umbegland, Kanyadaan* and *The Vultures* dramatize fully this impulse of brutal competition for domination, exploitation and oppression of one by the other, inherent in the institutions of politics, caste and class.

Depiction of violence as a phenomenon underlying all human institutions and systems gives us a critical perspective on a wide range of people belonging to different walks and sections of society – middle class, lower class, elites, politicians, leaders, commoners, dalits, journalists, businessmen, tribals, mobs and so on. This comprehensive nature of concerns is further revealed by the different forms of violence he has depicted in his works. There are numerous incidents of physical violence perpetrated in his world in the forms of blows, kicks, slaps and beating with belt and sticks, killings, murders and even genocide. Violence in the form of forced sex, abortions, violation of woman’s personal dignity in different ways abounds in his plays. Torrents of abusive words, name-calling, threats, curses, obscene remarks appear to be an integral part of the natural speech of his characters. The delineation of psychological violence in innumerable forms and shades appears to be the main forte of Tendulkar as a dramatist of human life.

An in-depth analysis of his aesthetics of violence also gives us insights into his powers of penetrative observation, objective dissection and bold and honest presentation of the complexities of human mind and behaviour. It is not only the range and variety of his men and women but also the way he explores and exposes the factors and forces driving and motivating them to acts and expressions of violence that makes them look so real. His plays bring out time and again how violence begets violence and the victim turns into a victimizer. Feelings of deprivation, humiliation and injustice caused by hierarchies of all kinds become a potent cause of aggression and violence in individual’s behavioural patterns. In *Kanyadaan* Arun’s stinging comments against Jyoti’s parents and her upper caste are promoted by his haunting consciousness of belonging to a caste which has been subjected to deprivations and indignities...
for centuries. It is this venom of hatred and anger which drives him to indulge in all sorts of brutal violence against his own wife, Jyoti, even when she is pregnant. Ghashiram Kotwal’s revelry in unleashing atrocities on Poonaites is another example of how one’s feelings of being wronged and humiliated by those in positions of power can incite feelings of violent revenge.

His diagnostic approach into the causes of violence also lays bare the role of one’s socialization and early childhood experiences. He shows how violence among family members, subjecting children to such experiences, tends to make them grow into violent individuals. Sakharam Binder’s egotism, brutal self-assertions on his women and uninhibited use of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence have their source in the humiliation and thrashing he received from his parents as a child. Arun, too, has no inhibitions about battering his wife, Jyoti, because he has seen, as a child, his father coming home over-drunk every day and beating his mother half-dead.

Tendulkar’s clinical insights into human psyche also highlights how biological urges, manifesting in the form of libidinous drives tend to find violent expressions, particularly in the face of hostile and frustrating situations. When these biological forces are thwarted by orthodox social norms, they become a repressed force and tend to find violent forms of expression. It may be in the form of displaced aggression against the vulnerable or may also at times become self-directed. Mitra’s case in *A Friend’s Story* is a classic example of violence resulting from one’s thwarted libidinous drives. Her lesbian sexual urge turns her into a kind of ferocious devourer of Nama but when frustrated by the orthodox heterosexual patriarchal milieu, it becomes self-directed, pushing her ultimately to the desperate act of self-annihilation.

Tendulkar’s treatment of violence brings to light not only the socio-psychological or biological factors and forces as causes of violent behaviour but also depicts it as something intrinsic to human nature. He dramatizes how man in spite of his more developed brain and cultural veneers is basically like other animals and birds, driven by the genetically-rooted instinct of violence. He shows that all humans, irrespective of gender, class, caste and education etc, tend to exhibit at one point or the other a propensity in varying degrees and forms to use violence. This human tendency, he suggests, is most probably a trait of the species. He, thus, enables us to achieve a more comprehensive and incisive understanding of the phenomenon of violence and the causes of its prevalence in almost every area and aspect of human life. If his treatment of this subject of violence on a wide scale reveals the comprehensive nature of his themes and concerns,
the objective and analytical explorations into its origins testifies his immense curiosity to
discover and lay bare the secret truths which lie in the deep and dark oceans of human psyche.
This evinces his commitment to nothing but truth, the total truth which makes his theatre an
image of life. And it is this ability of Tendulkar to present the image of life that makes many of
his characters so interesting. Different nature of motives, intentions and the basic impulses
behind their actions determine the human quality of his dramatic figures. This emphasis on the
inner realities brings his characters close to the reader’s heart. They tend to display the
remarkable complexities and ambiguities especially in the case of those men and women who are
composites of good and evil, strengths and weaknesses, capable of human contradictions and
changes. His ability to understand and depict such complexities of human behaviour is mainly
due to his holistic perception of the drama of human existence. He doesn’t show the external
environs and the internal life of the individual as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, he depicts
them as intricately interdependent, acting and interacting upon each other. That is why, his
characters adopt a wide range of coping mechanisms to negotiate the pressures and challenges of
their situations.

The study of his aesthetics of violence brings into sharp focus these mechanisms which
reveal the fundamental qualities of their human nature, making them look so convincing. The
fact that they all adopt responses to their varying situations in accordance with the peculiarities
of their temperaments, outlooks, attitudes, level of sensitivity and awareness, as well as the
courage, strengths and weaknesses of their moral and psychological being makes them look well
individuated figures. We meet in his world characters like Kamala and Gauri who tend to be
passive and submissive to the conditions of their existence and seek to survive without any
noticeable sign of either awareness of their predicament or any will to resist or alter it. Women
like Rama do differ from Kamala and Gauri in the sense that they tend to aspire for and have a
vision of a different and better life for themselves. But she too ultimately resigns herself, though
reluctantly, to the onslaughts of her situation due to the lack of inner resources. Inadequacy of
inner strength, lack of intellectual and psychological maturity leads a woman like Mitra, with
sensitivity of heart and irresistible desires of body, to adopt the mechanism of seeking escape
into alcohol, sex and even suicide. In some ways akin to them appear those of his characters
who, instead of resorting to self-annihilation as a means of escape, turn their feelings of anger
and frustration outward and thus, turn aggressive against the weaker ones to purge themselves of
the venom of their hurts and humiliations.

In the vast gallery of his portraits are also those of his characters who tend to derive
strength by their blind dependence on or adherence to some force, set of values, principles or
codes to confront the harsh realities of their life. Laxmi and Nath in *Sakharam Binder* and
*Kanyadaan* respectively stand out as examples of this conformist strategy of negotiating
challenges of their world. If Laxmi relies on faith in her religion and the code of conduct it
prescribes for women, Nath uncritically follows the old borrowed ideals in the face of violence.
Though it gives them strength and some stability in the face of storming situations, both of them
tend to exhibit severe limitations of their abilities and capacities to respond in a dynamic way to
new and changing situations with an open mind. Like those who submit passively or the ones
who escape from the pains of frustrations either by giving in to alcoholism and self-destruction
or by taking it out and becoming aggressive and violent towards others, these conformists too, do
not appear in his plays as major figures, deserving our admiration.

Tendulkar, as a realist, certainly doesn’t present any of his character as an embodiment of
all the desirable and traditional qualities of a hero. But he does believe in the possibilities that
even ordinary human beings can display in considerable degrees, such qualities as an acute
sensitivity, developed consciousness, intellectual incisiveness and stamina, firmness of will and
courage essential for a life of freedom and dignity even in the face of daunting adversities.
Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Sarita in *Kamala* and Vijaya in *Encounter in
Umbugland* stand out as characters who appear to be more dynamic, resilient and courageous
capable of developing responses to encounter even the most restrictive, repressive and
debilitating forces in their milieu. Benare, for example, is a modern, educated, economically
independent woman who faces courageously the onslaughts of male chauvinists and self-
proclaimed custodians of orthodox morality and is determined to protect the life in her womb as
an unwed mother demonstrating the resilience of spirit and commitment to a life of dignity at her
own terms. Sarita also impresses us deeply with her emotional sensitivity coupled with
intellectual capacity necessary to comprehend and confront the realities of oppressive and
exploitative male world. She emerges as a woman with remarkable depth and maturity of mind
and attitude, displaying great capacity to learn from her experiences and grows into a resolute
woman ready to confront the tyrannies against herself in particular and women in general.
One of the most striking features of Tendulkar’s aesthetics of violence appears to be his objective and critical treatment of not only the realities of violence in its varied forms but also in the way he has presented very penetratively the causes and motives of the victimizers’ tendencies to commit cruelties as well as the manner in which the victims cope with such experiences in the context of their situations. This goes to underline the fact that though he brings out qualities of man’s basic nature which have remained always the same and yet does not negate the reality that human beings are complex and more evolved animals negotiating situations in endlessly different ways. This is what introduces in his plays some element of hope saving them from becoming monotonously pessimistic. One notices that each of his characters has a distinct personality which shows that Tendulkar’s treatment of men and women is not reductive at all. All these aspects further add to the human appeal of his characters making us see something of our own in each one of them. This identification with his characters arousing pity, fear or unacknowledged primitive passions, yields not only emotional pleasure but also the pleasure that comes from the discovery of knowledge about things which lie buried in the dark recesses of our mind. Even the most shocking scenes and behaviours of brutality, when seen from an aesthetic distance, evoke in us a reaction, yielding pleasure of thought, reflection and even rejection of the immoral.

Variety and multiplicity of situations and individuals with peculiarities of their characters are a clear testimony to Tendulkar’s rejection of all dogmas, theories and philosophies about life. That is why his plays tend to be open-ended, throwing up more questions than the answers they provide, thus forcing us to react emotionally, intellectually and morally. The way his plays engage us at all these different levels of our sensibility and experience, yielding pleasures peculiar to his theatre is a clear evidence of how he has dealt with the phenomenon of violence in a highly gripping manner. The success of his powers as a dramatist to fascinate his audiences even when he disturbs and shocks them with his ruthless honesty, in rendering often the most brutal of human behaviours is certainly the result of his ability to marshal his skills in creating powerful characters, arranging and organizing events and situations and in handling such devices as speech patterns, imagery, symbols and spectacle in a remarkably dexterous manner. All these qualities of Tendulkar’s theatre of violence make it unparalleled in the tradition of Indian drama, distinguishing it not only from the conventional sentimental and melodramatic Marathi theatre of
his times, but also giving him a unique place among great giants of modern Indian drama like Girish Karnard, Badal Sircar, Mahesh Dattani and Mohan Rakesh.