Vijay Tendulkar

(1928-2008)
CURTAIN - RAISER
CHAPTER - I
CURTAIN-RAISER

Theatre is life. There is no art, no craft, no learning, no yoga, no action, which cannot be seen in it. (Bharata qtd. in Rangacharya 268)

Theatre, a large energetic public activity, is revelation. It is creative expression emerging in performance. While “drama belongs to an author, theatre belongs to people. The balance between drama and theatre is the same as the balance between an individual and society” (Kamber 11). Drama, a performing, co-operative, and collaborative art is an immediate, intense, and a communal form of literature. It is immediate because it is acted out in front of an audience, intense because what is to be depicted is concentrated into a few hours and communal because it is enjoyed and evaluated by a group of people who have purposely gathered to watch it.

Dramas are, in fact, cultural constructs and represent ways of perceiving, structuring, and restructuring reality. They are certainly not meant to be read or heard but to be recreated by the actors on the stage and reincarnated in the mind of the audience. The ability and power of drama to create an emotional experience of the utmost intensity, akin to religious or mystical ecstasy, an experience that may bring a climactic turning point in an individual’s metamorphosis or conversely a deep unsettling feeling or experience like that which Hamlet inflicted upon his uncle “is the true measure of its importance in the fabric of our lives, our society and our culture, the true extent of the ‘very cunning of the scene’ ” (Esslin 178).

Human conditions have become inexplicable. Life’s ever growing multi-dimensional complications and fast loosening socio-moral knots engulf men and women negating all attempts at explaining situations. A playwright uses a significant part of human experience as his subject to project a heightened representation of life on the stage. He creates the semblance of human interaction in his dramatic performance through staging before his audience a duplicate, mimetic, and illusionary image of the world in all its complexity. An important objective of dramatic performance according to Esslin is “the release of deep
emotion and profound insights (whether religious experience, moral uplift, political propaganda or indeed, the arousing of feelings of guilt)” (133).

The act of theatre is a live and an interactive process. It is “now and here”, which is a happening both for actors and audiences. This act of co-creation is not at, but with the audiences. The rhythm, the composition, the movement, the colours, the shapes, and the dimensions, all create a “temporal space” and a “spatial time”. It is the magic of being someone else for the actor, and the wonder of witnessing this metamorphosis for the audience. Hasmukh Baradi’s overwhelming response is:

It is concrete, touchable, “most humane action”, and a part of societal processes, from time immemorial. Be it amphitheatre of Greeks, “natyashalas” of Bharata, present day proscenium arch theatres or traditional (folk) popular theatre forms, including the street performances. The crucial everywhere is the spatial relation, for communication by and amongst actors, across the footlights with the spectators, beyond the theatre walls, with the societies and their cultures. (313-14)

True drama is created by bringing life to the theatre and the theatre to life. Drama is undoubtedly a fiction, a dream of passion but a mimesis of real life. It unfolds scene by scene, act by act, the variegated saga of human life in all its complexity and colour, giving total aesthetic experience culminating into feelings like joy and sense of relief. The theatre is “a simulacrum - at its highest level, ordered and elevated to the status of art - of the real world and real life” (Esslin 176). In the hands of an efficient playwright, drama becomes one of the principal vehicles of information and the prevailing methods of thinking about life and its situation. Having grasped the potentialities of this literary genre, dramatists aspire for “efficacy oriented theatre” rather than “entertainment oriented theatre”.

The major function of the theatre being edutainment, playwrights strive to enlighten their spectators on exploitation, educate on rights and privileges, and evolve them into fine, sensitive, and sensible human beings. It is an instrument for developing their minds. It has a positive function which is delineated in Natya Sastra as follows:
To those inclined towards righteousness and duty, it teaches righteousness and duty. To those whose minds run on passions, desires and worldly goods, it serves desires and worldly goods. It teaches modesty to the arrogant, self-discipline and control to the violently intemperate, courage to the effeminate, valor to the proud and the brave. It imparts knowledge to the ignorant and refinement to scholars. To the lordly, it is luxury but those who sorrow, it provides stability. It adds internal wealth to those who already possess it but to those distracted with envy and worry, the theatre brings peace and composure. (Kale 109-10)

Kurt Vonnegut too insists that, “Artists should serve society by being agents of change and introducing new ideas” (24). Drama can certainly be an effective means towards true education. The whole gamut of staged events that fall under the description of drama can provide the audience with “strong emotional experiences ‘strike us to our soul’ and produce powerful effects upon their lives, thinking and behavior” (Esslin 22). There is certainly a good deal of prophecy indulged by playwrights in their plays. “Warnings, sermons, admonitions, ideological exhortations, moral judgments, defined problems with built-in solutions, all can camp under the banner of prophecy” (Pinter x). As Hamlet has effectively deployed the ‘mouse trap’ to catch the conscience of the king, dramatists, with their theatre texts, endeavour to shake vigorously the numb conscience of human beings by cultivating a public conscience regarding the existing but ignored patterns of life.

Drama tends to exercise its most powerful and lasting moral impact by “reflecting the attitudes of the more advanced groups among the population, exposing them to public outrage and discussion and thus gradually penetrating the consciousness of society” (Esslin 172-73). The changing views reflected in drama, in turn change the moral climate of society and prepare the stage for the next phase of change. The impact of the naturalistic drama of playwrights like Ibsen, Hauptmann or Shaw, which contributed a great deal towards changing public attitudes to women, the working classes and sexual mores, was a gradual and an indirect one. The gradual humanization of attitudes towards racial and sexual minorities,
and the opening up of hitherto taboo subject matters to public discussion owe a great deal to drama on stage and screen.

Theatre is not an escapist entertainment. It exposes the artist’s “rage for order” and offers an “insight experience” to its audience. Aristotle defines tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action and not of narration; through pity and fear effecting proper Katharsis or purgation, of these emotions” (Butcher 240). This Greek word Katharsis means, “purgation, purification, and clarification”. The implication of purgation is that the artificially stirred feelings like pity and fear expel the latent pity and fear inherent in the spectators acquired through their real experiences. In the pleasurable calm which follows when such passions are spent, an emotional cure is attained. There is not only aesthetic gratification for the audience but inner illumination and clear comprehension of cause and effect.

Critics like Humphrey House believe that ‘Catharsis’ refers to the purification or moral conditioning of the emotions of the viewers. There is not merely emotional relief but the emotions, purified of the excess and defect, train and direct the lookers on towards right objectives turning them to be virtuous and good. Under the excitation of art, the transport of human pity and fear might be dissolved in joy and the pain might escape in the purified tide of human sympathy. According to the third interpretation, ‘Catharsis’ means clarification. It refers to the incidents depicted in the play and the way in which by his artistic treatment, the playwright reveals their universal significance. Such revelations lead to an enhanced understanding of the universal laws that govern human life and destiny. This kind of “insight experience” pleases the audience because it has enabled them to grasp the true relation between the incidents on the stage and the universal laws of human life.

That is how theatre remains to be the most powerful and highly influential social institution. The mystique of theatre till date is due to its everlasting capacity to affect the minds of its audience in all the three above mentioned dimensions. The audience will
naturally feel attracted if they have affinity in situation, identity with characters, and familiarity with the speech pattern. The individual spectator feels his or her personality merge into a transpersonal presence and becomes one with the collective personality of the crowd. “In the theatre”, opines J.B. Priestly, “we are out of our ordinary minds” (4). The spectators remain both emotionally involved with and skeptically extricated from all that happens on the stage. The actors and their actions are seen in the “strange light and shadow of belief and disbelief; they belong to a heightened reality that we know to be unreal” (Priestly 5). Yet the dramatic medium is capable of creating an emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic experience. This is “an aspect of ‘mass-psychology’ as outlined by Le Bon or Freud, the outcome of the heightened concentration that springs from the individual’s awareness of the other spectators’ attentiveness, their bated breath, their stillness, or, conversely their wild laughter and manifest enthusiasm” (Esslin 173-74).

It is this dramatic experience, which attributes to the mystique of the theatre. It is in the “delicate relation between belief and disbelief, between the dream life of the play and the real life in the play’s presentation” (Priestly 5) that the mystique surrounding the theatrical performance has its roots and being. Every playwright perseveres to achieve this essential balance, which is the crucial inner relation between play and reality, by displaying amusing and afflicting incidents clearly exemplified with complex and striking characters and technical virtuosity. The dramatic experience would be richly rewarding and exhilarating when these two are “delicately balanced and both are excitedly meeting all demands made upon them” (Priestly 10). In the end of such a dramatic performance, the spectator should emerge “perhaps as great as, perhaps even greater than one of the pivotal, decisive experiences of his or her ‘real’ life” (Esslin 177). That is what Artaud meant when he dreamt of a theatre that would shake its audience to the very core of their personality. This is the manner in which drama can truly enhance people’s existence and can play an immensely valuable part in enriching this globe, extending the scope of people’s experience and understanding of the human condition.
Human beings, now more than ever, are more directly influenced by drama. Drama has become so pervasive in the lives of the large masses of people and the importance of it in the life and culture of the people has immensely increased. It has become one of the principal means of communication of ideas and, even more importantly, modes of human behaviour in the civilization. The reality portrayed is 'selected' and 'arranged' through an artistic process. A veritable explosion of drama has been taking place through the photographic and electronic mass media. In the past, street drama, a live theatre, had been the only method for the communication of dramatic performance. Today it can reach its audiences in a multitude of ways, through cinema, television, videotape, radio and cassette recordings.

The twentieth century has produced three "indirect" that is recorded or transmitted types of drama namely radio, film, and television. Radio drama achieves through only sound the magic of story telling. Using only voice, music, and sound effects it creates worlds not before the eyes of the spectators but the ears of the avid listeners. The cinema, a visual medium with tremendous potentials, has pioneered more innovations in dramatic narrative than either of its fellow electronic media. A whole series of inventions and discoveries has made greater slices of reality available to the film watchers. Television is creating the greatest impact almost everywhere. The intensity of its use leaves the other media behind. It could lean towards either theatre or cinema in method and style. All three are visual media.

"The umbilical connection with the stage" (Chambers 749) was more evident in the early days. Some critics even accuse it as "film or theatre transmitted electronically rather than an aesthetic category in its own right" (Chambers 750), but it cannot be denied that television plays reflect as well as influence the broader implicit values of society.

More drama is currently being 'consumed' than ever before in history. Though there are dangers in the massive substitution of fictional life for real experience, in ideological manipulation dressed up as entertainment, there are strong positive values on the other side. People's mental horizons have been extended beyond the limits of their personal experience. Imagination has been stretched in a way that only drama can accomplish. There can be no
doubt that television serials and soap operas have become the "most powerful purveyors of social values and philosophies, the objectives, the ultimate 'meaning' of existence for the large masses of the populations exposed to them" (Esslin 159).

The stage or screen as a place where significant things are being exhibited elevates the most mundane objects and events to exemplary status and makes them significant beyond their mere individual being. They become signs for multitudes of similar objects and events. The visual media provide some of the principal role models by which individuals form their identity and ideals, set patterns of communal behaviours, and form values and aspirations. These visual treats have successfully become "part of the collective fantasy life of the masses, with the adventures of the heroes of T.V. series, the comic characters of situation comedies and the powerful demigods of the cinema taking the place occupied by the heroes of the popular culture, folklore and myth of previous ages" (Esslin 14).

The greatest advantage of stage drama over the other dramatic media like the cinema and recorded television drama is that every moment of dramatic action is a direct visual and aural sign of a fictional or reproduced reality. The significant fact about the stage drama is that "each performance can take the particular cultural, social, historical, geographical situation of its audience into account and adopt the basic content of the play to these changing circumstances" (Esslin 170). In the live theatre, the written portion is merely a small part of the total text or context of the performance. The director, the designers of set, costume and lighting, the musician, the choreographer, and the actors contribute significantly in establishing the mystique of theatre. Their contributions will not only be highly remarkable but relevant because even if the same text is staged in different countries and at different periods, they will immediately adapt to the taste, social, cultural, and technological conditions of that time and place.

Above all, the audiences witness before their very eyes, a human becoming an actor, transforming himself into a character, and then reacting as a human. The spectators derive "the aesthetic pleasure from reliving, from participation, from witnessing and from being
together with other members of audience” (Baradi 324). Theatre is not merely to watch and listen to but to experience with actors in the same space that the characters live. The incidental clumsiness on the part of the actor is pardoned and amateurishness over sighted because of the “process of ‘happening’ providing newer connotation to the signification of space. Whatever is not seen or missed can be imagined because the space itself is a medium of communications” (Baradi 324).

Theatre is unique among all arts. To see a play is certainly a more exciting and memorable experience than to read a novel. The text of the play once translated into sights, sounds, and actions on the stage, results in the fascinating display of human behaviours directly. With such brilliantly mounted entertaining and enlightening spectacles, the playwright with the help of his technical crew reveals truth, creates and recreates freshness in the performance, and enthralls the audience. William Shakespeare, despite his being a great and renowned sonneteer, has been enjoying everlasting name and fame because of the captivating delineation of human behaviours in all its complexities in his plays. In the Indian scenario also, Kalidasa, popularly known as “Shakespeare of India”, has been mainly revered for his theatre accomplishments.

Theatre in India, from time immemorial, is not a mere diversion, but an integral part in the existence of common man. It has had a rich and glorious tradition. Theatrical performances are an inevitable part of religious celebrations, whose major function is both to refresh and instruct. The spectator in the ancient Hindu theatre “had to be a devotee - a person to whom theatre, a semireligious ritual activity, was a way of life. It was part of his culture” (Kale 72). Drama is, in fact, regarded as the Fifth Veda because it teaches while freshens the mind.

The journey of drama, in India, commences with the Sanskrit plays. The chief Sanskrit dramatists were Asvaghosa, Bhasa, Kalidaas, Bhavabhuti and Sudrak. Tragedies like Urubhanga, romances like Abhijnana-Sankuntalam and historical plays like Mudrarakshas form an imperishable part of India’s literary heritage. Each play consists structurally of prologue introduced by an invocation and a formal ushering in of the plot and author, by the
It is important to note that "Sanskrit drama never offers tragedy unlike many of Shakespearean plays" (Narayan 22). While all emotions including grief, terror and disgust are depicted, the Sanskrit drama never allows a tragic catastrophe to cause a painful impression in the minds of the audience. It is evident that a drama with a tragic end has never been popular in India. Sri Aurobindo exhibits the spirit of Indian drama and highlights the Indian attitude and philosophy of life in the following words:

An atmosphere of romantic beauty, a high urbanity and a gracious equipoise of the feelings, a perpetual confidence, is the sunshine and the flowers are the essential spirit of Hindu play; pity and terror are used to awaken the feelings, but not to lacerate them and the drama must close on the note of joy and peace; the clouds are only admitted to make more beautiful the glad sunlight from which all come and into which all must pass away (60).

There is a remarkable growth of Indian English drama during the Pre-Independence period. It saw the first light of the day when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote *The Persecuted* in 1831. The real journey commenced with Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Is This Called Civilization?* which appeared on the literary horizon in 1871. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, the two great sage-poets of India, are the first Indian dramatists in English worth considering. Tagore’s plays are firmly rooted in the Indian ethos and ethics in their themes, characters, and treatment. The soul of his plays is not the careful knotting and knitting of the plot but the music of ideas and symbols.

Sri Aurobindo is a major Indian English dramatist. He has written five complete blank verse plays besides his six incomplete plays. K.R.S. Iyengar observes: “But all five plays are stepped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidaas and Bhavabhuti-though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones” (226). The most striking feature of his plays is that they deal with the different cultures of countries in different epochs and naturally the plays exhibit a variety of characters, moods, and sentiments.
Another significant contributor is Harindranath Chattopadhyay. There are seven verse plays to his credit published under the title *Poems and Plays* (1927) and all the seven plays are based on the lives of Indian saints. His *Five Plays* (1929) are written in prose where the writer’s socialist bent of mind is quite palpable. The next great name is A.S.P. Ayyar who has written six plays. His plot and characterization are subordinated to the message and he uses drama as a mode of apprehension of reality pertaining to contemporary life. The next strong dramatic voice on the Indian literary scene is that of T.P. Kailasam. He has written both in English and Kannada. Though Kailasam is regarded as the father of modern Kannada drama, his genius finds its full expression in his English plays such as *The Burden* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), and *Keechaka* (1949). He has a real genius and love for the drama and his plays have “a uniform technical excellence” (Amur 186).

Bharati Sarabhai and J.M. Lobo Prabhu are the other significant names in Pre-Independence Indian English drama. In the Post-Independence era, Indian English drama does not make a noteworthy presence unlike poetry and fiction. However, the Post-Independence Indian English drama was benefitted by the increasing interest of the foreign countries in Indian English literature in general and Indian English drama in particular. The climate slightly changed. A good number of plays by Indian playwrights like Asif Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, and Gurucharan Das were successfully staged in England and USA. But the plight of Indian English drama is that no regular school of Indian English drama was established in the country. This was mainly because of the encouragement drama received from several quarters immediately after India got freedom, but it was monopolized by the theatre in the Indian regional languages.

Very few playwrights like Manjeri Isvaran, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy have tried their hands by attempting poetic dramas. The number of prose playwrights is larger in comparison to verse playwrights. The most prolific playwright of the Post-Independence period is Asif Currimbhoy who has written and published more than thirty plays. The range and variety of the subject matter are tantalizing. They comprise history and
contemporary politics, social and economic problem, the east-west encounter, psychological conflicts, religion, philosophy, and art. K.R.S. Iyengar in his academic discourse appreciates the creative calibre of Currimbhoy in his own critical framework: “Farce, comedy, melodrama, tragedy, history, fantasy: Currimbhoy handles them all with commendable ease” (732). The plays of Pratap Sharma, Gurucharan Das and Nissim Ezekiel are considered to be a welcome addition to the dramaturgy of Indian English drama.

The form and facet of Post-Modern drama have crystallized and have become galvanized because of the overwhelming impact of G.B. Shaw, Chekhov, Ibsen, Eliot, Yeats, Pirandello, and Bertolt Brecht. But strangely enough, Indian English drama has failed to strike roots in the Indian soil. Nonetheless, the trial and error method is going on to seek and search the roots of Indian English drama so that it might have a towering stature to prove in front of the world. In comparison to other literary genres Indian English drama has achieved a little but in the changing perspective the realm is full of fruit bearing possibilities. In this connection it will not be an exaggeration to quote R.K. Dhawan who observes, “Very recently Indian English drama shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing” (19).

The feeling and experience of the ordinary men engaged in the day-to-day struggle of life or the desires, dreams, and despair of an average Indian are begun to be focused and reflected in Indian English drama. Dattani does not write on conventional subjects. He exposes the mean, ugly, and unhappy things of human life. This young promising playwright has contributed worth staging plays like Where There is a Will, Final Solutions, Dance like a Man, and Tara. Acclaimed as a leading playwright in English, he has now bagged the Sahitya Akademi Award for English literature for his play Final Solutions.

Manjula Padmanabhan’s pioneering play Harvest has received Onassis Award and got tremendous popularity throughout the world. She portrays a “mean and moribund world where mothers sell their children for ‘the price of rice’ ” (Yadav 11). Indian English drama, moreover, has registered a remarkable growth and maturity through English translation of
Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali plays in the 1980s and 1990s. A good translation is not “deconstruction” but “reconstruction”. It is “recreation” or “transcreation” which makes “the recalcitrant interiority and uniqueness of vision a universal possession” (Chellappan 159).

Literature uses words with which the people of that language community can associate the experience of their composite cultural past. The word is essentially a cultural memory, in which the historical experience of the society is embedded. The society remembers and participates in this experience when this is put into a context. The individual reader shares the experience of social participation by way of reading literature. As Talgeri opines, “the translator has to recreate this participatory experience of the source language culture by recontextualizing it in the target language, so that the target language reader so to say can participate in an alien cultural experience” (3). The translated works of the doyens like Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar, who are actually regional writers, have not only brought them forth into the national theatre movement but have installed them in the arena of the world theatre exhibiting the creative talents of the Indian mind. A study of Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh, Muktibodh, Badal Sircar, and Girish Karnad amply reveals that they have added a new dimension to Indian drama through their substantial contributions.

These dramatists have made “bold innovations and fruitful experiments” which pave way for the new resurgence ultimately leading towards the establishment of a national theatre. Their plays revolve around social, political, and psychological problems. Mohan Rakesh with historical characters, Badal Sircar with his third theatre, Girish Karnad with myths, and Tendulkar with his unconventional attitude towards human problems express their anguish at the prevailing social condition and the role man has to play in such conditions. Tendulkar, the avant-garde playwright, has taken up the theme of isolation of the individual and his confrontation with the hostile surroundings. These playwrights aspire to shake the slumbering conscience of the complacent middle class and make them realize their duty, responsibility, and role in shaping their and their fellow beings’ lives.
Vijay Tendulkar, one of the most celebrated Marathi writers and journalists, is a versatile genius and his creative hand is quite at ease with articles, short-stories, one-act plays, screenplay plays and dialogues, dramas, and translations. His forte remains dramas because his creative genius has attained fruition in plays. In his interview with Mukta Rajadyaksha, he has stated “Theatre is possibly the medium I am most comfortable with. There is, I feel, more respect for a writer’s word. And it is a medium that’s open to change from one performance to the next” (2). His keen observation of the tangled web of human relationships has emboldened him to register in his plays “man’s inhumanity to man with Conradian horror and Swiftian anger” (Sen 8). A play to him is obviously a tool for social analysis and he has used this medium to challenge unacceptable situations in society.

Like Badal Sircar, Wole Soyinka, and Bertot Brecht, Tendulkar also uses this art as a means of heightening the human consciousness of people. A writer, according to them, has “to function as a social consciousness . . . or else, he will have to withdraw to the position of a post mortem surgeon” (Soyinka 89). In an Orwellian fashion, he combines sarcasm and imagination to protest against the prevailing evils in the society like casteism, lesbianism, corruption, and contractual co-existence. His excellent wielding of the pen has resulted not merely in his significant literary accomplishments but in the attainment of prestigious awards and fellowships.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar, born on 6th January 1928, has been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality world wide for the past five decades. He had been groomed in a literary atmosphere which naturally provided him opportunities to involve with theatre activities right from his childhood. His father, Dhondapant Tendulkar, was head clerk at a British publishing firm called Longmans, Green and Company (now Orient Longman). He was an enthusiastic writer, director, and actor of amateur plays in his mother tongue, Marathi. From the time Vijay Tendulkar was four years old, he was taken to those rehearsals. They were like magic show for the young child where he witnessed the living persons change into characters.
At that time, women's roles were performed by men. The child was absolutely amazed to see the male actors suddenly changing their voice and movements to become women. His brother, Raghunath, too acted and was interested in literature. Writers often came home and his father enthusiastically published a few books of his writer friends. Since he did not have a bookshop, the books lay on a wooden stand at home. They were Tendulkar's playthings. As he grew, he was drawn towards the novels and short stories of leading writers at home. He automatically became a voracious reader of good books. His father's domineering attitude, his subjugated mother's deep anguish, the violent communal and religious riots witnessed from his balcony and various other exposures triggered his thought process and his keen observation of life and its oddities commenced right from the young age. Tendulkar thus had a chance of getting exposed to life and literature from the tender age itself which resulted in the shaping, sharpening, and sensitizing of the future writer's sensibilities.

Tendulkar reminisces with great adulation the influence of two literary personalities on him during his school days. Dinkar Balkrishna Mokashi, a radio mechanic but a fine writer, impressed him and acknowledges Tendulkar “he influenced me by his personality and the informality of his writing” (Choudhury 26). His next role model was his Marathi teacher in school, Vishnu Vinayak Bokil, whose stories were often turned into successful films. He was one of the first to write Marathi as it is spoken in everyday life. “He had a light hearted, jovial and exuberant style” says Tendulkar, “which I adored. What struck me even more was that there was absolutely no difference between the way he wrote his stories, taught in class, or talked if we happened to meet him on the street” (Choudhury 26). Tendulkar’s association with him has taught him the most valuable doctrine that is to “look around you and develop yourselves in other directions” (Choudhury 27). His writing has acquired a conscious motivation and he begins to dwell and lose himself in the joys and sorrows of a world that he has spun in his own mind. Among the literary giants, Tendulkar has a special fascination for Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Henrik Ibsen. Williams' passion for violence,
Miller's concern for the common man, and Ibsen's social concerns aesthetically expressed through the poetic elements have made a profound impact on the budding playwright.

Tendulkar wrote his first story when he was six years old. He had three volumes of stories before he ventured into his first play. In his eleventh year, he wrote, directed, and acted in his first play. He was a child artiste in two Marathi films and his formal education came to an end in 1942 during the Quit India Movement, in response to Gandhiji's call to boycott schools, but the education to learn to live continued, in fact, more vigorously. He had a long career in a printing press, in journalism where he was a sub editor, an executive editor and assistant editor of a daily and as a public relations officer in a company.

Such exposures have offered him tremendous scope to mould his language to suit the requirements of his writing which amounts to role playing. He declares:

In the morning I was a short story writer during the day I had to write as a journalist, at night till morning I turned myself into a playwright. The journalist had to write with a certain force, finality and authority. A short story writer had to be introspective, had to have a sensitive eye for details and an objective, analytical mind. A playwright was required to be behind the curtain leaving the stage of his writing to his characters whom he would control — but from behind the curtain and indirectly.

(Choudhury 44-45)

Such exercises have groomed him into a sensible writer. He has evolved through trial and error method without any formal training or anyone explaining the basic technique.

Tendulkar proudly states, "My capital in this medium was my early grooming, opportunities to make mistakes and correct them, a basic curiosity about people and life around me, a skill to internalize details of human behaviour at different circumstances, and a good pick up of mannerisms of speech, et cetera"(Choudhury 45). Writing is soothing, great relief, and joy to him. This prolific writer has to his credit thirty two full length plays, seven collections of one - act plays, six collections of children's plays, four collections of short
stories, three collections of essays, besides seventeen film scripts and a novel, all in the span of fifty years.

Tendulkar’s aesthetic endeavor has exposed the prismatic quality of his writings and fetched him many awards and honors. He has been felicitated with the Maharashtra State Government Award (1956, 1969 and 1973), the Sangeet Natak Academy Award (1971), the Filmfare Award (1980 and 1983), the Padmabhusan (1984), the Jansthan Award (1991), the Saraswathi Samman (1993), the Maharashtra Foundation Award (1998), the Pandit Mahadev Shastri Joshi Award (1999), the Kalidas Samman (1999), the Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar (1999), the Dinanath Mangeshkar Award (2000) and the latest recognition, for lifetime literary achievement is the Katha Chudamani Award (2001). Among his other honors are a Nehru fellowship (1973 – 74), an Honorary Doctorate from the Ravindra Bharathi University, Calcutta (1992) and a lifetime fellowship from the National Academy of the Performing Arts, New Delhi (1998).

Tendulkar’s experiences of his times and his exposure to life have shown him that the individual is largely disempowered and reduced to the role of a helpless spectator by the logic of certain events and social grouping. His artistic consciousness has compelled him to lock with life on paper and has brought forth a stupendous output. His portrayals have brought him both bouquets and brickbats. He has been severely criticized for exaggerating the “spiritual bankruptcy” of the degenerate socio-cultural milieu in which we live. He has been accused of “neo-realistic projections of squalor, poverty, crime, disorder and mental perversions” (Ramnarayan 168) to titillate the viewer/reader and of promoting defeatist apathy. Lately accolades have been pouring in and he has been acclaimed as one of India’s best playwrights. He is internationally known as a “path - breaking theatre writer”. Smug notions of morality have been beaten up in his plays. They have exposed middle - class hypocrisy in a clinical, naturalistic manner which is a bold venture undreamt of by other writers of his time or his predecessors.
Tendulkar’s plays bear the marks of Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, Brecht’s Epic Theatre and Albert Camus’ Theatre of the Absurd. To him, violence is integral to the human conditions, an aspect he studied in depth during his Nehru fellowship. Artaud, a theatrical theorist, playwright, poet, and an actor, has advocated a new theatre that “depended not on the dramatic use of language alone, but on the use of many elements, including music, special effects, painting, and primitive elements such as are found in Balinese theatre to disturb the audience” (Chambers 42). He has strongly stated that the role of the theatre is not only to mirror everyday life but also to bring out in the spectator all that is most primitive that culture and civilization have submerged. Art should strive as far as possible to be reality itself, to bring real passions and sufferings out of the shadows. Panic and the maniacal are a necessary part of such theatre and the scream, one of its most potent manifestations. The Theatre of Cruelty devised by Artaud in 1934 and revived by Peter Brook in the 1960s thus forces the audiences “to find in the theatre not escape, but the realization of their worst nightmares and deepest fears” (Chambers 42). Every facet of total theatre that can be brought into play to increase the sense of violence and increase the disorientation of the audience is justified.

Artaud’s influence is obviously revealed in writers as disparate as Ionesco and Beckett, Weiss and Bond, Pinter and Grotowski, Genet, Fugard, and Tendulkar. Since the unblinkered perceptions of the world’s inherent cruelty must be given a new form, they boldly dispense with coherent language and the framework of an ordered and comprehensible world. They have rejected the “tyranny of the spoken word on stage [by replacing it] with a ‘concrete language’ of sound and imagery” (Coelho 29). Realizing the exciting potentialities of Artaud’s rather revolutionary concepts, they have aspired that their theatre should spring from outside, from beyond the theatre, from life and its cruelty itself. Their aim is not just to shock and confuse but to shock and enlighten those who complacently ignore the injustices of their hostile and cruel system. These playwrights exhibit in their best works a “capability
to synthesize the theatrical impulses of Artaud with the finest features of intellectual or verbal drama” (Coelho 31), which is truly enriching.

Tendulkar's consistent and prolonged engagement with human aggression has made him one of the most distinguished theorists of violence in the country. Those caught in the "hinges of post – Independence intellectual life and public affairs in India cannot but recognize the way Tendulkar has scanned the life world of contemporary Indians in order to identify the sources and nature of the violence that have come to pattern it" (Hindu “Vijay’s World” 2). Tendulkar, the scathing interpreter of maladies, has galvanized theatre as well as cinema with his provocative explorations of morality, power, and violence. His long association with Rangayan, a theatre group, that has given experimental Marathi theatre a completely new direction, has offered him ample scope and liberty to experiment and exhibit his notions of life. Shanta Gokhale ascertains:

Tendulkar’s early plays were the first in Marathi theatre to bring the realities of modern urban life to the stage. This was a clear break from the sententious, sentimental and melodramatic plays that dominated the mainstream stage of the time. With his modern themes came a new language, crisp and understated. He broke new ground again in the 70s with his plays of violence, bringing to the stage sights and sounds that the middle - class audience had never before seen or heard, causing them to protest vehemently against all of them. (Daily News & Analysis 2)

The theme in the plays of Tendulkar’s is an essential enquiry into the nature of power, cruelty, violence, and sex. He presents a "too terrifying, repulsive, almost barbaric representations of life" (Coelho 35) which is very difficult to swallow or digest. Artaud has insisted that “theatre must discover its true meaning and message, purpose and course, in the grand though horrifying spectacle of life” (Coelho 35). Tendulkar’s Silence! The Court is in Session, The Vultures, Sakharam Binder, and Ghashiram Kotwal are considered as representative plays of Marathi theatre of cruelty. His plays show his concern for modern man’s anguish. That these plays, so different in content and form are pointed towards an
important human predicament is itself a tribute to the questioning and probing spirit of Tendulkar. Though he has shown something uncommon and strange in his plays, he has never given a perverted and vulgar depiction.

Elements of the theatre of the Absurd are easily perceptible in Tendulkar’s plays. Martin Esslin has drawn this term from the existentialist Albert Camus and has used it to describe the situation of mankind seeking meaning in a universe that does not provide it. The plays of the absurdists, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Edward Albee, and Harold Pinter, have offered portrayals of meaninglessness, isolation, and the breakdown of language. In Tendulkar’s drama too they get their due and electrify the audience with horror.

Tendulkar had the opportunity to live through the freedom struggle movement. India achieved independence in 1947. The sequence of events after that happened fast. Changes came at an amazingly rapid speed. It appeared that the ground under the feet was slipping and much that was expected to survive got devastated. This happened not only in India but the world over. “Just as a man departs and leaves behind his shadows”, Tendulkar disclosed during his acceptance speech of the Saraswathi Samman Award in 1994, “values disappeared leaving meaningless rituals. They had lost their basis and we were left with nothing but hurdles... Then came the alienation between values and conduct” (Choudhury 33).

Consequently people suffered. Struggle was inevitable in their efforts to seek support for their actions and they had to resort various manipulations in order to maintain some sort of balance in life. Tendulkar says, “I grew up witnessing all these; in fact I lived with it” (Choudhury 33). As imperialism faded away, governments collapsed and there were vital changes in the thinking of people. There were no readymade answers and questions became merely complexities of problems and situations. Tendulkar aptly states, “It was a facade that we were going ahead while the fact was that we were sinking in the quagmire. Where were we going we did not know, because we were not moving at all. The ground underneath was slipping. The process is still on and no solution is in sight” (Choudhury 35).
Human beings, Tendulkar regards, are like Mickey Mouse and its kin, fighting for survival. In the battle of survival "one mouse kills another, many mice gang up and end up ruthlessly destroying one another" (Ramnarayan 168). The uncertainty and insecurity witnessed and experienced have been conveyed in his plays highlighting the helpless and victimized state of humanity. The "endless decay and violence in the social mores inexorablyimpinging upon the man - woman relationship, sex and ethics seem to have created a sense of fatefulness out of which there is no escape" (Chari 28-29) for anyone. Being trapped by their own helpless condition and left to the battering of cruel and irrational forces beyond their control, people can neither rebel nor live in acquiescence. They are subject to a miserable sense of self-destruction and dissipation bordering on despair.

It will be an extremely difficult task for any dramatist to present the tremendous stress involved in such human conditions. He may find devices like "logical discourse and literary symbolism inadequate to effectively present the shameless seeking after power, the raw violence, and the festering social interstices" (Chari 29). They will be found at once to be crude and anti-literary. The situation, being immensely absurd, calls for a mode of effective presentation of the sordid reality. The crudeness and anti-literary character of the subject matter "impinging upon the willing susceptibility or readiness of the creative imagination" (Chari 29) of the versatile genius Tendulkar, seems to have evolved its own form, which is similar in many respects to the Theatre of the Absurd. Through such a mode, he subjects to urgent, contemporary treatment the physical and mental tortures human beings inflict upon each other in individual relationships, in group relations, and in the exercise of brutal power by the state machine.

The next significant point about Tendulkar's plays is his inventive ability. His plays are "experiments of an intense and deeper impulse and not just a matter of superficial innovation" (Dass 70). His finely cultivated theatrical sensibility searches for forms that would enable his audience simultaneously to get entangled with as well as remain estranged from the actions displayed on the stage. He has gone in search of proper and appropriate
devices that would rivet the attention of his audience on the stage, plunge them deep into the action yet induce them to be contemplative and analytical. In this aspect he resembles Brecht.

Brecht’s aim is to effect a “radical transformation of the theatre into a productive critique of society” (Chatterji xxii). He wants to create with his Epic Theatre a new realism which would be objective, critical, and socially relevant. He does not want the audience to be doused with emotion and sensation and reduced to a ‘hypnotized mass’. He expects his audience to lie critically detached, alert yet relaxed. The theatre should not present a “mirror reflection of life but a re-presentation, a critical reproduction of reality” (Chatterji xxvii). Contrary to what Coleridge has advocated, there is no need to cultivate a “willing suspension of disbelief” on the other hand the devices employed should constantly remind the audience that they have been watching a play. He has coined the term “verfremdungseffekt”, translated as “estrangement or alienation effects”.

Tendulkar’s employment of techniques like mimes, songs, dances, asides, direct address to the audience, and the character’s movements among the audience undoubtedly remind his spectators that they are watching a performance. They can be analytical and critical about what is going on, yet they are absolutely absorbed in the issue depicted and even after the show is over, they are unable to forget or get rid of the jolt it has made on them. The uniqueness of Tendulkar’s art is that it does not deny the audience the pleasures of empathy and at the same time arouses their critical sense.

Tendulkar’s profound involvement with life and theatre has motivated him to explore and experiment both and project sui generis slices of life for the perusal of his audience. Elements of the theatre of cruelty, the theatre of absurd and the epic theatre are judiciously combined in his plays which have subsequently shocked the audience, sensitized them regarding their miserable state, and made them contemplate on the bitter truth, which is their inhumanity and inherent bestiality. His success in this genre may be adjudicated not only by the honours conferred on him but even more by the tremendous viewer-response for his plays as living theatre, widely performed in Marathi, and in Hindi / English translations. Indo-
American Art Council, in New York arranged for a month long Tendulkar festival in 2004. When enquired why Tendulkar and not any other writer, IAAC’s President, Aroon Shivdasani, rejoicing over the choice reasoned out:

He is India’s greatest living playwright, a man with an enormous social conscience. His piercing social commentary and his framing of bleak truths under menacing shadows and merciless lights entertain while simultaneously making us aware of our hypocrisies. He is a consummate, articulate thespian who understands human nature and world theatre. (Ramnarayan Theatre: New York Frames 2)

Tendulkar was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award and the people of New York zeroed in on the festival and the heartwarming response it received, affirms the statement that Indian theatre is among world’s most active, exciting, and important theatre movement.

It is indeed an irrevocable loss that such a vibrant theatre activist breathed his last on May 19, 2008 owing to ill health. In the gloom cast by Vijay Tendulkar simply ceasing to exist, there appears a luminous caravan of immortal characters he has left behind reminding his blistering honesty, genuine curiosity, and passion for justice. Shanta Gokhale, the noted theatre critic and a close associate of the artist, pays her tribute which throws light on the person and playwright. She eulogizes: “[Tendulkar created his plays] to explore questions that troubled him, situations that horrified him, and conventional ideas that did not convince him. He allowed them [his characters] the freedom to be themselves. They grew into believable flesh and blood human beings who inhabit our world today as reference points” (Magazine 3).

Blinded by anger against the arrogant hypocrisies of the society’s upper crust and propelled by a strong desire to highlight that observance of false facades should not matter more than human beings, for the first time in the history of Marathi Drama, he has put on the stage uncouth and arrogant sadists, cowards, brutes, and delinquents. He has probed them with “sensitivity, guided them through life’s tempestuous waters” (Mishra 10) and has never pronounced any judgment on them but has profoundly desired to liberate them from their
wretched existence. He has vigorously attacked the middle class with ferocity and his “iconoclasm and irreverence shocked the audience” (Mishra 10). Watching his plays like The Vultures and Sakharam Binder, even those “who felt it was important to have their society vivisected in order to see how it worked, were horrified and repelled but they understood” (Gokhale Magazine 3).

Vijay Tendulkar, the colossus of a vibrant Marathi stage, has to his credit thirty two full length plays. But for the latest one His Fifth Woman (2006), a sequel to his Sakharam Binder, which is written in English by the playwright himself, all the other works are constructed in his own mother tongue Marathi. Twelve plays are translated into English. His plays do not deal with problems that are specific to Indian culture but they analyze issues that prevail among the entire humanity. Though his literary works are produced within a cultural region, they go beyond the spell of its immediate historical context, transcend the time-barrier and become celebrated works which make a tremendous appeal to various minds with diverse cultural and historical background. The individual-versus-society theme is his enduring contribution to theatre. He has earnestly endeavoured to flash in his plays the various ills of the society and tirelessly explored the human destiny against the grim backdrop of sex and violence, which astound his viewers.

A study of his plays reveals his abiding concern for humanity and his anxiety to redress the pitiable plight of modern man. The techniques employed perfectly fuse with the themes exemplified enabling the spectators simultaneously to entangle emotionally with and estrange from the action enacted. The audiences are both entertained and enlightened as his works are reverential contributions to the welfare of humanity. Based on this view, the researcher has attempted to analyze the causes for the tremendous appeal and success of the avant-garde playwright Tendulkar, under the title “The Mystique of Theatre in the Select Plays of Vijay Tendulkar.”

The researcher has opted to study this topic as no full length analysis of the writer’s works on this aspect has been undertaken so far. An in-depth scrutiny of Tendulkar’s
genuine concern for people and amazing craft is hoped to widen the scope for the learners of literature, to disclose new vistas for future research scholars and above all to sow the seed for a radical change in the attitude of people stimulating them to realize and rectify the prevailing shortcomings both in themselves and in the society. The researcher proposes to adopt the sociological, realistic, psychological, and structural approaches for the interpretation of the select plays of Vijay Tendulkar. Photographs, taken from the recorded stage performances of Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder, Kamala, and a documentary film entitled Tendulkar And Violence Then And Now are appropriately incorporated as visual illustrations, to uphold the theme of violence, to demonstrate the inherent inhuman traits, and to substantiate Tendulkar's inventive ability.

Tendulkar, for whom writing is as essential as breathing, is committed to the cause of unmasking the ills and injustices of the society. This creative genius, through his plays, exposes his genuine care for the humanity and artistic mastery over the form. Among them eight translated plays, entitled The Vultures (1961), Silence! The Court is in Session (1967), Sakharam Binder (1972), Ghashiram Kotwal (1972), Encounter in Umbugland (1975), Kamala (1981), Kanyadaan (1983), and A Friend's Story (2001) are chosen to analyze and highlight his social and artistic concerns, as there is thematic unity and representative quality in them.

The present study has been divided into five chapters. The first one is “Curtain-Raiser” and the last one “Curtain-Down” which are the introduction and the conclusion respectively. The crucial issues of life depicted in the plays by the playwright are analyzed in the second chapter entitled “Latent Tendencies”. The third chapter “Unveiling” discloses the peculiar traits of his characters. The fourth one “Amazing Artistry” exhibits Tendulkar’s inventive ability and technical virtuosity in the employment of dramatic devices.

At the beginning of each of the three main chapters that follow this introductory chapter, the chosen concept is explained in general followed by a thorough investigation of the selected works of the playwright to exemplify his conceptualization of the same. Wherever
required, cross-references are made to the works of other writers citing parallels or contrasts in situations, events, characters, and artistry. At the end of each chapter, a brief summing up of the arguments of the respective chapter is presented and the need for the analysis of the subject to be dealt with in the next chapter is stressed. In the final and concluding chapter, the arguments of all the preceding chapters are neatly tied up in a dovetail fashion and suggestions for further research are given.

Chapter II "Latent Tendencies" depicts Tendulkar's exploration into and ruthless dissection of the inner and intricate workings of human mind resulting in the exposure of its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality, and sheer wickedness. It brings to light how boldly he challenges through his plays the validity and relevance of certain values, vividly exposes the ugliness of various social systems that dehumanize and trample on human dignity, and effectively voices the inarticulate urges of man. His plays disclose gender inequality, power manipulation, self-alienation, oppression, exploitation, mental agonies, suffocations, sex, and violence. The projection of the three vital issues highly prevalent in all societies, namely gender disparity, power manipulation, and gratuitous violence in all its brutality, gruesomeness, and viciousness is analyzed to expose man's dehumanization.

Chapter III "Unveiling" makes a thorough study of the essentiality of characters in effectively enhancing the themes. It shows how the battle of survival instigates men to be hypocritical, selfish, vengeful, and sadistic. The complexities of human character like man's taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, savagery, neurotic fantasies, utopian sense of life, and even his cannibalism are best brought out. His characters are enveloped under four heads namely male protagonists, female personages, supporting characters, and off stage characters. It is found that most of his male characters are misfits and debauched persons. They are mono-dimensional, flat, and static. They signify man's overt and covert bestiality. His women are willing torch-bearers and mute sufferers. They allow themselves to be reigned by the collective forces of female subordination like sexual differentiation, denial of social and
economical privileges, and restrictive patterns of behaviours. They are depicted in pairs in each play and function as foil to each other emphasizing their unique traits. They are both victims and saviours of their men. They are multi-dimensional, round, and dynamic. The study proves that the subordinate characters and the back stage characters are, in fact, very vital, highly essential, and inevitable in executing the desired changes in the lives of the main characters.

Chapter IV “Amazing Artistry” explores Tendulkar’s inventive ability and innovative technical devices. The combinations of the different visual, aural, and verbal structures that make up the overall shape of his dramatic performances, determine the power and effect of them on the audience. The chapter highlights how the structures are firmly rooted in the web of themes the writer wishes to express. His plays with strong undercurrent create a fresh and an everlasting impact on his startled audience. The appropriateness of narrative techniques, the significance of narrative methods, the desirability of the carefully designed verbal filigrees, the efficacious incorporation of the chorus and choric characters and the ability of drama to work through non-verbal means are highlighted. All such dramatic devices used by the playwright are neither superfluous nor decorative but functional in the delineation of the theme.

The concluding chapter entitled “Curtain-Down” recapitulates the findings of the preceding chapters and acknowledges Tendulkar’s plays to be powerfully dramatic, highlighting his ability in contriving interesting situations, creating proper atmosphere, sustaining coherent action, depicting realistic characters, and experimenting boldly and successfully with a variety of theatrical techniques. It also suggests some topics for further research for future aspirants.