Chapter-4

Negotiating Violence

Tendulkar’s plays are primarily an example of the art of representation, reflecting critically reality of life as he sees and understands it. The amazing range and variety of forms of violence he depicts in his plays reveal the comprehensive and inclusive nature of his view of the world. His interest in exploring and understanding reality leads him deeper into scrutinizing and unveiling the factors and forces motivating human attitudes and behaviours. He suggests that almost all human relations and actions are motivated by the quest for power, resulting often in conflict and even violence. But his interest as a playwright is not limited to a mere depiction of violence and probing into its causes, he goes further and dramatizes different ways and means men and women adopt to cope with this pervasive and potent element of human experience.

Tendulkar seems to view violence as a metaphor for life, fraught with forces seeking to thwart individuals’ drives for fulfillment. Tendulkar shows human life as a complex phenomenon with multiple dimensions of relationships and experiences – personal, familial and social. As a social and historical being, an individual is always engaged in an interaction between his subjective self and objective realities impinging on his perceptions and responses. These external realities create situations in which the individuals have to conduct themselves, struggling to realize the fulfillment of their instincts, desires, aims and ambitions. They, thus, find themselves pitted against restrictive and even inimical forces seeking to control, manipulate and subjugate the individual even by the use of force and violence to the interests of those in power.

Various social, cultural and economic structures such as gender, caste and class, erected and sanctioned to serve the powerful, impact on the moral and psychological being of the individual, evoking from him different types of reactions. These responses to the situations are contingent on a variety of factors in the life of his men and women. Since each individual is the product of his typical personal experiences and is endowed with certain tendencies, abilities and capacities of mind and heart peculiar to him, the responses he adopts to encounter hostile and hurtful situations are also bound to be different in each case.

If some of the characters resign themselves without showing any perceptible resistance and, thus, appear to be passive, helpless and even unthinking sufferers of oppression, there can
also be people who tend to compromise with their situations, but do so reluctantly and resentfully, to survive violence. There are also others who refuse to surrender and instead try to resist all forms of onslaughts on their life, but their oppression to the victimizers, sometimes, takes the form of aggression and even forms of sadistic and pathological revenge. A few of his men and women also display a tendency to escape violence by seeking refuge in the world of alcohol, sex and even suicide. One also comes across a number of people in his world who seek to survive atrocities by conforming, almost uncritically to the orthodox ways and values of their society. If some of the figures deal with the impact of blows on their sense of self by voicing their frustration and resolution to defy their degradation, there are also those who express their will and resolution in the form of action against their victimizers. Tendulkar has also created men and women who are equipped with greater intelligence and awareness and, therefore, try to alter not only their own conditions but also seek to oppose violence at large with the help of their ideas and ideals.

What impresses the reader about his treatment of the methods and mechanisms humans adopt in the face of disruptive and harsh conditions of existence is his insight into human nature and capacities, both good and evil, in their struggle to survive. That is why he appears to have portrayed characters who live at a rather simple and even a primitive level, driven by instincts and appetites with the same dexterity and skill with which he has presented those who are more evolved and complex human beings, displaying a capacity to respond to hurtful and throttling situations in a relatively more dynamic and rational manner.

The responses of his characters to the inhospitable situations appear to be as wide-ranging, varied and complex as life itself. This is evident from the fact that even when some of his characters tend to epitomize certain general human traits and values, they exhibit them in subtly varying forms along with the working of the contrary human impulses making their responses look more humanly real and complex. It is for this reason that the different ways people in his plays adopt to cope with unsettling and traumatic experiences defy all attempts at rigid categorization. However one can trace certain broad trends in the behaviours and attitudes they adopt in the face of thwarting conditions. One of the ways a large number of his characters appear to adopt is to survive their plight by submitting rather passively to their circumstances. This is noticeable mainly in his women characters who, conditioned by tradition and handicapped by economic dependence appear to have no other alternative but to suffer their fate
resignedly. But here too, one finds a considerable variety of attitudes and behaviour towards the violent and oppressive situations in their lives. If there are those who surrender to their predicament rather ungrudgingly because of their complete lack of hope and vision for a different kind of life, there are also women who submit themselves reluctantly because of the overwhelming pressures of social and material life. Because of their lack of inner resources and inability to show any sign of stamina to struggle against oppression, none of them emerges as an admirable figure even if the reader may pity or even sympathize with them. In the absence of any significant desire or determination for a better deal in life, they register no perceptible growth in their perceptions, attitudes and responses.

Tendulkar shows that all of these women are victims of patriarchal structures of power which seek to keep women subjugated and enslaved. The various forms of sexist practices in patriarchal setup of society have been one of degrading and crippling forces which women have been confronting since the day of dawn. Most of his women find themselves helpless in the face of sexist oppression and are unable to cope with it in any way other than accepting its pains and sufferings. The inability to resist such oppressive conditions might be attributed to their being living at a low level of awareness and poor material conditions. These individuals usually do not possess the ability to think rationally which is due to their lack of learning that gives them no choice, other than to resign. Since they neither think nor act to bring a change in their lot, there is seen no significant growth in such characters. The absence of hope and faith in themselves makes them silent sufferers and they resign to the cruelties done to them. They appear to possess low sensitivity and have a limited perspective. They accept whatever is given to them as Simone de Beauvoir puts it: “They have gained only what men have been willing to grant: they have taken nothing, they have only received.”

Living this kind of servile and slavish life, they do not cherish any hopes and expectations to get anything better in return, for they just become accustomed to the tradition of conditioned slavery.

Tendulkar presents such a response through women like Kamala, who belongs to a poor tribal community and therefore has to depend for her bare survival upon the mercy of her masters. Such women appear to have no choice but to carry out their master’s orders without any will or happiness of their own. Tendulkar conveys how these women are not treated as humans and are reduced to mere things or commodities to be exhibited and used by men. Kamala, the eponymous character, a victim of flesh-trade in the play, has been presented as too naïve and
ignorant to understand fully the complexities of life and thus meekly accepts the conventionalized form of gender roles ascribed by the sexist society. A sense of inferiority has sunk so deep into her psyche that she cannot conduct herself with confidence and self-respect in the presence of her master. She stands in a corner, her face hidden by her pallu and when Jaisingh approaches her, she pulls her veil further down over her face and indistinctly nods her head for every answer. At other time, she feels shy of talking to him for “he’s such a big man - and I’m a stupid peasant… I won’t be able to” (K:35).

The whole description of the way she conducts herself timidly and submissively reveals how completely she has submitted herself to the overwhelming oppression in her world. This is also evident from the way Tendulkar describes the helpless and pathetic nature of the life of tribal women who are sold as slaves in flesh trade market and the way these women endure being inspected and handled like animals by the “men who want to bid….Whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and….“(K:14). Through their experience, Tendulkar gives his readers an idea of immeasurable cruelty perpetrated on the women in sexist system. But his interest is not confined merely to highlighting the practice of flesh-trade, he focuses an equal and searching spotlight on the way these women survive rather pathetically the ordeals of their life by passively resigning themselves to this sexist system.

This also becomes evident from the whole pattern of Kamala’s existence and thinking which is highly orthodox in nature. She conforms to the conventionalized and orthodox beliefs that the role of women is to only reproduce children and look after the domestic chores:

SARITA. How many children do you have, Kamala?
KAMALA. I’ll have as many as you want. And work as hard as you want…. We’ll keep the master happy…. I’ll do the hard work, and I’ll bring forth the children …. You are an educated woman. You keep the accounts and run the house…. Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I’ll sleep with him (K:34-35).

She is ready to submit to this fate without any complaints as she can hope for nothing better with her limited scope of thinking. Such characters are unable to transform their situation into a better one, as they never even realize their conditions as oppressive. She remains silent and offers no resistance to any of her oppressors, be it Jaisingh or the flesh traders. Even when the press
reporters ask questions, offensive to her human dignity, and laugh demeaningly at her and women of her tribe, she makes no sign or utters any syllable of protest. She, it seems, has internalized her degrading role as a slave and thus offers no resistance to the indignities done to her body and mind. It is this lack of resistance in such women that reduces them to the status of nothing more than a kind of toy. They suffer silently the violence done to their bodies, minds and souls in the sexist structure. The long history of their oppression and marginalization tends to benumb them to the pains of their slave-like existence. Inarticulate and submissive in nature, they fail to develop meaningful and satisfying social relationships. Rather, they feel satisfied with getting a role of making their masters or patriarchs pleased.

Their resignation to the lot controlled by others results in the perpetuation of more sufferings and degradation. They are not active participants in what happens in their life and they just submit to whatever is done to them. They do not seem to possess the ability of making choices as is further evident from the response of Gauri in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. In this play one can see how women fall easy prey to the machinations of the powerful. Here, Gauri allows herself to be used like an inanimate thing in the game of her father’s ambitions and Nana Phadanvis’s lust, fraught with cruelties of harrowing nature. The whole of her role in the play is characterized by submission, passivity and unquestioning acceptance of her destiny.

One of Tendulkar’s ways to make his women visible is to give them voice, to share their experiences of humiliation, marginalization and victimization. But Gauri, neither raises her voice to protest against being used as a commodity, nor does she share her experiences with anyone. Her unquestioning surrender to the men who matter is clear from the way she is passed on by her father to Nana without her having any say in the matter. She appears to go through the motions of doing whatever she is asked to. It indicates how women like her exist as mere objects, nullities bereft of any will or desire of their own. Though her inner experience is rendered invisible but that can be a deliberate effort on the part of Tendulkar. For Gauri belongs to the times when women were termed as minority and hence were always legitimate objects of being used as sex objects for men’s pleasure. Though the play exposes a patriarchal culture which traps women into destinies not of their choice and legitimizes the violence against them, he only lets the actions against Gauri speak for themselves. She at once is marked as central yet invisible in the play. This invisibility clearly reveals her as an unthinking sufferer who cannot speak. It seems that she fully surrenders to the life destined for her and readily slips into the role of a mistress.
This is evident from her short but significant scenes in the play. She appears thrice on the stage and the manners and behaviour exhibited by her clearly show how she gets sucked into the situation beyond her control.

At first she appears as shy, diffident, a little awed by Nana’s presence and then during Radha Krishan dance, she is seductive and sensuous as directed by the father and demanded by Nana. The third time during the Rangpanchami dance, young, vital and happy, she enacts the role choreographed for her to please the master. In none of her appearances are there any hints of her reluctance or misery or repugnance at being mated with an old man and that too as his mistress. How helplessly resigned she appears when Nana, satiated with her, disposes her off and sends her to Chandra, the midwife for abortion resulting in her gruesome death.

Of course Gauri’s position is unique, as compared to the other women in Tendulkar’s plays. She belongs to another era and truly represents the older generation. Marriages of young girls to old but powerful and rich men were nothing unusual as Nana’s nine marriages testify. She belonged to the times when social structure of the period did not permit women making free choices and rather were brought up as non-entities. Tendulkar however shows that in spite of some changes in the social and economic status of women in post-independent India, majority of Indian women still find it too difficult to assert themselves in taking decisions even about their own lives. A large number of them tend to succumb to the patriarchal tyrannies because their confidence in themselves is so low that they cannot even imagine a life without the protection of a male. That is why they go on suffering the insufferable without any meaningful resistance.

Their submission to the painful lot is however a bit different in character and nature from the one exhibited by Kamala and Gauri. Here, surrender is not without resentment and protest even if they remain resolutely suppressed because of their lack of courage needed to take any radical decision. They evince greater sensitivity and higher level of awareness resulting in their ability to think of a different and better life than what they are saddled with. Higher level of their sensitivity and understanding fills them with anger and rage against their degrading and crippling circumstances. But because of their inner weaknesses they fail to alter their conditions and yield to them, though reluctantly and resentfully.

Rama, in *The Vultures*, is one such character whose conduct clearly illustrates this attitude while living in the midst of vultures. She appears as the one who has suffered a lot at the hands of her husband and family for twenty two long years. The play shows how “all her hopes,
her expectations/ Were scorched, uprooted where they grew”(TV:205). One finds that she is a sensitive woman surrounded by people with predatory traits. For them nothing but money is important which they seek to grab by all means. She feels suffocated in this atmosphere of mutual suspicion and hatred. Jealousies, anger and violence are the ruling traits of these members of her husband’s family. She herself has to put up with the verbal volleys of Manik, her sister-in-law, who always frets and fumes at her. It is her sensitivity that sets her apart from all the other members of this vulturine family even in her attitude towards Rajaninath. He is an object of derision and rejection from all others except Rama who sympathizes with him in his loneliness and suffering. She, therefore, even tries to give him food and tea. But she always has to suffer snubs and threats from her husband and ultimately succumbs to the fear of jeopardizing her marriage by infuriating her husband for helping Rajaninath. Her agony appears at its most intense particularly when she has to strangle all her desires and needs for fulfillment as a wife. Like any other woman, she too has her dreams for a peaceful home of love and harmony with her husband. But what she gets in reality is an ordeal she has to suffer each time her husband makes drunken love to her. Her natural yearnings for fulfillment as a mother too are stifled. She feels her dignity painfully violated each time she is taken to a “swami, astrologer or healer”(TV:242) to cure her of the infertility, she is accused of. But she submits to all these indignities silently though she knows that it is the seed which is sick and rotten. In fact, she doesn’t seem to have confidence necessary for her to speak the truth and thus protect her self-respect as a woman. She appears to be too timid to risk the security and status as wife.

Burning in this silent agony and raging thirst to become a mother, Rama faces a new death everyday and her heart maddens with pain. It has been so many years like this and she has endured all the pains without even a word of complaint or a tear. But she is afraid that these barriers of restraint and suppression may one day crumble under the unbearable pressures of frustration and pain and “streams of blood will flow from” her “eyes and fragments” of her “heart will fall”(TV:241) from her mouth. She knows that her predicament is worse than even that of the ‘Sati’ who had to burn herself alive after the death of her husband. Tendulkar explodes all the aura of glory created around this practice of utmost cruelty by showing how women like Rama are forced to commit Sati every moment of their life by killing their needs and desires: “They used to burn themselves alive -- in loyalty to their dead husbands. But only once.
Once they were burnt, they escaped. But I… in this living death of my wifehood -- I commit *sati* every moment! I burn! I am consumed!” (*TV*:242).

The aversion to the constant submission to her plight is so acute that it sometimes leads to a spontaneous outburst of Rama’s agony and anger. This becomes evident when she reveals how she has longed for “getting free of this once and for all!”(*TV*:242) even if it means either to destroy herself or poisoning her husband to death like a fatal woman. All her rage and despair ultimately dissipate into nothing but self pity and flagellation: “I am weak. I am timid. Despicable. Useless. Quite, quite useless. Not good enough to live”(*TV*:242). Certainly she appears to know what she wants “but not how” and she does not “have the courage to find out!” (*TV*:242). The playwright shows that she remains trapped in this complex situation as she is utterly destitute of the strength of will and the capacity to act, so necessary to bring about a change she frets for.

Her response to the pathetic condition in fact seems to be very complex and ambiguous. That’s why some of the critics, like Wadikar, find in her an example of ideal and pure Indian womanhood. But at a close scrutiny, all these qualities and roles appear to be convenient masks she assumes, perhaps unconsciously, to camouflage her deep despair aimed at making her miseries and torments bearable. This is often a subtle psychological strategy of the sufferer to survive the tyranny by seeking refuge in the comforting and consoling identification of herself with the imagined ideals and images. The fact that the forbearance and spirit of self-sacrifice admired in her by critics are not the essential and ingrained aspects of her natural self but something adopted as a part of her survival strategy. This is further suggested by the fact that ultimately she gets broken because she fails to derive any genuine strength from these assumed qualities. This is summed up towards the end of the play in her image as “a crumpled nothing,”(*TV*:206) rendered insensate, like the stone, bereft of all signs of a living human being. The whole pattern of Rama’s behaviour reminds one of the predicaments of a large number of women who prefer to carry the burden of marriage and suffer humiliations instead of standing up against atrocities.

One of the secrets of such a wide appeal of Tendulkar’s plays is the fact that all of his characters emerge as well-portrayed individuals with subtle particularities of traits even when they may at a superficial level look alike. This is evidenced very clearly by the subtle but important differences in the way they try to face aversive situations. If Rama succumbs to her
situation and fails to alter it, so do many of his other characters, but not for the same reasons and consequences. If women like Rama submit, though resentfully, to their lot there are those like Mitra who do not submit to survive the antagonistic forces and, therefore, ultimately seek escape into self-annihilation. Both of the characters get defeated by the situations hostile to their dreams and desires.

The reasons responsible for the differences in their respective responses lie mainly in the peculiarities of their temperaments and attitudes. The response of escapist like Mitra is often characterized by extremity and hypersensitivity. They are also found lacking in a sense of commitment to any larger human principle or system of values which could serve as a guiding and stabilizing force for them in times of crisis. The absence of faith in themselves further contributes to the chaos and the purposelessness in their existence. The result is that their lives are characterized by feelings of emptiness and nothingness. Unable to cope with the frustrations and vacuum in their life, aggravated by hostile world around them, they tend to become escapist seeking refuge in alcohol, sex and even death.

Tendulkar has depicted the inner conflict and turmoil in their lives in a very powerful manner showing both an attitude of sympathy for their sufferings as well as criticism of their weaknesses and escape from realities. The way he renders the complexity of the personality and response patterns of such characters further enhances the human appeal of his plays. The character of Mitra in A Friends’ Story stands out as a fine example of this memorable feature of his dramatic art.

In this play Tendulkar deals at length with the predicament of lesbians in traditional patriarchal Indian society. Mitra, a college going girl, discovers initially to her shock that she is different from others in her sexual inclinations. She is acutely conscious of the fact that such behaviour or urges are treated as abnormal with feelings of horror and contempt by the society. She gets so deeply perturbed and unhinged that she even tries to assure herself of normal feminine urges by experimenting heterosexual experience with her servant. But her failure to negate this truth about the nature of her sexuality through this relationship proves too much for her. Unable to come to terms with her aberrations and haunted by the fears of social contempt and rejection she contemplates and even tries to escape from her situations by committing suicide. But when the attempt fails and the truth of her lesbian tendencies becomes public she again proves deficient in her inner resources necessary to adopt an attitude of balance and dignity
in the face of this situation. Filled with a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about her fate she adopts an attitude of reckless defiance. This manifests itself in the egotistical and aggressive stance she takes towards almost everybody around her, including Nama for whom she has an infatuation. Even when she notices that Nama wants to withdraw from the relationship, she cannot take it with grace and dignity. Her possessiveness for Nama assumes monstrous proportions and the reader sees her as a kind of ruthless hunter. This aggressiveness appears to be a strategy to ward off her fears of being treated as a lesbian pariah. When she feels emotionally hurt and publically humiliated by Dalvi’s exposure of her lesbian relationship through his letters, she tries to put on a mask of dismissing the whole thing rather casually. But the whole façade of putting up bold appearances to cover her inner emptiness and haunting sense of insecurity ultimately collapses with the final blow of betrayal by Nama and also by Bapu. It plunges her into such a deep whirlpool of despair that she finds no way out of this trauma. She is so bewildered, lost and lonely that she feels broken and disintegrated morally and psychologically. This further deepens the crisis of faith in herself, hurling her into the bottomless pit of meaninglessness and purposelessness in her life.

Unable to cope with it she tries to escape into indulgence in alcohol and sex. She visits the army club and drugs herself to her trauma by bouts of liquor. She even allows army officers to use her body for their carnal pleasures. Even this effort to overcome her “problems of depression, loneliness, promiscuity, lack of relationship” common to homosexuals like her, leads her deeper into a blind alley of guilt and despair. “No, I’m not a good little girl. I’m a whore! A lesbian, do you know that? A lesbian bitch! A freak!” (AFS:492). Completely devoid of sense of self-esteem and failing to find any support or succour from anywhere she plunges into the darkness of death by committing suicide.

As is characteristic of Tendulkar, the dramatization of the character of Mitra and her behaviour tends to be highly complex, evoking divergent response from readers. On the one hand her conduct appears to be a kind of protest against the insensitivity and hostility of the traditional society which fails to accept human life “in all its diversity and complexity,” but on the other hand he exposes how the whole response she makes to cope with the reality of her situation and the harshness of the world around strips her of every veneer and vestige of human dignity and grace in the face of pressures and challenges. She ultimately appears as a weak and pathetic
woman, deficient in inner resources of strength, and therefore, driven to seek comfort only in escape through suicide.

That is why even when one can sympathize with her for her predicament, she nowhere impresses the audiences as an admirable figure. Tendulkar suggests that attitude of escape in one form or the other is not limited only to women, men too, he shows, often adopt different mechanisms of escape as survival strategies. For example, this may manifest itself sometimes in the form of transferred aggression and at other times may also be seen in the form of the outlet they seek through indulgence in self-pity and impotent rage against self and others. The exposure of such men to aversive situation generates in them “negative affect (unpleasant feelings of annoyance, irritation and anger). These reactions, in turn, automatically activate tendencies toward both aggression and flight.”

The way Kashikars, Ponkshe, Karnik, Sukhatme and Rokde in Silence! The Court is in Session respond to their feelings of defeat as men in the world of harsh competition by taking out the venom of frustration and annoyance against women like Benare is an evidence of their lack of courage to confront the truth about themselves. They in their persecution of Benare seek a kind of self assurance as men to repair their battered egos. Her suffering at their hand, ironically, seems to act as a kind of balm on their wounded pride. This evasion of reality about themselves by seeking false solace in the discomfiture of others is a subtle form of escapism often adopted by the morally weak and defeated. The illusions of success they build around themselves further testify the innate tendencies of these men to take flight into the world of make belief. For instance, Kashikar seeks comfort from his frustrations in the illusion of being a great social reformer he creates for himself. Ponkshe tries to soothe his injured ego by posing as a world renowned scientist. The way he flatters his vanity exposes the pain of defeat in his ambitions to be a successful man. All these men, like romantic escapists, create a world of their own dreams as alternatives to the world of realities which proves to be too much for their nerves. All these men remind us of characters like Harry Hope, Pat Mcgloin and Ed Mosher in O’Neil’s The Iceman Cometh who try to obviate the agony of failures by acquiring illusion of happy yesterday and golden tomorrow. Their flight from actuality into the world of their ‘pipe dreams’ is echoed in the illusions and affectations of Ponkshe, Karnik and Sukhatme. For men like them challenges of realities are unbearable unless relieved by dreams and illusions. It is evident that Tendulkar has depicted all these characters in a highly critical manner. Those of the spectators who can
appreciate their contradictions and complexities beneath the simple appearances of these men and women therefore find them highly interesting and realistic.

Through them Tendulkar provides glimpses not only into the ruthless workings of the world of man and nature but also into the drama generated by their impact on various aspects of human psyche. This is what strikes us when we see the inner storm raging in the soul and mind of Rajaninath who also ultimately turns out to be an escapist of his own kind. One finds that his role in the play is not limited to “comment on the characters and incidents through his poems” or “provide information about the past and present of the Pitale family” and thus to act as a kind of chorus. He, in fact, is a powerfully portrayed character resonating with warring passions and impulses touching upon various chords of the reader’s psyche.

If on the one hand, he appears as a resentful, scornful and angry man feeling wronged almost by everybody, he also displays clearly tendencies to indulge in helpless grumbling, self-loathing, lack of resolution and the will to act, so necessary to face his situation. He is haunted by the painful consciousness of being an illegitimate child of Hari Pitale, the head of the family of vulturine men and women like Umakant, Ramakant and Manik. The consciousness of this stigma, it seems, has impacted his psyche so deeply that all his anger and energies peter out ultimately into mere self-pity, paralyzing his will to act positively. That is why he seems to withdraw into himself and live alone a secluded life in the garage of the house. This withdrawal from the society and even family clearly indicates his inability to withstand pressures. The courage and confidence needed to build his sense of self in order to encounter the pressures on his psyche of the ignominy of an illegitimate birth seem to be completely absent. That is why, instead of channelizing his energies into an action which could give him strength and stability, he only indulges in impotent fits of pique. He dissipates all his frustrations and anger in ineffectual resentments. Ironically, he accuses Rama of living her life in “fear and trembling” (TV:238) doing nothing to actively resist the tyrants, while himself showing no signs of nerves or resolution to fight even for his own cause. On the contrary, he shows ingenuity in excusing his inaction and cowardice on the pretext that it could risk and jeopardize the life of Rama for sympathizing with him. This can be seen as a projection of his own failure on to Rama. Even his expressions of compassion seem to be a psychological mechanism to redeem himself from the consciousness of being the product of the diseased seed.
His lack of inner strength and tendencies to evade torturous predicament of degradation and dispossession further become apparent when he seeks relief in visiting whores: “Last night I went to a tamasha. These days I go daily. And I do many other things, too…. Day before yesterday, I went to a woman. She wasn’t a decent woman” (TV:222). Even his habit of writing poems seems to serve him as a means to find relief from his tormented state of mind. He only pours out his frustrations and futile flagellations of self and others in the form of poems which is a sure testimony to his evasive tendencies. All his poems appear to be flooded with excessive sentiments, which show how he seeks to compensate the lack of positive action in his life by indulgence in effusions of sentiments. It is noticeable that none of his thoughts and feelings get translated into any form of meaningful and concrete action.

It is Tendulkar’s achievement as a master dramatist that he has imparted such complexity and depth even to the characters like Rajaninath, who, at first glance appear to be rather simple. Though his role of providing necessary information about the past of the family and its different members is very significant in the structural scheme of the play, he emerges as a character reverberating with different human instincts, feelings, emotions and thoughts. If, on the one hand, he serves to provide a perspective by his comments on the vulturine nature of modern urban materialistic culture, the playwright also suggests through him the inadequacy of the response of passive resentment and escape into mere sentiments in the face of dehumanizing and brutalizing modern day realities. Though Tendulkar does not put his art at the service of any form of propaganda or theory, he does present all his characters in a critical manner. He, therefore, continues to draw attention to the possibilities innate in the attitudes his characters adopt to face violence in their life. That is why both strengths and weaknesses, inherent in their responses, are dramatized with equal skill and force in his plays. He also displays subtle, but significant, variations in their patterns of negotiating mechanisms, imparting to his characters well individualized personalities.

This becomes once again obvious when one examines the attitude of conformism represented both by his male and female characters in different ways and situations. Conformism is, in fact, one of the most widely adopted attitudes as a response to inimical and disruptive situations. It entails one’s strict adherence to some external form of authority- theories, traditions, set of beliefs or institutions - to guide one’s conduct in life. People with conformist tendencies tend to see such authorities as sources of strength and stability in the face of crisis.
They, thus, seek to overcome their sense of insecurity and uncertainties by following the “widely accepted rules indicating how people should behave in certain situations or under specific circumstances.” Their sense of judgment is controlled and directed by this external frame of reference which is treated as rather absolute and unquestionable. They even associate elements of sanctity and social legitimacy with such prescribed ways of thought and conduct. Such attitudes are adopted mainly by those who either lack knowledge of the intricate nature of life’s challenges or do not have the requisite ability to develop intelligently their independent responses to new situations as often “intelligence and conformity are negatively related.”

Inadequacy of self-confidence in exercising freedom of choice makes them deficient in their sense of responsibility. Though conformist’s tendencies in varying degrees and situations manifest themselves in a number of Tendulkar’s characters, some of them exhibit this strategy as a distinguishing feature of their personality. In this context, Laxmi in *Sakharam Binder* and Nath Devlalikar in *Kanyadaan* immediately stand out as striking examples. Depiction of both of them, however, reveals once again how Tendulkar never simplifies issues and characters, saving his art from becoming reductive or formula bound.

Laxmi emerges as a woman who represents those who have an “attitude of devotion to some object beyond the self and the human society. In her case, it is her faith in religion and devotion to god and her deities that help her survive the series of atrocities against her being. She follows the prescriptions laid down by her religion for the conduct of a woman rather blindly, even stubbornly, protecting herself from getting broken and lost. This uncritical commitment to religion and its principles, however, circumscribes her understanding of the complexities of life. In this way, her absolute faith in religion serves both as a source of strength as well as the cause of limiting the range of her sympathy, sensitivity and the means of dealing with people and problems in her world.

Through her character and attitude, Tendulkar exposes how absolute faith in tradition and religious precepts has tended to enslave women – mentally, psychologically and biologically. He shows how they acquire from their patriarchal environment the myths of treating their husbands like Gods and accept all their atrocities and cruelties without protest. Laxmi is one of those who get kicked and yet go and fall at their feet.

One learns that she was the daughter of a good family and her father was a ‘Munsif.’ But her life as a wife with her husband was miserable and she had to face the agony of being thrown
out of the house because she could not have a child. It was she who was held responsible for childlessness and, therefore, treated as a worthless commodity, a burden, useless for him. Even she herself accepts, unquestioningly, like a traditional woman, her childlessness as her own fault. The insecurities of destitution and stigma of barrenness is too tormenting in traditional Indian societies where all her sense of self- worth and possibilities of fulfillment for a woman, are contingent on her status as a wife and mother. She does not speak even a single word of protest against her husband's cruelty in turning her out of the house. On the contrary, her psyche is still so much possessed by feelings of devotion and reverence for her husband that like a traditionally ‘good woman’ she does not even utter his name. But she survives this crisis by ascribing it entirely to her fate: “That’s part of one’s fate. It has to be borne”\(SB:181\). This attitude of transferring the responsibility for her life to external agencies like God or fate enables her to cope with the stress of being an abandoned woman. The story of cruelties and sufferings in her life does not end here. Utterly destitute and forlorn, she is picked up by Sakharam, a highly lustful man, preying upon his victims in a ruthless manner. Though he gives her shelter, food and clothing in his house, he is most exacting in his demands and is brutal in imposing his will and desire on her. It becomes almost a regular phenomenon for her to confront his abusive and searing language, physical blows and sexual assaults, turning her life into no less than a real hell. But she survives all this on the strength of her belief that a woman must serve and obey her husband, enduring patiently everything he says and does. The religion she blindly follows sanctions her passivity and “confirms the social order, it justifies her resignation by giving her hope of a better future in a sexless heaven.”\(^{11}\) This sense of her sanctified duty as a wife to serve and accept her husband with all his tyrannies enables her to cope with the afflictions of pain to her body, soul and mind from Sakharam.

If this adherence of Laxmi to the traditionally glorified image of a woman as self-sacrificing, with endless capacity to suffer, enables her to bear the perpetration on her of all kinds of violence, it also makes her a fanatic, severely restricting her sympathies. This is revealed very clearly in her attitude towards Dawood, and, then Champa. Dawood, a Muslim, is a close friend of Sakharam and is sympathetically disposed towards Laxmi. He addresses her as ‘bhabi’ and even sometimes implies praises of her for having a sobering influence on Sakharam. She too appears happy when on the holy day of Ganesh Chaturthi she sees Sakharam bringing the image of Ganesh, followed by Dawood playing on cymbals. She wishes them both to take ‘prasad’ after
the ritual of ‘aarti’. But ironically, she cannot tolerate a Muslim participating in the chanting of aarti: “How can a Muslim join in a prayer to Ganpati?” (SB:144). This offends Sakharam beyond control and he lashes out at her with his belt. But she remains stubborn and faces ruthless belting of her helpless body. Her body quivers with pain but the blind allegiance to her religious convictions still give it an “upright... stance” (SB:144). This indicates how religion for her serves as a source of strength enabling her to survive relentless beating and belting. This is further evident in her attitude towards Champa. Critics have much to say about her role in Champa–Sakharam relationship. Shailaja B. Wadikar represents a number of Tendulkar’s critics who view her as evil, wily and treacherous. According to her, “Laxmi, once the embodiment of an ideal Indian woman, tender, religious and self-effacing, now turns out to be wicked and vicious when Champa becomes her rival in love.” Whereas she wins sympathy of Veena Noble Dass and Mohan R. Limaye who compare her with the mythological pativarta Savitri who succeeded in reviving her dead husband by tricking the God of Death. But Shanta Gokhale certainly appears closer to the truth when he points out in Laxmi, an example of “pious arrogance, the kind that all believers who see themselves as being full of virtue betray towards those who don’t hold to their kind of religion.” But even a perceptive critic like Gokhale doesn’t emphasize adequately the fact that if her conformity with her faith narrows down her sympathies for others it, also, at the same time, imbues her with the strength of mind and spirit enabling her to encounter all challenges with remarkable agility of mind and energy of will and body.

Laxmi finds Champa’s ways as highly objectionable, particularly when she notices that in the absence of Shakharam, she goes out of the house every afternoon. She feels utterly bewildered and shocked when she discovers Champa with Dawood: “How horrible! Sitaram, Sitaram. That Champa – and that Muslim – how, horrible!.... Terrible!” (SB:187). For her it is an act of infidelity: “Evil! Sin! She will go to hell for this” (SB:188).

She reports Champa’s transgression to Sakharam, thereby inciting his wrath. This act of Laxmi reflects how her behaviour here becomes a complex of different and even warring human instincts and tendencies – jealousy, possessiveness, sadism, self-love and preservation, etc. along with her strong sense of self as a righteous woman in the eyes of God. Even Champa’s murder is taken by her as a deserved punishment. However, what strikes one immediately is the sudden spurt of energy and authority with which she takes over the charge of burying Champa’s body. According to her code of conduct, Champa is guilty of a grave sin and therefore she deserves no
words of sympathy or pity: “[Looking at the body with contempt] Sinner!... She left her husband. She was unfaithful to you... Her soul must be burning in hell. God doesn’t take long to decide”(SB:197). This contempt for Champa and the courage and conviction with which she supports Sakharam and herself can be attributed to her blind faith in what her religion says. If this attitude of conformity, thus, renders her incapable of wider and generous human sympathies, it also serves as a source of strength to survive the gruesome situations in her life. In contrast to Laxmi’s attitude of conformity, with all its strengths and weaknesses, is the behavioural pattern of Champa. For her there is no object or system of beliefs occupying a supreme place of moral authority. If Laxmi is guided by strict allegiance to certain religious beliefs, Champa has no source of moral reference in religion, ideology or any other code of conduct. She, it seems, is guided by the impulse of satisfying only her personal needs and desires. That is why her response pattern shows a steady disintegration at the moral and psychological levels.

To begin with, she suffers silently all the tortures inflicted by her husband, Shinde. Her efforts to run away from the unbearable atrocities also fail, making his brutalities all the more painful and degrading. When he tries to use her as a whore, she cannot put up with him any longer and has to leave her husband to save her honour. But her life with Sakharam, too, is nothing but a series of constant humiliations and hurts. These experiences shatter her faith in God, men and human values. All this turns her skeptical and even cynical believing in nothing else but her ownself: “I’m on my own.... If they’re there, well, they’re there, for all that they’re worth. If not, I’m all by myself, and all alone. That’s the way it is!”(SB:181).

All her struggles to survive the crude and cruel realities of a woman’s life embitter her so much that she loses all faith in anything which could give meaning and direction to her decisions and actions. She turns irreverent towards God accusing him of doing nothing for her: “I don’t owe God anything!... He’s never done anything for me” (SB:179).

For her there is nothing sacrosanct about conventions and human ties. She becomes utterly disrespectful about all the rules and social norms. This bitterness and uprootedness – emotional, spiritual and moral – turns her into an individualist, concerned mainly with her own survival.

As a result of this, there occurs a steady decline and disintegration in her copying behaviour and personality. On the one hand she seeks to assert her independence in the face of Sakharam’s excessively coercive, degrading and tormenting ways and demands, and on the other
she conducts herself in a rather anarchic manner losing control over herself. This seeming
dichotomy is the consequence of the state of complete vacuum in her inner self caused by the
absence of religious, moral, social and human values. That is why she appears more of a pathetic
and pitiable woman in her death than as heroically defiant and admirable figure.

Tendulkar, through the contrasting responses of Laxmi and Champa, explores and
exposes both strengths and weaknesses inherent in different stances they take to survive the
harshness of life. If through Champa’s response, playwright shows how an individual, cut loose
from all guiding values, ideas or commitments, can drift into a state of fragmentation and
destruction of self, Laxmi’s negotiating mechanism of conformity serves to highlight the
severely restrictive consequences on one’s sensitivity and human sympathy. He further shows
how conformity in the case of Laxmi also serves as a source of strength which is absent in the
case of Champa who, however, seems to assert her independence as an individual more than
Laxmi can.

This pattern of contrast between different ways of coping with the thwarting situations
is discernable in almost all of Tendulkar’s plays. What distinguishes his treatment of these
responses is the fact that there are a number of subtle variations in his dramatization of each of
these coping mechanisms. Like Laxmi, for example, Nath Devlalikar in Kanyadaan, represents
an attitude of conformity to certain borrowed ideals. Arun in the same play stands for those of
the young generation who assert their freedom without moorings in any constructive system of
values.

Nath emerges as a character whose conduct and vision of life and society are all
determined by the ideas of Gandhian values of truthfulness, honesty and abolition of caste and
class disparities and discriminations. He shared dreams of great leaders like Gandhi and Vinoba
Bhave of building a society on the principles of liberalism and humanism. Like Gandhi, he had
an unquestioning faith in the fundamental goodness of all human beings. It is his firm conviction
that, “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”(KD:563). He derives all his strength and inspiration as an individual and social reformer
from what has been said or done by great men: “I come from the tradition of saints who said,
‘Don’t be deceived by my appearance which seems softer than wax.’ The strength of my
convictions can shatter rocks to fragments: Nath Devlalikar has never been under anyone’s
He assiduously cultivates these values in his children particularly, his daughter Jyoti, who grows up taking her “father’s words for gospel truth”(KD:558). Influenced by his values, she decides to marry Arun Athavale even without knowing him fully.

This decision of his daughter to marry a dalit boy creates a testing situation for his ideals and their viability. He takes it as his success as a practitioner of the values he has been preaching and feels proud of his daughter for translating his dreams of egalitarian society into reality by her personal example. He feels excited and praises his daughter for courage without even knowing anything about the boy. When his wife, Seva, tries to know from the daughter about Arun’s family background, their profession, his family responsibilities and his character, he accuses her of being prejudiced and shows no interest in knowing about the details about the boy. Even Arun’s rudeness and shocking behaviour, in his very first meeting with Jyoti’s mother and her brother, fails to caution Nath about his daughter’s fate. His perceptions and vision have been so much blinkered by his blind commitment to the socialist ideals that he refuses to see and recognize the facts which are so apparent in Arun’s behaviour. Anything which questions his dreams is taken as false and tainted with the upper-class prejudice of his own family. His enthusiasm over the marriage of his daughter with a dalit boy is so naïve that he interprets everything about Arun, even his blemishes, as signs of his intelligence and dedication. He tends to overlook even the most obvious realities of Arun’s personality asserting that “he is like an unrefined gold, he needs to be melted and moulded”(KD:527). This decision is perhaps an effort of his unconscious mind of purging himself of the guilt about his upper caste which he holds “responsible for the age old sufferings of these people”(KD:527).

The excessive faith he holds in the ideas and ideals borrowed from others, it seems, renders him incapable of rational and critical observations, decisions and actions. The result is that he, instead of advising his daughter against a hasty and impulsive decision, tells her to go ahead with it. This marriage, based neither on knowledge and understanding nor on love, therefore, turns out to be a disaster. The absence of compatibilities at the levels of their temperaments, attitudes, social and cultural backgrounds and aspirations, so necessary for a meaningful marital relationship, contributes vitally to their mismatch. But Nath ignores completely all these factors which educated and enlightened parents always take into account before giving away their daughter in marriage. The obsession with his dreams tends to
desensitize him even to the tortures which Arun inflicts on his daughter after marriage. This is evident from the way he sends back his daughter to Arun when she needs their support most. This is how he urges upon his wife to save the inter-caste marriage; he pleads “[with passion] Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! This dream which is struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust before our eyes!”(KD:537).

Tendulkar, through Nath’s attitude of conformity, suggests that ideals divorced from realities are not only ineffectual but can also prove catastrophic. The response to life’s challenges based on mere abstract philosophies or dreams may be attractive and even look good, but are often not viable and, therefore, not meaningful in negotiating hard truths about human nature and society. Such an attitude, the play shows, is lop-sided and more or less a sure prescription for further suffering and defeat. Nath’s discomfiture and the helpless suffering of his daughter and anguish of the other members of the family towards the end of the play is an ample testimony to this fact. Nath has to succumb to Arun’s blackmailing, forcing him to praise Arun and his autobiography publically against his conscience and the knowledge he now has about Arun’s bestiality, hypocrisy and opportunism.

Tendulkar’s plays suggest that life is too complex and variegated to be comprehended and confronted in a satisfying manner by any narrow rigid, and fixed attitude. If Nath’s absolutism and simple-minded generalizations about human nature and life incapacitate him to understand and respond to changing realities of Indian society and psyche, Arun remains a prisoner of his bigoted suspicion and hatred for the upper caste because of his inability to look at things in a more unprejudiced, flexible and healthful manner.

Arun, a young educated dalit boy, is obsessed with the injustice his community had to face in the past at the hands of the upper caste. His persecution complex possesses his psyche so strongly that he cannot develop or adopt a constructive approach to modern-day realities of changing Indian society. He pours out anger and pokes at everyone whom he holds responsible for the miseries of his people. His response is mainly of reactionary nature seeking to hurt and humiliate even those of upper class who are positively inclined towards him. He revels even in beating and bashing Jyoti, his wife, simply because she is a Brahmin.

His whole behaviour clearly evinces that his energies and anger are not controlled and channelized into creative action by commitment to any ideal or a positive view and vision of life. All his potentials thus get dissipated into insolent vituperations and fits of senseless physical
violence. Even when we tend to have sympathy for the cause of the class of the oppressed and dispossessed for justice and equality, Arun’s behaviour disappoints and shocks us for its mindless and purposeless outburst of hatred and violence. Tendulkar appears to convey through him that every individual or cause, however just and noble, can become self-defeating and even disruptive for others if not aided and guided by faith in and commitment to higher goals and values.

Through this contrast between Nath’s uncritical allegiance to his old Gandhian and socialist ideals on one hand and Arun’s individualistic, opportunistic onslaughts on his victims without any creative and affirmative guiding principle on the other, Tendulkar enables his readers to have a more critical understanding of these two extreme approaches to life and its challenges. If Nath fails because of his unrealistic attitudes, Arun fails to inspire any hope and confidence for personal and social change because of his obsession with past and lack of vision for future.

Tendulkar’s dramatization of different responses and coping mechanisms suggests that no approach or attitude which does not take into account intricate social and violent realities and complex human nature can prove truly adequate and viable. He seems to believe that the spectrum of life is too vast and the interplay of its innumerable ingredients too challenging to be comprehended and confronted by any reductive formula, mindless acceptance or resignation or indulgence in means of evasion and escape. His plays underline the necessity of a more inclusive attitude based on critical understanding of forces operating in and influencing human life. Only a comprehensive and dynamic approach coupled with psychological and moral courage appears to get his endorsement as an incisive critic of life. As a realist, therefore, he has created no character who can be seen as an embodiment of all these positive human qualities.

Nevertheless, there are characters in his plays who encounter the most challenging situations, fraught with pain and danger, exhibiting greater resilience and commitment to these qualities. This makes these characters look more realistic and impressive than other figures, giving them a greater role in the thematic and structural designs of his plays. In this context, the characters like Sarita and Kakasaheb in Kamala, Benare in Silence! The Court is in Session and Vijaya in Encounter in Umbugland immediately pop up in the reader’s mind as notable illustrations.
Sarita’s response to the predicament as a woman has been depicted by Tendulkar with greater dexterity and insights than has been recognized by some of his critics like Gowri Ramnarayan, who questions Tendulkar’s art when she observes that the transformation in Sarita from a state of complacency and ignorance into recognition of her enslavement seems too “illogical” and “too sudden a change.” But when examined closely the development in her personality and response to her degrading and stifling conditions appear to be fully congruous with traits latent in her personality.

It is important to note that she is an educated woman from a family with members like Kakasaheb, who were actively associated with Indian freedom movement. This also suggests that she has the latent potentials to learn from her experiences and thus to develop appropriate attitudes and strategies to meet challenges in a more meaningful and dignified manner.

To begin with, she appears as a typical Indian woman, busy all the time trying to discharge all her duties as a wife. Even Jaisingh’s fits of temper fail to deter her from doing all that he expects from her. Her sense of responsibility and duty is also a pointer to the sensitivity she has as an individual with a sense of self-respect. She, though very mildly, like an Indian woman, expresses her resentment and feelings of getting hurt at the way Jaisingh becomes unreasonably angry with her over trifles like her anxiety over his whereabouts or office work and even for failing to take down the names of the telephone callers. Still one finds her very particular in looking after Jaisingh, her husband, taking care of his needs, likes and dislikes. Her efforts always are aimed at pleasing him when he comes back home from office and to give him all the respect and comforts.

This she does, the play shows, with an utmost sense of duty. The meticulous and conscientious way she conducts herself as a wife is indicative of the sense of honesty and integrity innate in her personality. It is noticeable that this is something not limited to her personal life, but extends to others as well. The way she feels for Kamala and women like her is a clear evidence of her compassion and concern for others, particularly the weak and the dispossessed. Her simmering discontent with the way things are also becomes apparent when she instinctively pushes Jaisingh aside, refusing to go to bed for his pleasure after the press conference.

A woman with her educational background and personality traits can certainly be expected to get the shock and trauma of life when she suddenly realizes that she is being treated
as a commodity, something taken for a ride by the partner she has trusted. This is what exactly happens with Sarita who, it seems, is shaken out of the slumber of faith and wifely dedication to her husband, Jaisingh. With the innocent question of Kamala “How much did he buy you for?”(K:34) she is rudely jolted out of her complacency and thrown into a state of moral, intellectual and psychological turmoil trying to find answers to her questions about her position as a woman. The realization that her predicament was no better than Kamala’s leads her to see that the man she thought to be her partner “was the master of a slave”(K:46). This comes as a challenge to her sense of self-respect and dignity. The feeling that all her efforts for domestic peace and happiness have been taken by Jaisingh for granted and she has, thus, been degraded and exploited adds insult to her injury. She now has a clear-sighted knowledge of how the status and condition of woman, even of educated middle class family like hers, are in no significant way different from those of the women of the tribes. All women, she realizes, valued only as objects of sex are mere commodities in the flesh trade market.

Her natural response to the situation, therefore, is that of revolt against her subjugation and devaluation. Determined to resist the oppressive system of male chauvinism, she questions: “Why can’t men limp behind? Why aren’t women ever the master? Why can’t a woman at least ask to live her life the same way as a man? Why must only a man have the right to be man? Does he have one extra sense? A woman can do everything a man can”(K:47). She questions vehemently why only woman is required and expected to make adjustments and compromises. She will no longer put up with Jaisingh’s hypocrisy and selfishness. Her rage against the double standards of society and her resolution, not to accept it any more, conveys her courage to be the master of her life.

Her firm determination to revolt, it is clear, is not of a negative and disruptive nature. It has been prompted and motivated by the positive impulse to oppose tyranny and injustice. There is nothing in her words and actions to suggest the desire to hurt or humiliate her partner as an act of revenge. In fact, what makes her resolution more impressive is the fact that she is determined to fight not only for her own sake but for the sake of women’s cause against their oppressions and degradations. That is the reason she decides to stay back and nurse Jaisingh back to health when he feels utterly broken and shattered because of his dismissal from job by his master. In fact, her sympathies are with all the Kamala’s of the world, whether male or female. Sarita emerges as a woman with remarkable depth and maturity. She displays a great capacity to grow
and learn from her experiences in order to encounter tyrannies against herself in particular and women in general. She shows both emotional sensitivity as well as intellectual capacity necessary to comprehend and confront the realities of oppressive and exploitative male world. What makes her a memorable figure on stage is the impressive equipoise she exhibits in deciding to stay back with Jaisingh, firmly determined, at the same time, not to slave for him any longer.

This gesture of Sarita has been interpreted rather simplistically by some of Tendulkar’s critics. Wadikar, for example, takes it to assert that she “lacks the guts and the courage to rebel against injustice.”\(^{17}\) Almost similar is the view of Vikram Gokhale who wonders whether Sarita “is a Masochist” and perhaps “she remains so because she has no other alternative.”\(^{18}\) But Shanta Gokhale is more balanced in his assessment that she has “decided to stop being a slave, but not to being a compassionate human being.”\(^{19}\) Through Sarita’s personality, attitudes and coping skills, Tendulkar seems to underline the importance of a dynamic outlook coupled with courage and confidence to challenge the forces that seek to assail and destroy one’s sense of self as a human being. A more comprehensive attitude, evincing concerns for larger issues based on commitments to finer human values and qualities is essential not only for a meaningful survival of the self but also for positive human relationships.

The importance of this pattern of outlook and response mechanism is accented in his plays also through the characters who represent opposite tendencies. The viability of Sarita’s abilities and response patterns are contrasted in the play, for example, by Jaisingh who appears as a representative of crass materialism and individualism. If Sarita is moved and activated by Kamala’s predicament, Jaisingh appears as a man who uses Kamala as a pawn in his game of self-promotion. Sarita displays a remarkable balance of mind and human compassion in deciding not to leave Jaisingh when he needs help, even when she rejects and revolts against his exploitative and oppressive ways. On the contrary, Jaisingh shows little signs of human understanding, sympathy and compassion, engrossed as he is in a blind race for career and status. Sarita, therefore, is shown gaining strength and stature during the course of the play, emerging ultimately as an admirable figure, while Jaisingh goes down in the reader’s estimate with each successive scene and ultimately ends as a pathetic figure.

Journalism, for Jaisingh, is nothing but a means of advancing his narrow personal interests divorced completely from the ethics of the profession. Though he pompously champions the cause of the downtrodden, the exploited and the weaker sex and claims to fight
against evils like flesh-trade, but in practice he tries to use these issues only and purely to grind his own axe. He fishes heartlessly in troubled waters without an iota of genuine sympathy and compassion for the victim. Larger moral, social and human causes, it seems, have no place in his code of conduct. This attitude, bereft of sensitivity, honesty and respect for human values, is shown as rather devastating for both self and society. This is brought out by Tendulkar by the way Jaisingh exhibits in the press-conference, Kamala, whom he has bought from the tribal hinterland of Bihar, claiming in this way to expose flesh trade even after decades of independence. Contrary to his contentions, the play reveals him as the one who is motivated solely by the aims of standing out from others and pleasing his editor in order to gain personal fame and promotion. One feels jolted when he is seen dealing callously with Kamala, sending her to the women’s home. His utter insensitivity even to Sarita’s thoughts and feelings further strips off the veneers of his gentlemanliness. The way “he collapses on the sofa,” (K:51) feeling completely decimated and broken with all his bravado vanishing, conveys the pathetic end of persons with this attitude.

One distinctive feature of Tendulkar’s treatment of different attitudes and coping responses and mechanisms is that he makes them look credible in the context they are displayed. The social milieu and the historical period in which the characters are placed contribute to this element of his art. This appears particularly when, in Kamala, he depicts the attitudes of two generations to almost similar situations they have to confront. For example, Jaisingh, with his tendencies of brazen individualism, materialism and mindless competition for career appears to be a true representative of younger generation of post-independent India. Kakasaheb, on the other hand, a journalist like Jaisingh, represents the generation still rooted in the ideals of the pre-independence Indian society. His approach to his profession is altogether different from Jaisingh’s “sensational” and “high-speed journalism” (K:6). “A remnant of times past,” (K:5) he still lives and works by values of truthfulness and service to the larger cause, untainted by self-seeking motives. If for Jaisingh, his achievements as a journalist lie in the art of “presenting the case – not in the case itself,” (K:14) for Kakasaheb “it’s not the facts of an occurrence that are important. But the topic is” (K:6). His purpose has been to comment on the problem and “suggest a way to stop it” (K:6).

Similarly, their respective approaches to the question of man-woman relationship appear to be widely divergent. For Jaisingh, woman is nothing but a means for the gratification of his
personal needs and his vested career interest. A huge gap, in fact, a contradiction can be noticed between the lofty aims he proclaims and the ugly things he actually does with respect to women. But Kakasaheb, one finds, serves as a catalyst kindling Sarita’s critical consciousness not only about Jaisingh but also about her own responsibility in maintaining the things as they are. One is impressed by the honesty and courage with which he admits how he, too, had behaved in the past as a male chauvinist towards his wife, but the fact that he has learned and matured to develop a more sagacious and respectful attitude towards women exhibits his quality of dynamism and commitment to humanistic values. The way, towards the end of the play, he questions Sarita’s wisdom in contemplating radical step against Jaisingh is an unambiguous evidence of a very balanced perspective he has acquired through his own knowledge and experiences of life.

A critical look at Tendulkar’s delineation of Kakasaheb and Sarita with their respective personalities and approaches, suggests that if Kakasaheb appears more as a voice of sanity, commenting and guiding from a higher pedestal of knowledge, wisdom and morality, Sarita is seen more as an individual in the very thick of life and action, confronting and struggling through turbulent and torturous experiences and thus moving from a state of ignorance to knowledge, passivity to action and from a lop-sided response to a more mature and equilibrated one. This makes Sarita one of the more dramatically powerful and realistically portrayed women characters along with figures like Benare and Vijaya inhabiting the world of Tendulkar’s plays.

All of these women stand out for their spirit of resilience and capacity to learn from their experiences and thus to grow as strong, self-confident individuals capable of taking on life in the patriarchal world with its humiliating and crippling prejudices against them. A pattern of development from a state of innocence and simplicity of perception and response to that of awareness and knowledge of the intricacies of their world is distinctly perceptible in their depiction. What makes them memorable characters is the subtle interplay of a wide range of human instincts, feelings, emotions and thoughts crystallizing into positive and holistic attitudes towards the odds of life.

Benare, in *Silence! The court is in Session*, occupies a place of importance in the gallery of Tendulkar’s portrayals especially because she emerges as a rich and complex human being with faith in herself and in the beauty and value of life. All this is revealed through her constant and painful struggles as a sensitive individual against the harsh and ruthless objective realities of the man dominated world. Through her, Tendulkar dramatizes how a woman can emerge from a
state of mere prey to man’s lust and hypocrisy into a strong woman asserting her right to a life of independence and human dignity.

In the course of her transformation and maturation she has to encounter the experiences which can prove shattering and devastating for any woman in a traditional patriarchal milieu. She was subjected to sexual exploitation first by her own maternal uncle when she was an adolescent girl of only fourteen. Then, her betrayal by him shook her to the core of her being. She even made attempts at committing suicide by throwing herself off the parapet. However, the play shows it was not as much of an expression of her weakness as of strong feelings of indignation for the man who “turned tail and ran” instead of standing by her: “I felt such a rage against him then – I felt like smashing his face in public and spitting on it”(SCS:117).

Her response to the incident, in fact, indicates that she has an invincible spirit to survive and live life to its full. The fact that she expected sincerity, steadfastness and courage from the man, hints at the values of sensitivity, honesty and moral grit she herself lives by. These qualities constituting her outlook and response again come to the fore when she is impregnated and then let down by Prof. Damle also whom she worshipped as her “intellectual god”(SCS:118).

It is in response to this shattering experience that her moral and psychological strength comes into play. One finds her adopting the stance of defiance towards the world of sham moralist and cowards. This stance, however, is accompanied by greater balance of mind and recognition of the realities of her world. Her dedication to her profession as a teacher, the acquisition of her status as an economically independent woman and the way she tries to get married in order to give her child a “father to call his own – a house – to be looked after… he must have a good name!”(SCS:118) clearly testifies a strong element of affirmation in her vision of life. She is fully conscious and also determined to protect her rights and human dignity as a woman, displaying, at the same time, her wholehearted respect for the rights of others which is an indication of the importance she attaches to the principles of harmonious and mutually enriching co-existence.

But as a woman with pure sentiments and unsuspecting mind swayed by feelings of love and faith in a world of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery, she finds herself trapped in an extremely torturous trial at the hands of society. She is subjected to a long and agonizing persecution and humiliation by the whole pack of jealous and sadistic male chauvinists like Kashikar, Ponkshe, Sukhatme and Karnik. They take out their venom of frustrations in hounding
Benare for her illegitimate pregnancy. Though deeply wounded and hurt, Benare puts up a spirited defense of her conduct and mocks at them for their failures and fakeries. However, like any other human being she too is shown to pass through a quick succession of the rise and fall of emotions making her portrayal so powerful and life like. The gestures of rebellion, fight, flights and even of freezing at the information that she has been sacked from her job in the school accusing her of immorality make her such a veritable woman. But what impresses about her most is the fact that she, even when appears broken towards the end of the play, remains undefeated. She emerges as unflinchingly resolute to live on creatively and meaningfully as a mother, defying all the forces antagonistic to the very principle of life. All her strength, the play suggests, comes from her genuine magnanimity of soul, love of life, her faith in the sanctity of human dignity and freedom and above all her commitment to finer human values. She appears as one of Tendulkar’s most lovable and memorable characters because one finds in her a unique fusion of feminine delicacy of heart and firmness of mind. Thus she, like Sarita, emerges as a modern woman capable of challenging the male chauvinists in society, and refuses to be cowed down by them. Tendulkar attempts at delineating these women, who in spite of their supposed inferior status in Indian society, rebel against all odds and command reader’s admiration for their determination, not to quit. This impression which they leave finally on the reader makes it difficult to accept the observation of critics like Kalindi Deshpande who says that “almost all his women characters meekly submit to the injustice, violence and harassment done to them. They seem to be helpless and have no other alternative but to go through the way that life has chosen for them.”20 The close analysis of these women, on the contrary, suggests that they do display notable courage to assert themselves against tyranny but do so in a humane and affirmative manner. Moreover, it is noticeable that some of his women no longer remain confined to the domestic space. Sarita, who is only a housewife, is strongly conscious of the degradation and exploitation of women in general at the hands of men. She is, in fact, acutely sensitive about all the oppressed and tyrannized people of the world including men. Her concerns and the spirit of revolt thus, transcend the barrier of traditional feminine space. Benare, too, steps out of this limiting domain and becomes economically self-reliant by working in a school. Her determination to protect the fruit of her unwed motherhood further indicates the emergence of new woman who tries to define her self existence at her own terms. This reality of woman’s advent into new territories is at the very heart of Tendulkar’s *Encounter in Umbagland.*
The very name of the protagonist, Vijaya, emphasizes the confident and vanquishing outlook with which she learns to encounter all forms of prejudices, conspiracies and violence. She displays a remarkable capacity to learn from her experiences and grow into a strong and mature woman in control of not only her own life as an individual, but also the destiny of her kingdom. To begin with, she appears as a young girl with childish whims and temper, ignorant of the hard realities of practical world of political jungle, infested with “beasts of prey” (EU:307). A princess, ascending to the throne after the death of her legendary father, Vijaya is viewed initially by the group of her ministers rather patronizingly, treated as no better than a puppet. But the play shows that she has inborn traits of independence and self-assertion, something the ministers fail to recognize. The way she questions everything is a sure indication of her intelligence, reason and logic of her own.

This strength and dynamism of her personality guided by the mature and experienced Prannarayan, her friend and counselor, gets actualized when she shrewdly sees through the conspiracies of her ministers and foils them, beating them at their own game. She appears in the play as a basically well-meaning ruler, trying to implement her plans for the welfare of the tribals who had so far been neglected. But when the ignorant tribals are misled by the malicious propaganda of the ministers and are turned violent against Vijaya, she shows remarkable courage and political shrewdness to turn the tide of their wrath against her intriguing opponents.

Treatment of Vijaya’s character and the way she triumphantly encounters the male hegemony, bestial political violence and even the misguided and uncontrolled fury of the instigated mob amply evidences Tendulkar’s confidence in the potentials of women to confront and live life in its various dimensions – private and public – with intelligence, knowledge, courage and dignity. Tendulkar, through her, seems to explode the concepts of binary and hierarchical division between men and women which ascribe qualities of tenderness, meekness, obedience, conformity and domesticity to women and, thus, privilege men with such traits as leadership, aggression and domination.

It is, however, noticeable that the number of characters who display these traits is rather small in the world of Tendulkar’s plays. This suggests that the number of women with such abilities and capacities constitute a minority even in the modern day Indian society. His commitment to depicting life and the world around him as he finds it is further evidenced by the fact that he has delineated a very wide range of responses both men and women adopt to survive
all sorts of violence. It is significant to note that he shows them adopting all these different responses in varying degrees and forms, depending on the position and the context they find themselves in.
References


9 Robert A Baron and Donn Byrne, p. 224.


11 Simone de Beauvoir, p. 624.

12 Shailaja B. Wadikar, p.18.


17 Shailaja B. Wadikar, p. 123.

