Vijay Tendulkar, a controversial modern playwright, has galvanized Indian theatre with his provocative explorations of socio-psychological realities of human life fraught with conflicts and violence. He broke from the habitual sentimental, melodramatic and narrow drawing-room themes and self-regarding complacency that dominated the mainstream stage and objectively explored and exposed human nature in all its diversity and depths.

A comprehensive and insightful study on Tendulkar’s oeuvre, focusing on his view and vision of life, treatment of the theme of violence and its aestheticization has led us to remove the imbalances and gaps in the existing criticism. A critical look at his major plays shows that his treatment of violence is characterized by complexity and incisiveness and serves to bind them into a kind of unified body with all its different forms, varying shades and nuances.

For Tendulkar all human relationships are power relationships where one uses force to hurt, humiliate or subjugate the vulnerable using different means. Physical violence perpetrated against the body of the victim in brutal forms is exemplified by the way Sakharam beats his women like Laxmi and strangles Champa to death in *Sakharam Binder*. Allied to this is the form of sexual violence which manifests itself in forced relationships, prostitution, rape and sexual harassments resulting in injury or violation of the body and dignity of the woman. Sakharam, for instance, compulsively indulges in violently exploitative sexual orgies with his women revealing a psychopathic attitude towards them.

Both these forms of violence tend to be accompanied by the psychological violence, impacting the mind and heart of the victim. It includes basic fears which emerge when one feels threatened with loosing one’s social reputation, status and dignity. The way Benare is haunted by fears of social stigma of becoming an unwed mother in *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a striking illustration of being subjected to such fears. Along with all these forms, violence can be very painful and virulent in the form of hurtful language also, which includes verbal attacks such as ridicules, name calling, curses, abusive words and swears. Abundance of abusive language in *The Vultures* has scandalized Tendulkar’s audience not only for their vulgarity and obscenity but also for the venom of hatred and violence.

Not confined to mere dramatization of forms of violence, Tendulkar goes deeper into the multiple factors that motivate violence highlighting biological, psychological, social and economic forces. He shows how biological urges, particularly the libidinous drives find a violent expression in the face of thwarting situations as in the case of lesbian Mitra in *A Friends Story*. 
Tendulkar also draws attention to psychological factors, revealing how violent childhood experiences make Sakharam grow into a violent individual. The system of patriarchy, the repressive social gender norms and institutionalized system of domination and control over woman by man are important factors responsible for violence prevalent against women. The way Jaisingh, in Kamala, treats both Kamala and Sarita is amply revelatory of this insidious nature of violence.

Discriminating and repressive social stratifications, too, have been highlighted by Tendulkar as some of the other major causes of behavioural violence seen in individuals, living a deprived life. Arun in Kanyadaan, shows in his cruel and violent behaviour towards his wife, Jyoti, a girl of upper caste, how social oppression and deprivation can turn the victim into a victimizer.

Tendulkar also takes into account the economic factors as one of the causes of violence in society. Driven by strong greed for fulfilling mercenary goals, people in this materialistic modern milieu lead a fragmented and isolated life. The Vultures stands out as a play in which most of the characters show these maladies of inhuman selfishness, greed and senseless violence, ever ready to cheat or even kill one another to get a greater share in property. Power as a source of violence manifests itself most obviously in political institutions. Ghashiram’s lust for power and desire for revenge makes him barter away his daughter to become Kotwal of Poona. He goes amuck with power, perpetrating the most horrifying cruelties on Poonaites and ultimately himself meets a violent death at the hands of the rebellious crowd.

Besides depicting different forms and dynamics of violence, Tendulkar’s plays also highlight attitudes and ways, means and methods individuals use to negotiate this reality of their existence. If some of his characters like Kamala and Gauri tend to survive by submitting passively to the conditions of oppression and degradation in their lives, there are others, like Rama, in The vultures who surrender to their lot resentfully and reluctantly. Some of the characters exhibit tendencies of seeking escape from pressures and challenges. Mitra in A Friend’s Story for example, is unable to negotiate her own frustrations and feelings of emptiness and tends to escape in alcoholism, sex and ultimately suicide.

Another strategy adopted by some of his characters is to conform to some external force, set of ideal, values or theories. If Nath in Kanyadaan relies heavily on borrowed ideals, Laxmi in
*Sakharam Binder* derives strength from blind faith in her religion and in the sanctity of traditional role of a wife.

Tendulkar also portrays characters endowed with acute sensitivity, intellectual incisiveness, firmness of will essential for a life of freedom and dignity in the face of daunting adversities. Sarita in *Kamala* and Vijaya in *Encounter in Umbugland* are characters who appear as dynamic, resilient and courageous, capable of developing responses to encounter even the most hostile and debilitating forces in their milieu thus introducing some element of hope in his plays, making his art realistically affirmative. From a critical look at depiction of such a vast variety of responses emerges the fact that Tendulkar has tried to explore human nature and the world around in a realistic manner without reducing his men and women or their copying mechanisms to any set of fixed theory or philosophy.

The theme of violence projecting Tendulkar’s weltanschauung serves as the unifying principle providing an organic unity to different elements, constituting his art of drama. It is this that puts different incidents, situations and characters into an indivisible and unique pattern of aesthetic relationships. These elements along with the images, symbols, dialogues, speech patterns and language of silence, gestures and movements tend to derive their meaning and significance from the theme of violence.

Almost all of his plays are character-centric and portray real, throbbing human beings with instincts, desires, ambitions, impulses and conflicts of their own complex selves. In the life-like portrayals of his characters, his audiences see something of themselves and thus tend to experience identification with them at different levels − emotional, intellectual and moral, yielding pleasure peculiar to his theatre. His plays also provide us with the pleasure that comes from the discovery of knowledge about things which lie buried in the dark recesses of our minds. Even the brutal scenes of bestiality, when seen from an aesthetic distance evoke in us a reaction, yielding pleasure of thought, reflection and even rejection of the immoral.

Tendulkar’s aesthetics of violence, thus, suggests that what makes him a successful playwright is his kaleidoscopic range, keen sense of observation and clinical understanding in depicting different forms of violence, human instincts and motives and varying responses to the complex situations in a graphic and powerful way, thereby, imparting the element of universality to his art.