Chapter-IV

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SAKHARAM BINDER AND THE VULTURES
Violence against women in India is perpetrated irrespective of caste, class and creed. Women in general and low caste women in particular are the victims of violence. Even the Hindu religion does not provide any security to this human being creature. The Hindu holy text sanctifies the homicide of infant girls by parents who consider themselves incapable of shouldering the responsibility of having a girl child. The Hindu holy book, *Bhagvad Gita* calls women embodiment of the nastiest desires and justifies the killing of women: “Killing of a woman, a *shudra* or an atheist is not sinful. Woman is an embodiment of the worst desires, hatred, deceit, jealously and bad character. Women should never be given freedom.” The modernized, democratic India follows these religious teachings of abhorrence and antagonism towards women. The change does occur but only in the *modus operandi* of the violence inflicted on women. In past, in Hindu society new-born girls were buried alive now new-born baby girls are either strangled to death or aborted during pregnancy. In spite of the enactment of laws, formulation of reformatory legal processes, provision of legal aid to the needy, extensive use of the provision of Public Interest Litigation, conduct of Family Courts, mushrooming of Women Counseling Centers, increasing prosperity, globalization and education, etc., women are still subjected to humiliation, oppression and victimization in myriad ways. We worship woman as a goddess, regard her as a mother, love her as a wife and she is most affectionate to us as a daughter but still we commit violence against her. India--- the birth place of a great civilization; the place of origin of *Vedas* full of respect for women; the great cultural
land—fails to protect its daughters from violence—physical, sexual, psychological—within or outside family. The shield of law fails to safeguard them. What is happening in a holy place where woman was worshipped as goddess? How brutally women are being treated in the country of Ghandhiji, who gave to the world the message of ‘non-violence’. At every place in this country the environment is too hostile for the development of her personality. In ‘Free’ India we celebrate the sacrifice of Jhansi Ki Rani even after one hundred fifty years, but do not allow her to raise voice against the evils of the society or the state.

Shere Hite, the well-known English scholar, in her ground-breaking work, *Women as Revolutionary Agents of Change—The Hite Reports: Sexuality, Love and Emotion* asserts that everyday language is used by men for emotional aggression against women. Words, according to her, are amongst the most powerful tools of a society for carrying on and reinforcing its ideology. The report says:

In the case of gender, words embedded in the language, act as hidden subliminal attacks and value judgments, often leading to irrational interpretations of behaviour. . . .The frequent use of words and phrases with built-in gender insults for women. . . creates an atmosphere of emotional intimidation, which weighs just as heavily on women as economic intimidation has. Through using this vocabulary, subtly, often unconsciously and in a socially acceptable way, many men bully women emotionally and thus control relationships.²

The primary function of language is that of communication, and Tendulkar uses it as an effective tool to analyze man-woman relationship in his plays. His experience as a journalist makes him use words so skillfully that his sentences are sharply etched constructions and absolutely to the point. Every word in his plays is meant to be where it has been placed. In order to expose the hideous face of a patriarchal
order, he has created many of his male characters to use not only a contemptuous language, but also to make dismissive and derogatory statements against women. It is also a shocking fact that they freely use the words like ‘bitch’, ‘slut’ and whore’ for women at the slightest pretext, thereby overlooking the hurt inevitably done to the latter. What is more, such an abusive and sexist language is neither contradicted nor condemned by other characters present on the stage. So there is no denying the fact that the patriarchal order is totalitarian in nature.

In the dramatic world of Tendulkar, the male characters unleash violence on the female characters in multifaceted forms and degrees to wield their authority and satiate their sadism. Physically, they are subjected to beating, thrashing and unrelenting drudgery; sexually, they are abused, subjugated and suppressed; psychologically, they are tormented and tortured; mentally, they are compelled to comply with the life-denying stereotyped societal norms and mores, and emotionally, they are deprived, blackmailed and exploited. In Tendulkar’s plays, almost all the female characters, irrespective of age, class, status and background, fall prey to violence in one way or the other, perpetrated by male characters under the umbrella cover of the patriarchal order. The way violence characterizes inter-personal relations in his plays, suggests that it is very part of human existence. Tendulkar sincerely believes that “violence exists in each of us and it must be presented in all its manifestations.”3 In an interview, he said: “I do not exaggerate the concept of violence, it is within us or around us.”4 In the dramatic world of the playwright, the theme of violence is intimately related to the theme of sex. Both the themes constitute the important part of the content of the plays. It is often observed that “pathos and violence characterizes most of action”5 in his plays. A close examination of
Tendulkar’s *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures* establishes the fact that the feudal mean mentality, more or less, persists even in the second half of the twentieth century despite the large number of social and legislative reforms in the background. Through the treatment of man-woman relationship in the fast-changing socio-economic scenario of the modernized, democratic India, the playwright exposes the social malaise which suggests that it is the rigid and rusted patriarchal mentality that lies at the root of women’s sorrows and sufferings; pains and privations; drudgery and degradation.

In *Sakharam Binder*, there are two female characters, Laxmi and Champa who fall prey to violence in myriad forms at the hands of men within or outside the bond of marriage, though the former is docile and acquiescent, and the latter is aggressive and authoritarian. They are not only two women into Sakharam’s life but they represent two tendencies, each having a different attitude to life. In the context, the observation of V.B. Deshpande seems to be pertinent in a way: “Laxmi represents values like purity, patience, and chastity whereas Champa stands for a carefree attitude to life which looks upon the body entirely as a medium of pleasure and she is interested in finding out the manliness in man.”

But the critic fails to discern the similar socio-economic conditions underneath their contrasting characters. Both have been the victims of males under the life-denying conditions of the patriarchal system. Both have undergone almost the same kind of harrowing experiences in their respective families. And now both are without regular support of males or husbands: Laxmi has been abandoned by her husband and Champa has abandoned hers. In both cases, it is man, in the guise of guardian, who has been the principal perpetrator of violence on them. Laxmi is beaten and driven out by her husband from her previous house as she...
fails to beget children, and now in the hands of a veteran womanizer, Sakharam Binder, her position is no better. Sakharam uses abusive language against her, beats her, suppresses her desires and at last flings her out of house when she refuses to obey his dictates and desires. On the other hand, Champa leaves her husband for his constant inhuman brutalities on her. And now she stays with Sakharam and refuses to comply with the strange habits and masochistic orders of Sakharam, and tries to prevail over him but this is too much for the authoritarian Sakharam to digest.

These two women represent two polarities of feminine response towards the sensual patriarch. The sharpest contrast is created between Laxmi and Champa in terms of their attitude and behaviour towards their respective husbands. Laxmi secretly regards Sakharam as her husband, because she cannot otherwise see herself in the kind of unsanctified union he proposes. When she returns after her nephew has thrown her out, she falls at Sakharam’s feet and does not go despite his merciless beating and kicking. On the other hand, Champa does not regard him anything more than another exploiter, but she has no qualms in beating her legitimate husband to a pulp when he comes looking for her. Laxmi’s response is noteworthy because it is an indicator to the fact that all transgressions from the male-ordained norms are taboos. Sakharam parades his unusual ways of life and his physicality. Yet he is stunned by Champa’s violence against her husband because the use of violence and abusive language is considered as prerogative of males. The fact that it is the physical violence unleashed by her sadist spouse that changes Champa into a creature who has to be driven senseless through liquor before she can surrender to sex is of no account. Laxmi is a typical Indian woman with her god-fearing religious, docile nature and
her undaunted devotion towards her husband, no matter how great a tormenter he is. When she is driven out by her husband on her failure to produce a child and is received by Sakharam, she accepts the vicissitudes of life without any grudge and protest. She begins to worship Sakharam, finding him only option to survive in the cramping circumstances. In the captive and suffocating atmosphere of Sakharam’s house, she demonstrates the patterns of thinking and modes of behaviour which are instilled in woman by the patriarchal conditions and conventions.

Lusty and rapacious, Sakharam partakes in life's pleasures and the women in his company are an easy and effective means of furthering his quotidian satisfaction. Laxmi’s sternly religious and pious nature enflames Sakharam, and after much viciousness is heaped on her, she lashes out at him verbally and is kicked out of the house. But, on the other hand, Champa is a sizzling cauldron of furious revolt that guts down all the men around her, whether they are her protectors or perpetrators. She is a woman who has walked on her alcoholic, atrocious husband on account of atrocities inflicted on her. She is curvy, sensuous and candid, and has the illusion of choice as a bargaining tool because she walked out on her pining husband. Her nonchalance and disregard for Sakharam’s directions allied with her flirty intensity renders him speechless. The power shifts, making him glassy-eyed and useless. In the beginning, she refuses to yield to his unbridled sexual advances, but after a considerable amount of resistance, she submits to his lusty nature, but in the mood of total stupor. It may be perceived as a kind of compromise for food, clothes and shelter she is provided with by him. Through the character of Sakharam, the playwright highlights the
inherent lusty nature of man in the system exclusively governed and sustained by man-made rules.

Sakharam Binder represents the double standards that patriarchy almost always sanctions. He is not bothered by the fact that he subjects the helpless women to a kind of prostitution. He does not want to be restricted by the responsibilities that the institution of marriage entails. Whatever be the socio-economic background, the male characters in Tendulkar’s plays like Sakharam, Jai Singh, Ramakant, Umakant do have one thing in common that they perceive women as subject to be exploited as possessions, not as individuals with feelings and desires of their own. The women have to limit themselves to the circle of restraint that confines them. According to the differences in background—social, economic, educational—the circumstances may be greater or lesser, but the restrictive circle is very much there. Sakharam, the ardent believer in free-sex, makes contractual arrangements, based on seemingly mutual conveniences, with the abandoned women he brings home under the pretext of providing them with solace, support and shelter, but confines them to carrying out unmitigated household drudgery as well as satiating his psychosexual needs. E. Renuka pertinently remarks that Sakharam’s nature is “as deceitful as that of a crocodile.” He is a man devoid of ethics and morality, and professes not to believe in the outdated social codes and conventional marriage. B. Wadikar rightly comments that Tendulkar exposes “the masochism of the lower middle class male” through the character of uneducated Sakharam. He accordingly uses the society for his own pleasures. He regularly gives "shelter" to abandoned wives, and uses them for his sexual gratification while remaining insensible to the emotional and moral implications of his exploits. He justifies all his acts through claims of modern, unconventional thinking,
and comes up with hollow arguments meant, in fact, to enslave women. The way he instructs the kept women reveals his inherent masculine hypocritical and oppressive attitude towards them.

On the one hand, Sakharam attacks husbands while pitying wives: "... those fellows—they can't father a brat and they take it all out on their wives. Beat her, kick her every single minute of the day. They’re an impotent lot! For them the woman’s just dirt, that’s all." He further delivers comments on the distinct natures of man and woman:

... the woman stays docile. She works well, she behaves herself. She knows that one wrong move and out she goes....It’s only when a woman gets married that she goes wrong. She begins to feel, ‘Now I’ve got my man!’ But the husband---he’s proper swine! He ties her down, he does not get tied down himself! He flits around again---a freed bird! (p.130)

Sakharam keeps the view that it is vulnerability on the part of women that is also responsible for their sufferings at the hands of man: “Mention your husband’s name and your eyes begin to brim over with tears. He kicks you out of the house; he is out to squeeze the life out of you. But he’s your God. You ought to worship a god like that with shoes and slippers! He should be worshipped in public, Gods, eh? (p.133). But, on the other hand, he himself employs almost the similar tactics and strategies to keep them under an iron hand as regular husbands often do in the analogous circumstances and situations. He is totally agnostic character who wants to enjoy life to the maximum extent possible. He says: “Without harming anyone, enjoy your life to the hilt. Only one should not be a liar or a fraud” (p.133). He claims all kinds of rights over them, but the helpless women have hardly any choice and rights in his house. About the nature of Sakharam, Wadikar observes: “He pretends to be a saviour, but actually, he is just an egoistic epicure.”
But Arundhati Benerjee, disagreeing with Wadikar, keeps the view that Sakharam is a man who is “primarily honest and frank. His straightforwardness in dealing with helpless women....demands a certain admiration.”\textsuperscript{11} Sakharam is frank and outspoken and he tries to work out “an independent philosophy of life, with no sense of false obligations.”\textsuperscript{12} Though he seems frank and honest in his speech, but there is no denying the fact that he is, in a way, an autocrat in his own way.

In the series of women, Sakharam brings home. Laxmi is the seventh. He informs the dainty, suffering woman of the rules of the house, and of his all sorts of needs and requirements. He seems to be bluffing when he animatedly warns in his oft-repeated speech that he is hot-headed and likely to revert to violence. The way he presents himself before Laxmi authenticates the view that man is man everywhere irrespective of age, status and place. Right from the very beginning it becomes crystal clear that the stay of Laxmi in his house will be a strenuous journey amounts to a great ordeal. On just entering the house, he makes her, in a bossy manner, acquainted with his lifestyle, temperament, and terms and conditions:

It’s Sakharam Binder’s house. And Sakharam Binder is not like your previous man. You’ll find out what he’s like. No free and easy ways are here, see? I’m hot headed. When I lose my temper, I beat the life out of people. I’ve a foul mouth. There’s always a bidi or an oath on my lips...I’m not rich but I pull on. You’ll get two square meals. Two sarees to start with and then one every year. And not a fancy one at that. I won’t hear complaints later. I like every thing in order here. Won’t put up with slipshod ways. If you’re careless, I’ll show you the door. Don’t ask for any pity then. And don’t blame me either. I’m the master here. I don’t care if they treat me like dirt outside...If someone calls, you’re not supposed to look up and talk. If it’s a stranger, you’ll have to cover your head and answer him briefly.
That's all. May be I'm rascal, a womanizer, a pauper and I drink....But I must be respected in my own house. I am the master here....No question to be asked. And one thing last....you’ll have to be a wife to me. (p.125)

Sakharam’s character is fraught with contradictions and absurdities which are reflected in his wavering demeanour, opportunistic mentality and brutal treatment of women. Later Sakharam tells Champa: “And you’ll have to make the food yourself. That’s woman’s job”(p.161). This view of Sakharam goes contrary to the previous one that he does not believe in the institution of marriage and he is not a husband, but he orders his kept women as if he were a regular husband. Though Sakharam says: “It’s good thing I’m not a husband” (p.129) and repeats time and again that “he’s no husband to forget common decency” (p.135). He orders them “to be a wife” to him and anyone “with a little sense will know what to make that” (p.126). Again in case of Champa, he says: “Here you will have to carry out all the duties of a wife” (p.159) Not only that, he also says: “I packed her off. I only keep them (women) here as long as I need them” (p.159). In this context, E. Renuka rightly observes that “though he poses to be a saviour, he presents the picture of a brutal and wretched victim of all that is bad in society regarding the man-woman relationship.”13 The playwright creates the character of Sakharam to expose the inherent hypocritical and chauvinistic tendencies of males in the lower middle-class Indian society where women are often placed in a vulnerable position.

In the face of the peculiar conditions of Sakharam, Laxmi, terrified, trembling and almost tumbling, is left with only a solitary choice---either to accept the terms or get out. At the first sight, the deal seems to indicate that he believes in the equitable norm of ‘give-and-take’ but the reality is otherwise. He offers her basic necessities of life
like food, clothes and shelter for twenty-four hours’ bonded labour to satisfy all his needs—physical, sexual and psychological. But, under the tricky transaction, she forfeits all the rights to articulate her desires and freedom to complain or protest against his unjust order. It is distinctly comprehensible that she is left with almost no opportunity to live like a human being with emotions and intellect. Even she is not allowed to play with or talk to insects in the hours of her boredom and loneliness. When he finds Laxmi talking to a black ant for comfort and company, he delivers a brutal threat to “knock her brains out” (p.139) if she does not desist from doing so. He even scolds her when her foot gets burnt from the hot coals falling from the chillum. Veena Noble Dass keeps the view that “the economic and sexual aggression is inherent in our equitable and repressive society.”14 His callous and indifferent attitude is reflected in these lines: “Good! I hope these coals roast your feet—roast them nice and brown….Impossible creatures! You have to kick them and clout them. That’s the only way they can keep their minds on their work and later, All you women – you are a worthless lot” (p.140). This sadist male also enjoys twisting Laxmi’s hurt foot, all the time threatening to break her legs. He exercises his male authority by unleashing physical violence on Laxmi. Sakharam may be said to “inherit violence from his father”15 who mal-treated him in childhood. His parents cursed and beat him brutally in his childhood. This cruel treatment left a deep painful scar on his tender mind. Sakharam says to Laxmi:

Born naked. I was. My mother used to say the brat’s shameless. He’s a Mahar. Born in a Brahmin home. And if I was, who’s to blame? It wasn’t my doing...I ran away from home when I as eleven. Got fed up with my father’s beatings. Nothing I did ever seemed right. You’d think I was his enemy or something. The way he’d thrash me!. (127)
He feels disgusted with the patriarchal tyranny of his father and strongly rebels against this tradition. He becomes misogynist and detests traditional marriage and lives with a woman without marriage. He tells that he is not a husband, but he proves worse than a conventional husband. The frustrated childhood crushes his tender feelings and makes him rough and tough guy "growing like a cactus that stands the onslaughts of stormy weather."\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, violence is used as a ploy to enforce one's bidding and it is the coward who inflicts it on the weak and women. In patriarchy, power is to be gained by using all kinds of channels including working on women's mindsets and if that fails, violence is to be used. In the space of one year, Sakharam has often directed his belt on Laxmi. She laments:

I've never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders. Curses. Oaths. Threatening to throw me out. Kicks and blows (wipes her eyes with the end of the sari). There I was in agony after I'd been belted and all you wanted me to do was laugh. Laugh and laugh again. Here I'm on the point of death and I'm supposed to laugh. Hell must be a better place than this (whimpers). If I die, I'll be free of this once and for all. (p.148)

Laxmi objects to the presence of Dawood at the worship of Lord Ganesh. This infuriates Sakharam and drives her out. Then he brings Champa who seems to have become frigid owing to the torture of her husband. So, she first resists sex with him, saying: "I left him because I had my honour to save. The swine wanted to make a whore of me. Don't go around like a dog behind a bitch. You've come and ruined my sleep as it is. Now run along and fix some dinner for us" (p.162). He fails to gather strength to display his male chauvinism; instead, he seems to obey her orders. He finds her irresistibly charming. But later when he forces her either to sleep with him or to leave him, she decides to satisfy
him. She drinks liquor and yields to his lust. She, later, tells Laxmi: “Once you drink, you get along fine. But your Sakharam, he really takes his money’s worth out of women. I’ve managed to last out here. What else can I do? Go out in streets? Face half a dozen animals every day! Easier to put up with one” (p.181).

On the one hand, Sakharam attempts to expose the ugly face of the institution of marriage where women are confined to drudgery and sex; but, at the same time, he does not hesitate to discard the kept women when “there’s no spark left” (p.129) in them. Sakharam reduces the man-woman relation to the level of a contract—the contract being “a link based on need. The need ended, the link snapped” (p.182). Geeta Kumar observes that, for Sakharam, the man-woman relationship is “something absolutely commercial.” But the critic fails to observe the lop-sidedness of Sakharam’s deals which are not based on the equivalent terms—he demands more and gives less. He keeps all the rights of termination of the contract, and does not give any freedom to the women he keeps. Both Laxmi and Champa come to learn that he is an absolute calculating, pitiless, drunkard and sadist to boot. On seeing Laxmi looking for framed gods, he says: “We’re not saints. We’re men. I tell you, Worship and prayer can’t satisfy the itch. If you want a thing, well, you’ve got to have it. What’s there to hide? And from whom? From our father?” (p.127). It is evident that the main motive of this patriarch is to exploit the helpless women on his own terms. On the first night itself, while letting her rest, he asks her to stop her religious fasting, for she will need all her strength to serve him. He says: “Mine is no ordinary appetite” (p.135). Laxmi, though frightened at first, however, soon learns to adapt herself to the new environment. She discovers that in his
heart of hearts he, whom she has by now begun to regard as her own husband, is not a bad man.

Sakharam loves his *mridanga* and *chillum (ganja)*. He plays on his *mridanga* after having his heart’s fill of ganja, and then he falls into trance. He is still capable of shocking cruelty on his women. Through Sakharam’s character, the playwright lets us have a peep into the inherent lust in men, which brooks no resistance, “the insatiable appetite” in Sakhatram’s words. Though not believer in the marriage, he does not like his kept women to play host to others in both his absence and presence in the house. He tells Laxmi the moment she enters his house. Sakharam pays tributes to whores, after comparing them with *ganja/ Chillum* in these words: She’ll go to God with her head held high. She’ll say to him, “I had a living to make. I had to eat. But I didn’t cheat any body. If I gave anything at all, I gave men joy. They’re born with an itch. I satisfied them. Big and small. I treated them all alike. As equal: O lord: If anyone has sinned at all, it’s the others. Not me” (p.130).

The relationship between Sakharam and Laxmi is that of a victimizer and victim, exploiter and exploited; master and slave; lord and subject. He keeps repeating: “My orders have to be obeyed,” as and when Laxmi complains against the wrongs done to her: “I’ve never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders. Curser. Oaths. Threatening to throw me out. Kicks and blows” (p.148). Though she is subjected to rigorous drudgery, she muffles her cries for a year, fearing expulsion from the house. At last Laxmi bursts out:

You think I am afraid to tell you? How much more can a person bear? It’s year now since I entered this house. I haven’t had a single day’s rest. Whether I’m sick or whether it’s festal day. Nothing but work, work; work all the time. You torture me the
whole day, you torture me at night. I’ll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end. (p.146)

When Sakharam perceives that Laxmi is challenging his authority, he immediately resolves to drive her out of his house. In a chauvinistic manner Sakharam tells Dawood: “I’ll knock her teeth in, every single one of them. I’ve never put up with even a word from anybody and here is this niggling bit of cast-off woman trying to lord over me” (p.150). Sakharam terminates his contractual agreement with Laxmi and throws her out, after a bitter brawling, without losing any time. The battered woman’s inability to leave is related to the stark and bitter reality of having no place to go and no means of survival but Sakharam chucks her out enforcing his own set of rules and reinforcing his belief in the saying: ‘Three things that improve with beating are, a dog, a walnut tree and a wife.’

Sakharam discards Laxmi not only that she disobeys his dictates, but also that she starts overlooking his lusty advances. Moreover, Sakharam, the womanizer, has become habitual of having sex with different women. Laxmi fails to provide him any substitute for a hot woman. It is evident that woman’s survival and happiness under a patriarchal order is largely relied on whims and wishes; desires and dictates of man. He represents the double standards of patriarchy. Under the pretext of helping the women in distress, he indirectly subjects them to a kind of prostitution. It is evident that the women, trapped by circumstances into living a coarse and brutalized life with Sakharam, have no economic independence. In this context, Veena Noble Dass accurately observes: “The women characters have been trapped by circumstances into living a coarse and brutalized life with Sakharam because in a society where women have no economic independence.”

In the dramatic world of Tendulkar, economic dependence of women on
men emerges as the chief cause of her pitiable position. The way the playwright treats the theme of exploitation of women suggests that the right kind of education and economic independence may prevent women from brutalities at the hands of men.

Laxmi wins the sympathy of some critics like Noble Dass who compares her with Savitri who succeeds in reviving her dead husband by tricking the God of Death. As a philanderer wife, she supports and observes patriarchal values and norms and joins men in prosecuting her fellow-women. Champa through her bitter experiences learns to protect herself. She succeeds in protecting herself and protesting against the male chauvinism of Sakharam. She is kind towards her fellow woman, Laxmi and saves her from the wrath of Sakharam. Shinde is also an interesting character. He like a sadist enjoys torturing Champa, his young wife till she leaves him. Later, like a masochist, he enjoys being hurt and humiliated by Champa. He exemplifies two kinds of violence: sadism and masochism.

In case of Laxmi, it is also ignorance or superstition that blurs her mental eye to perceive the real character of Sakharam. Like the earlier women in his house, Laxmi also takes refuge in religious rituals and fantasies. Even after she has been discarded by her impotent husband, she still nurses the illusion that she will die in the lap of her new husband, Sakharam. She insists that she is going to die in his lap---an expression of the common wish on the part of a chaste Hindu wife to die before her husband. Laxmi tells Sakharam: “Please don’t send me away. Nowhere I can go. Nobody turn to. I’ll do everything you want. I’ll do all the work. I don’t ask for anything just a roof over my head and to die in your lap” (p183). Still she is sticking to the tradition which has otherwise become one of the reasons of her exploitation. She has been
taught to treat her husband like a god. She, therefore, wears a *manglasutra* in his name, carefully hidden inside her blouse. She thinks that her place is at his feet. He is master, husband and god, with sanction to do what he pleases to with her without fear of reaction and retaliation. As a religious person, she loves crows and she pets a black ant at home. All this arouses Sakharam’s anger. This is why, when the burning coals fall on her feet, he just leaves her to suffer the agony. Furthermore, he orders her to laugh the way she laughs to the black ant while he and she make love. She gets herself braced up for these eerie experiences too.

The mysterious disappearance of Champa during the afternoon hour arouses Laxmi’s suspicion. She follows her and discovers that she has been having affair with Dawood. She prays to God for advice:

> The whole of last week. Where does she go every afternoon? I went for his sake. My misfortune. I could not keep the man I married. For me this one was my husband. I worshipped him. Even when I was away. I’d worship him in silence every day...If I have to die, let me die on his lap---in full glory like a married woman...Of, God, he does not know. The thought of it makes me sick. (p.187-88)

Laxmi thinks of herself as a righteous person, someone whose every action has been accepted as favourable by God. Sakharam abuses her, beats her black and blue but she never complains. After all, she is grateful to him, as she still has a roof over her head and a ‘man’ to look after her. A Muslim friend of Sakharam comes to their house for a Hindu puja and she opposes his presence in the house and for this impudence, she gets a volley of kicks from Sakharam. The relationship does not work out too well and tired of her mewling and complaining, Sakharam asks her to leave the house to go and stay with her nephew. She pleads and whines in vain. After touching his feet, she departs. Sakharam, though seems to be a comforter, he seeks an unquestioning
allegiance from the women he keeps in his house. If they fail to please him, he loses no time in discarding them.

After the unceremonious departure of Laxmi from the house, Sakharam, in need of a woman, brings home a new ‘bird’ Champa who is younger and more attractive than Laxmi. She is a lazy, arrogant virago of a woman, who likes tea made for her, enjoys afternoon siestas and is averse to household chores. For the first time in his life, Sakharam has the tables reversed on him and he is an absolute slave of this woman. She is brazen and uncouth; enjoys drinking. She has abandoned her ex-husband on grounds of bestialities and cruelties. The cruelties have been so horrific that she has decided that nothing worse could ever happen to her, and that accounts for her unabashed behaviour. Once the ex-husband comes to visit them, begging her to return to him and she beats him until he is almost half-dead. Her actions are too much even for the hedonistic Sakharam. So he tries to possess and dominate her by using other tactics. Her body being his main target, initially he yields a little bit of ground. “The peach” (p.158) as Sakharam’s friend Dawood calls her, is to be had at any cost. Champa’s ex-husband Fauzdar Shinde refers to Champa’s “buttocks” and “breasts”(p.165) as if only a woman’s limbs matter, not the whole being. This minor male character has earlier behaved in an abominable way. Champa’s first encounter with a male, who becomes her husband, has left her emotionally scarred for life.

No, I don’t have a heart. He chewed it up raw long ago. He bought me from my mother even before I’d become a woman. He married me when I didn’t even know what marriage meant. He would torture me at night. He branded me. He stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things. I ran away. He brought me back and stuffed chilly powder into that god-awful place where it hurts most. That bloody pimp! What’s left of my
Champa sick and disgusted with Sakharam’s insatiable thirst for sex can only surrender when she is totally drunk and in that state only the insensitive man like Dawood, and an animal like a dog can have sexual relations with her. Totally smitten with her bodily charms, Sakharam stops going for work. Later seeing her drunk all the time, he does not hesitate to call her “a slut”, and “a bitch.” Sakharam’s forcing himself upon Champa is not liked by her even in her drunken condition. She accuses him of being an impotent: “If you can’t make it, go and lie down quietly. Haven’t been able to make it these last few days. A sound from the kitchen and you go cold---That true or not?” (p.193). The male libido when challenged manifests itself in many types of violence against women. Sakharam cannot stomach this insult but he does not deny the charge. This probably happens to Sakharam as he is conscious of Laxmi being in the kitchen. In fury he forces Champa to drink and then makes love to her. The male victory, at least in his own view, is complete. Indulekha Roy Burman rightly observes: “What Sakharam demands from his mistress, is absolute submission along with domestic comfort and physical gratification. The wretched women are turned into his slaves in his kitchen as well as in his bed. They are also promptly dismissed from his haven on the slightest offence.”

The image of Champa is that of an extremely attractive as well as abusive young woman. She is considered as a match for the male chauvinists of the play. The way she uses abusive language for her husband whose house she has left, and orders Sakharam and Dawood to take care of her requirements about food, sleep and rest informs us that she is made of domineering and authoritative stuff as males are made of
in a patriarchal order. When her husband, Fauzdar Shinde comes just to 
have a look at her, she hauls him up holding by the scruff of his neck, 
slaps him, punches him and beats him with her sandals. She behaves like 
a male and her policeman husband is a helpless female. But the attitude 
she adopts towards males is not inborn; rather it is the outcome of the 
circumstances in which she was maltreated, abused and sold. Later 
talking to Laxmi, she refers to her husband as a bastard earth-worm, a 
eunuch. As a result of all this, she adopts a revengeful attitude towards 
all those who have been the root cause of her present predicament.

Laxmi takes pity on Champa’s husband and feeds him. When Champa 
comes to know of it, she turns away nasty and tells Laxmi: “Look here. 
Don’t double cross me. I warn you. (Laxmi wants to say something, but 
the words don’t leave her mouth). If you act straight, you can 
stay”(p.191). She refuses to comply with the conditions and dictates of 
Sakharam. She surrenders to him only when she becomes oblivious of 
her existence in extremely drunken mood. Sensing that his authority is 
being grossly challenged, Sakharam screams: “In this house what I say 
goes, see?...My orders have to be obeyed. I can turn nasty otherwise. I’ll 
thrash the life out of you. There’s no stopping me” (p.171). But 
Champa, being well-versed with man and his ways, knows how to deal 
with him and how to take his dictates in varied situations. But it does not 
mean that she is crafty and callous and devoid of human attributes.

Champa’s humanity is revealed when Laxmi, in a pitiable 
condition, comes back to Sakharam’s house after a short stay in her 
nephew’s house in Amalner. This time she is determined never to leave 
Sakharam’s house, but Sakharam does not want to have Laxmi back in 
the house. But Champa comes to Laxmi’s rescue proposing that she 
should do all the household work and she herself would look after
Sakharam’s other needs. This is an idea, to which Tendulkar returns again in Kamala where Kamala makes a similar proposal to Sarita, the wife of Jai Singh. At this proposal Sakharam seems to be lenient and allows Laxmi space in the house. It does not mean that Sakharam has changed his basic nature and become compassionate and considerate towards women, but the real thing is that he finds an opportunity where two women will cater to his all sorts of needs and desires. It is evident that males, of course, would like to have the opportunity where two females would try to please the male and fulfil all his wishes. In the very beginning of the play, the way he lays down conditions before Laxmi reveals his intentions and expectations as a male in the male hegemonic society.

As a prototype of male chauvinism, Sakharam, an atheist, not only subverts religion when he refers to the trunk, ears and paunch of Ganesha in a derogatory way and digs at Ganesha’s mouse, saying that he doesn’t give a damn for her or for her god, but also strangles Champa to death when he comes to know that she has illicit relations with Dawood. Laxmi tells Sakharam: Laxmi’s religious fervour continues unabated. She sleeps in the kitchen. Her chanting of “Sitaram” disturbs Sakharam’s drunken lovemaking. He also kicks and beats Laxmi. The male, of course, boiling with rage, mad at being cheated by his woman, strangles the sleeping Champa to death. No explanations, no questions, just swift male ‘justice is administered. Infidelity is not to be tolerated at all. Veena Noble Dass aptly remarks: “He becomes jealous and jealousy arises in an individual in direct proportion to the impotence of the individual. The harsh critic of the institution of marriage and of the inhumanity and hypocrisy of husbands himself turns out to be a puny male chauvinist.” 20 The brutal murder of Champa not only informs us
of violence on women but also exposes the hypocrisy and hollowness of the system where women are punished and men go scot-free for the same transgression.

In this play, Sakharam’s relationship with the two women—Laxmi and Champa, though clearly defined by him at the outset both the times remains stormy, as it is full of lust and violence. The language in the play in keeping with the naturalistic mode is shocking at many points. According to Arundhati Banerjee, “The language used is extremely coarse, rugged, laden with abuse but at the same time crisp and colloquial. The choice of such a medium for the dialogues makes the play even more living and realistic.” The fact remains that Sakharam’s abuses are directed at the weaker sex because he knows that he can get away with anything as both women are totally dependent on him at the time they cohabit with him. Not satisfied with calling Laxmi an ungrateful wretch and threatening to break her jaw, he tries to frighten Laxmi first with the prospect of leading a dog’s life if she leaves him. He further calls her an ungrateful bitch while talking to Dawood. The same kind of attitude and abusive language is used for Champa when she refuses Sakharam’s sexual advances. As she refuses again and again, Sakharam used to having his orders obeyed, shouts: “You’ll be driven out of here. That’ll put some sense into your head. You will have to live like a bitch then. Sleep with every fellow you meet. Yes, sleep with all of them” (p.171). A little later it is again “bloody bitch”, “shameless wretch” and “the slut”. The point is, the male uses sexual abuses again and again, firmly believing that it is the ultimate insult. For a woman, nothing could be more humiliating than such one. He also shouts: “You women, you are all the same. Suckled by dead mothers! Corpses! That’s what you are. You get kicked by your
husbands and you go and fall at their feet” (p.133). Sakharam tells Laxmi: “In this house, the women must always speak with restraint. I won’t put up with bad language” (p.158). Apparently, the same rule does not apply to him as he is a man. Double standards are always applied in a patriarchal society as far as women and their concerns are concerned. The play exposes the hypocrisy and injustice of the oppressive patriarchal moral code. As such the play is a ruthless picture of suppression, oppression and exploitation of woman in lower middle-class society. Indulekha Roy Burman rightly comments the play “dissects the morbid, squalid aspects of human life against a bizarre backdrop of Plebian society”.

It is through the character of Champa, the playwright shows how deep rooted women’s exploitation in society is, for here is a woman who is unconventional and strong enough to have left her husband. Here is a woman who can nonplus Sakahram by not behaving like a destitute dependent. Here is a woman who will not let a man use her body simply because he is her husband or her patron. If Laxmi draws her strength from being unconventional, Champa draws it from being an independent, self-respecting individual. In the ultimate analysis, however, she must still submit to Sakharam, though on the first day she casually asks him to arrange some food because she is very hungry. She is soon cooking for him as Laxmi did. Champa’s first response to his sexual demand is reflected in these lines: “I’m not that kind of woman. You’d better behave yourself. Don’t go sniffing after me like a dog,” and later “I’m not too nice when I’ upset. Don’t upset me. I don’t like that sort of thing….all that man-woman stuff” (p.168).

The play depicts how violence within or outside family creates fissures in man-woman relationship. It not only causes self-alienation in
the individuals, but also makes them inhuman and perverted. The play presents the situation objectively without making any value judgements. Sakharam is also perceived to be the product of patriarchal tyranny at home. He wants to rebel against the inhuman traditions that made his father treat him unkindly. But paradoxically enough, he proves worse than a regular husband. He is neither an intellectual nor is he a reformer like Nath in Kanyadaan who also fails miserably in his experiment of inter-caste marriage. He, in fact, leads a kind of married life like any patriarchal husband, but without having any legal or social sanction. Being self-alienated, he can not feel the joy of life in its natural taste. Furthermore, he unsuccessfully strives to overcome his feelings of inferiority and powerlessness caused by the humiliation received from his own parents. In his own way he enjoys his life and powers as man, he swears, he smokes ganja, drinks liquor and indulges in mechanical sex without marriage, and, thus, he tries to violate the accepted norms of the society. E. Renuka calls him a “confused hedonist.”

In a patriarchal system, violence is indicted on women in the form of sexual abuse according to the whims and wishes of men, thereby suppressing their desires and emotions.

In the play The Vultures, the family relationships are characterized by bestiality, exploitation, cheating, animosity, mistrust and alienation, and in such an atmosphere the worst sufferers are the women characters in the household. The father Hari Pitale cheats his own brother in business and earns great wealth. His children Ramakant, Umakant and Manik—inherit their egocentric nature. For money, they do not hesitate to kill one another. It seems that these human vultures get as much intoxicated through resorting to violence as through drinking liquor. Though the writer tries to project violence in variegated forms,
he also derelicts the loveless and joyless situation of the society caused by individualism and competition. The play shows how people become loveless and inhuman in their mad scramble to the higher rungs in this commercialized society. They also become joyless with anxiety. So they try to secure joy through liquor and violence. But it worsens the situation. The play shows how capitalistic values destroy human love and blood relations.

In *The Vultures*, there are two women— one wife and another daughter of the Pitale family— who fall prey to the mean mentality of the patriarchal order. Rama, the wife of Ramakant, trapped in the traditional marriage, undergoes harrowing experiences in her life; whereas Manik, the daughter of this family, though adopts Western lifestyle, falls victim to multifaceted violence even at the hands of her own brothers. The playwright creates two women characters, in this play, diametrically opposite to each other in terms of temperament, nature, lifestyle and status to offer the two-pronged commentary on the still alive patriarchal system in Indian society. In this play, Manik and Rama are a bolder contrast than Mrs. Kashikar and Miss Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Once again, being with or without child is the mental-physical state used to underline it. But this time round, the symbol of growth is used quite unexpectedly. Here Manik’s baby, like Benare’s, is illegitimate. But it is the result of passion. But in case of Rama, she cannot bear a child despite her almost divine goodness, because the seed that should bring it forth is rotten. Tedulkar uses bold, almost brash colours to portray Manik. She is the classic slut who parties, sleeps late, smokes, drinks and jumps from one bed to another. Her latest affair is with a so-called *Rajah* whose child she is carrying. The contrast between Manik and Rama is black and white. Yet, with all
her crudeness, Manik is only a female vulture, and for that she ultimately moves us to some compassion. Her brothers, who fight each other with every weapon, draw blood, thirst for more, stand united when it comes to her. They tease and mock her and throw the vilest obscenities at her. The males, in this play, in the guise of vultures pounce on others for their needs and necessities. The title of the play, *The Vultures* signifies the unpleasant atmosphere of the play. The vulture is a ferocious and ruthless bird that eats the flesh of animals that are already dead. A person who hopes to gain from the troubles or sufferings of other people can be metaphorically termed as a vulture.

The play centres round an innocent young woman Rama, surrounded in her in-law’s house by human beings in the shape of wolves. She is subjected to mental cruelty by the males in the family except her step brother-in-law, Ramakant with whom she carries secret extra-marital relationship. Tendulkar makes the men in the play use extremely abusive and offensive language which is shocking and, at times, even revolting. The ‘vultures’ in this play pounce on and snatch everything they can lay their hands on, without bothering even a wee bit about the feminine sensibilities of the women around them. Violence in this play is predominantly family violence, and this violence is bred by continued closeness in the now almost crumbling joint-family system in our society.

The house of Hari Ram Pitale is divided in three sections, one of the sections is segregated for Rama, the wife of Rajanikant, who is docile, submissive and caring wife. From the very setting of the house it is evident that she is trapped in the traditional marriage where her position is no better than servants in the house. For her, the house is like “the hollow of a tree,” where vultures in the shapes of men carry out
their nefarious designs against women. As the curtain rises, the light falls, but the bedroom of Rama remains “a dirty grey, almost black;” (p.201) whereas the outer area, where males stay most often, is radiated green. The playwright uses the technique of contrast between black and green colour to portray the two worlds---one for females and other for males. The black colour signifies the sordid and secondary position of women in the house, whereas the green colour indicates the freedom as enjoyed by the males in the family. It is evident that the norm of double standards is observed in the family, and such type of governance is almost always found in the patriarchal system.

Rama has been living in the house for a long period of twenty-two years, but still her position in the house is no better than a bastard or a slave. The way she undergoes humiliation and harrowing experiences in the family informs us of the position of women in the patriarchal Indian society. Rama faces multifarious injustices at the hands of her husband, Ramakant in particular and the family in general in the same way Sarita faces at the hands of her husband Jai Singh in Kamala. Like Kamala, Rama ungrudgingly looks after the needs and concerns of her husband from early morning to late night, but in turn, she gets nothing but humiliation and discrimination in plenty. A cursory look at her character reveals that she is a woman of few needs. She has the only one desire---to have a baby, but that remains unfulfilled, as her husband is impotent. She cannot bear a child because the seed that should bring it forth is rotten. Sahnta Gokhale comments: “Her infertility is the symbol of the putrid evil that her husband Ramakant, his brother and father fill the air with.”25 Though he is not strong enough to make her wife pregnant, he does not accept this fault; rather he puts blame on Rama, thinking that she is infertile. He carries her to various doctors, saints and
vaidas to restore her seemingly lost generative power. And when he fails to beget children, he puts the entire blame on God: “Man proposes, God disposes” (p.212). Though the real fault lies with him, he transfers the responsibility to outer agencies. But when he maltreats his father and sister, he is not afraid of God. Rama, though knows where the fault lies, but fears to open her mouth. In a patriarchal order, women are almost always termed not only barren but also humiliated for not producing children, even though man is found acutely deficient in the biological energy.

In a patriarchal order, the primary function of woman is to bear and rear children and looks after hearth and home. When she fails to mother children, owing to her husband’s impotence, she is despised as a bad omen. It is the established view that woman if finds any place in the family that she finds only on account of giving birth to children, especially male children. As a typical Indian or traditional woman, her concerns, indeed concerns for most women, are to pursue love and happiness and in her specific case, a desire for fulfilment in conception and motherhood. She has an ominous feeling expressed right at the beginning of the play of being helplessly carried away by the forces of time, nature and circumstances. After long years of married life, she has not been able to conceive. Pining, plaintively crying out, inwardly suffering, she opens her heart to her brother-in-law, Rajaninath:

I was born to become a mother. This soil’s rich, it is hungry. But the seed won’t take root. If the seed is soaked in poison, if it’s weak, feeble, lifeless, devoid of virtue – then why blame the soil? And if still the soil should cherish the seed--should with God as its witness make efforts--beyond life itself--to guard that seed, to nourish it?...that the soil should be on fire with thirst--and should have to endure a fast without water?...If there should be a raging thirst and it should meet with a fast harsh drought? (p. 241)
In a man-dominated society, women, often subjugated and suppressed, fail to muster strength to speak against their husbands, even though they deprive them of natural desires. To have any esteem and recognition in the family Rama craves for child, but she suppresses her desire, fearing a social disgrace or stigma. Though she gets attracted towards the stepbrother of her husband, Rajaninnath, but is afraid of revealing her emotions openly, thinking that she will be termed as kulta. She visits swamis and sadhus at the behest of her husband so that a child can be produced as a result of the holy men’s blessings. She expresses her innermost feelings to Rajaninath:

Every day, a new death. Every minute, a thousand, million deaths. A pain like a million needless stuck in your heart. Blinding you, maddening you with pain . . . A million needles like that, each second. Endless seconds like that each day. And endless day like that each long, long, unending, endless, never-ending cruel year. So many year like this I’ve endured. So many. A life time . . . Everyday a new mystic, a swami, an astrologer, a doctor – rubbing your head at the feet of every lump of stone he tells you to. Stretching out a begging hand to them. Asking them the same question. Quietly enduring whatever sacred ash, ash of incense, talisman, performing whatever useless vows or diets they may give you. (p. 240)

Rama is undergoing untold experiences with her husband. Being dependent on him, she cannot leave him, but at the same time, she finds it difficult to stay with him. Her life is almost like lie-in-death situation. She blurts out in front of Rajniath:

In this living death of my wifehood— I commit ‘sati’ every moment! I burn! I am consumed! And do you know something? I wouldn’t lie to you—recently—for the past several years—I’ve never get up again. So he’ll never show me to any new swami, astrologer or healer. So he won’t make disgusting drunken love to me. Won’t look at me with drooling lips – and talk to me of babies. (p. 242).
In the suffocating and scheming family environment, she, finding no proper outlet to give vent to her pent-up feelings, suppresses her emotions in such a way that she becomes almost a lifeless creature without emotions and desires. As Rajaninath mirrors her pitiable image through a poem:

A statue of emotions chilled to stone.
Alive, she followed after
That living death, her master,
With the dogged loyalty.
Of barren beast.
The true companionship
To a leper
Of a mangy dog
On the road to hell. (pp.201-202)

Rajaninath offers a running commentary on the events and situations in the house. He is not just the narrator of the events in the play detailing vital information about Rama but also an important witness to the torture, indifference, anguish and tears shed by Rama. He considers his own life a burden. He tells Rama that his life is “as barren as yourself.” He further says, “I am a worthless rhymester. I understand it well, the torment of your empty womb” (243). His burning anger is pacified occasionally by Rama’s gentle and sympathetic attitude. Rajaninath comments on the hellish life that Rama is undergoing in the house where the male members, absorbed in the dubious designs to have monetary gains, evince more interest in their own comfortable life than the precarious quandary of women:

It still remains
To breathe once, freely,
Breathe with freedom---
Such a freedom
After that living impotence
Of twenty-two endless years. (p.202)

Though Rama is as innocent as “a doe, an innocent doe, untouched as loving as the earth,” (p.203) her life in the house is “like a terrible dream.” (202). She is a “tender-hearted idol to adore,” (203) and in her “bearing there is the innocence of a deer” (p.206) but for the vultures in the house, her beauties and tenderness are insignificant and meaningless. Surrounded by men-vultures, her humanity is not only overlooked but also undermined in a way. Rama with many dreams entered the house twenty-two years ago, but the violent and aggressive atmosphere in the house has muted all her dreams. The house, for her, has been a permanent place of torments and tortures: “But it was no home. Not a home, but a hole in a tree. Where vultures lived. In the shapes of men” (p.204). In this house, Rama’s condition has been like that of “a goat” which is “chopped to mince and eat” (p.204). She patiently bears all the tortures and humiliations: “Their torture, their neglect of her. Their cold despising, her tormented struggles”(p.205). Rama feels more and more vexed with her husband who becomes impotent with excessive drinking and who takes her to several doctors and saints. So, while pouring her agony, she says to Rajaninath: “It’s not faults of doctors, of learned men, of saints and sages! It’s not even my fault! This womb’s healthy and sound, I swear it!” (p.241).

Alike a slave, Rama, in this house, is working hard throughout the day and looking after a joint-family of cranks consisting of her father-in-law, husband, brother-in-law and sister-in-law. All this would have been a common place if it were not for their selfish, vicious, self-seeking natures. All relationships become tainted in this house. Father-
son, brother-brother, father-daughter, brother-sister—these blood relations fight over money like dogs fight over a bone. In such circumstances, there can be no scope for Rama to lead a happy marital life or even a happy normal life. Her claustrophobic existence gets some meaning when she becomes pregnant as a result of her relationship with Rajaninath. But her happiness is an extremely transient. She would have been damned either way. To continue to live in subjugation and childlessness would have meant long years of suffering in silence but stepping outside the marital bond is sacrilegious. The foetus in her womb is destroyed forcibly by her husband. It is not just humiliation; it is the crushing of a woman’s will. The phallic supremacy of the male, even if he is a repulsive weakling, makes him exercise totalitarian authority and control over the female. Rama has to relinquish her selfhood in the sense that her wishes are of no consequence. Jealous patriarchal sentiment has always rejected independence and behavioural deviations in women. Even in contemporary society where almost all the plays of Tendulkar are set, for the majority of men, women continue to be ‘disposable’ and ‘dispensable’ whose desires and wishes mean nothing for them.

Rama is maltreated by male members of the family, though she carries out household chores like a beast of burden, donkey from early morning to late night. Her father-in-law, though in the last phase of his life, behaves in an authoritarian manner and does not desist from belittling women. Her wife died a long ago, and now he finds vulnerable Rama as substitute for his wife to unleash his bitterness that he receives from his sons. Having no one listening to his nonsense, he approaches Rama to make target of his ire. He threatens her with the words: “If I die, it’ll be a release! They’re all waiting for it. But I’m your father,
after all! If I die, I’ll become a ghost. I’ll sit on your chest! I won’t let you enjoy a rupee of it” (p.209). Even her husband, Ramakant, rebukes her for giving food to the servant: “Look here, Rama, from now on, don’t give an inch to that gardener Jagannath.” (p.210) Jagannath is beaten, starved and thrown out of the house, but Rama empathizes with him and tries to help him with food, but she is not only prohibited but also lambasted for this act of generosity. By creating the character of Jagannath, Tendulkar substantiates the point that the condition of Rama is no better than servants in the house. As Maya Pandit observes: The family of Ramakant, Umakant, Manik, their father and Uncle and the illegitimate son of their father represent “the decomposing state of the family where even the outward façade of decency has evaporated and what remains to be seen is the naked play of desire to possess, own, gain money and destroy another human being.” The playwright peeps into the man-woman relationships in the patriarchal social order and reveals the naked and dreadful truth that deprives woman of opportunity and strength to voice her aggrieved heart and tortured psyche.

Rama keeps an ardent desire to have a baby to find a dignified place in the family, but it remains a muffled cry, as the impotence of her husband deprives her that opportunity. She thinks that she is despised because she cannot beget children. So her desire to have children becomes intense with the passage of time. With this, she is not only deprived of sexual satisfaction, but also of normal social life. She is left with no one to have emotional security except her Rajaninath, but she is afraid of her husband while meeting him. Almost all the characters in this play are corrupt and violent except Rajaninath and Rama. A kind of internal as well as inter-personal family violence permeates in the play and it seems that almost out of a sense of helplessness and turning away
from the ugliness around, she stealthily meets him, and with the time she becomes pregnant by him. Umakant reveals this secret to Ramakant:

Umakant: I know about the brat your wife’s having. As if no one ever had one before! If you were such a man, why’d she keeps dropping them before this? At two or four months? And how do you know this brat is yours? Ramakant: (Confidently, slyly). Then whose it it?

Umakant: It’s that bastard Rajaninath’s! That enemy at your gates! It is your half-brother’s! Your bastard brother’s! That son of a whore! (p.255)

In a patriarchal society, double standards are observed in almost all quarters of life. In every field, woman is not only pushed to the periphery of household affairs, but also despised if she deviates an inch from her socially prescribed role. Poisoned by Umakant, Ramakant starts suspecting Rama’s character and movements. In the beginning, he orders her to stay within the room twenty-four hours: “You get upstairs first! Go on! Give you an inch of freedom---and you’ll take a mile! Go on, Go. Don’t come down again. Bloody headache, dammit!”(p.257). Later, he plans to abort the baby. He tells Umakant: “I’ll abort him. He’s not mine. He’s my enemy’s bloody son…I’ll abort him” (p.264). Outraged Ramakant makes sure that Rama has an abortion. Rama’s tears are frozen. She becomes a person “empty of pain and empty of desires” (p.206). The crude males around her have made her life hellish and the only sensitive, sympathetic male Rajaninath, with whom she has a meaningful and fruitful relation, is too weak and powerless to do anything, being the illegitimate son and an unemployed poet. Does a female ever really get what she wants in a patriarchal system of things? Not really as her life course is decided by others, her choices are limited and her destiny is one of unfulfilment and unhappiness. On the other hand, the husband himself visits so many women and openly narrates his
polygamous stories to his wife: "Last night I went to tamasha. These days I go daily. And I do many other things, too. If anyone objects, let them cover their eyes. Day before yesterday, I went to a woman" (p.222). Through the husband-wife relationships of Ramakant and Rama the playwright highlights the double standards of the conventional morality that chastises woman and lets man scot-free.

In a patriarchal order, as far as family decisions are concerned, woman's role is relegated to the background, considering her incapable of thinking and acting rationally. As and when Rama expresses her fear and anxiety about her husband's business and requests him to change it, Ramakant "blinded by egoism and male chauvinism" fails to understand the wisdom of his wife's advice. He bluntly rejects her humble prayer: "Look here, Rama. In this house we're not accustomed to listening to any smarten women! No man in the family's being a bloody henpecked husband. What I know very well indeed what to do, what not to do. No need for a woman to teach me a sense" (p.251). In this play, all the male characters, except Rajaninath, use very obscene language and fight over the ancestral property or money. Naive, traditional Rama is treated indifferently by them and at the end of the play she becomes totally desensitized and dehumanized. Since times immemorial, women in Indian society, even though educated, are kept in the background of household affairs.

Another female character in *The Vultures* is Manik, the daughter of the household, who in the midst of vulture-like characters in a family suffers immensely because of their selfish and wicked plans for their own benefit. Manik, at the age of thirty five, is a frustrated spinster who has lost her freshness. She is plump and her various relationships with men have not worked out. She has taken to drinking and smoking. Her
brother Ramakant and Umakant are contemptuous of her various habits and affairs, and pass caustic, vulgar and obscene remarks in her presence. They charge rent from her for living in her own father’s house and she says that she wouldn’t be surprised if at night they would force her to give away her share of the inherited money at the point of a knife. Manik tells Rama: “So I should leave it open, Should I? So you can come and strangle me, all of you? It’s because I take care that I’ve survived in the house! Think it’s human beings who live here? The door was shut, says she!” (p.207). She accuses them of making plans of poisoning her when she was down with typhoid. Manik tells Rama: “I was careful. That’s what saved me! I just refused medicine. I never slept. Even in the dark, I never closed my eyes for a second. That’s how I survived. Or you’d have fixed me long ago!” (p.208). It is no less than an ironic situation where a girl is feeling insecure amidst her brothers who are supposed to be protectors and a healthy source of emotional security. It seems that they inherit “the baser qualities from their father” who cheats his own brother and acquires property and affluence.

In this play, the two sons’ abusive language against their father is shocking. The father is equally sharp-tongued and retorts as each and every insult hurled at him. However, it is their foul words against their own sister, who is an accomplice in their nefarious designs in the beginning, which makes one feel totally disgusted. Both Umakant and Ramakant use the word “bloody” again and again as a pet phrase. It is ‘bloody problem,’ ‘bloody racket,’ ‘bloody bastard,’ and ‘bloody bugger.’ Not satisfied with referring to their sister as a ‘cow’ Umakant hits his sister Manik on the buttocks while she is wearing only a blouse and petticoat with a towel around her shoulders because Manik tells him to
hold his tongue. Umakant has earlier passed vulgar remarks to Manik: “Goes and rolls all over town, the cow! And then sits scrubbing herself” (p.214). Shamelessly and sarcastically, Ramakant on being told by Manik not to dip into her purse, says: “So it’s only that Hondur fellow who’s allowed to dip into things? Eh brother? How’s that?” (p.215). They pounce upon the opportunity of making some money. Ramakant suggests Umakant: “Why shouldn’t we blackmail that Hondur chap? Ourselves?” (p.236). Together they embark on an unscrupulous enterprise of detaining Manik in the house and extracting money from the prince by threatening to make his relationship with Manik public. As Veena Noble Dass rightly comments: “The play reveals that greed for money and materialism has seeped so much into middle class society that people would go to any extent to get hold of it.” 29

Umakant pulls at his sister’s towel covering her shoulders. Later Umakant and Ramakant cheer for the Raja of Hondur and Manik who are having an affair. Umakant responds as Ramakant cheers the ‘bloody’ Raja of Hondur: “No! No! For the bloody son of the Raja of Hondur! Cheer him! Cheer the bitch!” (p.244). This needless abuse against their sister, using whose name, they intent to blackmail the Raja of Honour, can only point to the rot which has set in their souls. They later abuse the nurse who brought them up when they were very young: “That was nurse who did. She was another bloody whore. You know brother, when I was small she used to tell me, go and play...she used to do with the watchman? Bloody bitch! And I was nursed up on her milk. They are all bastards. All the same. Shoot the lot of them” (p.246). There is no gratefulness or even indifference for the nurse, rather it is deep-rooted hatred for the woman who nursed them and nurtured them. In a patriarchal order, a daughter is not only discriminated but also restricted
to a certain sphere. If she tries to transcend the limitations put on her role, she becomes the target of ire of the male members of her family. In this play, the brothers use sexist language, refer to her as a buffalo, a bitch, and a woman who lolls in gutters. Veena Noble Dass remarks: “Thus the language of the play is as much as an instrument of power and is a prolonged scream. Obscenity in language is a form of psychic violence and can be used with great effect a weapon that can excite people to lethal physical violence.”30

The dubious minded males cannot tolerate the fact that their sister is planning to get married to Maharaja of Hondur, who has two wives, has made their sister pregnant. They tease her no end and plan to blackmail the Maharaja. They ask Maharaja of Hondur to pay them twenty thousand rupees but do not want Manik to know. They plan to confine her indoors forcibly and then think of a better plan, that is, to cause an accident. Umakant goes to call Manik. Ramakant puts the telephone receiver off the hook. He breaks an empty soda bottle in half to intimidate Manik. As Umakant and Manik enter, Umakant picks up a can-opener and both the bothers catch hold of the sister. One pushes her and the other obstructs her. She bites Umakant but is not able to stop them. They break her foot so that she won’t be able to go out. Unfortunately, for them, Hondur succumbs to heart attack the same night and their plans of blackmail are frustrated. After a while, as they are talking, they would enjoy the prospect of her committing ‘sati’. What devilish, fiendish minds these brothers have fantasizing about the horrendous custom of ‘sati’ and their sister committing it. Shockingly enough, they relish the scene: “Brainwave! First class scene! 109th week of amazing crowds. Our little Manik—sitting on the brat in her belly—commits Sati! Technicolour! Flames leaping to the bloody sky!”
The Maharaja is dead so the little maharaja in Manik’s stomach is to be killed by kicking at her stomach. Drunk, they knock at the doors of Manik and carry out their vicious designs. The poor female is seen screaming as a bird whose wings have been cut, her white saree soaked with blood. Today, twenty years later, it is possible to judge the play with objectivity. The play is a ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness. As A.P Dani aptly remarks: “The murky dilapidated, den like house stands for corrupt values of the family and psychosis of the raving megalomaniacs.”

The decadence and degeneration of human individuals belonging to a middle-class milieu is exposed through the interactions among the members of a family. Ramakant and Umakant’s greed and viciousness, their father’s degenerate nature, their sister Manik’s gross sensuality—all adds up to a naturalistic depictions of those baser aspects of human that one would like to shut one’s eyes to. The beating up of the father by his own children, the brothers’ forcible abortion of their sister’s child and the mutual hatred among he members of the family underline the fundamental evil inherent in human nature. In the words of Prof. Avinash Kohle: “Gidhade, which has a ruthless dissection of human nature, revealing violence, avarice lying beneath the put up of personality, was a fascinating expose of social reality.” They are ready to go to any extent to satisfy their avarice. They are “embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery.” While these patriarchal characters fight amongst themselves, they are united in persecuting the women in the play. Both the father and the sons are at loggerheads with Manik, the daughter of the house and they want total subservience from the daughter-in-law, Rama.
It is evident that the play deals with the precariousness of human nature. Adverse situations bring to the fore deeply buried tendencies in human psyche such as selfishness, cruelty, avarice and violence. In this play, all relationships become vitiated. The closest family relationships like father and children, brothers and sister, brother and brother do not just become strained, these come near breaking point. All the characters except Rama and Rajaninath are evil without any redeeming characteristics. Chari and Renuka point out: “This play enacts the goriest of the family relations existing in our society today.” Tendulkar suggests that this is the reality of contemporary life in some families. There is no sermonizing by the author. The ‘sparrow’ Rama suffers but so does Rajaninath with a sensitive poet’s temperament. In their own way, the ‘vultures’ suffer too. Ramakant’s male ego is bruised badly as Rama becomes pregnant with his step-brother’s baby. Umakant’s schemes to grab all the money in the house come to naught, and he is thrown out of the house by Ramakant. Both the father and the daughter disappear from the stage after being tortured by the sons of the house. N.S. Dharan remarks: “‘The Vultures’ is indeed the most violent of Tendulkar’s plays. It reminds one of Webster’s ‘The Duchess of Malfi.’ It is replete with violent imagery, consisting of blood, eeriness, and raving.”

The preceding discussion of both the plays—Shakharam Binder and The Vultures reveals the dynamics and dimensions of violence unleashed on women characters. Violence stems from various sources such as traditional marriage, conventional sexual morality with double standards, outdated religious rituals, economic dependence and ignorance. Without any grudge and protest, women characters bear violence in multifarious forms ranging from scolding to slaughtering;
beating to brutality; drudgery to degradation; exploitation to expulsion because they are relied on them for life and livelihood. In the name of protection and social and sexual security, male characters exploit the weaker position of female characters by displaying their manly power and potentialities, though, in reality, they are coward and impotent. The playwright through the treatment of man-woman relationships not only highlights the pitiable position of women, but also hits very hard at the roots of the sources of violence.
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