VIJAY TENDULKAR: The Inherent Violence of Life

"Mother... please open the doors of all your senses... please let me learn how to get out from the Chakravyuha... please don’t go to sleep."

(Abhimanyu in Chakravyuha)

- Ratan Thiyam

Happiness after all is a sensibility... Today real happiness has become so elusive that man is tempted to accept fake happiness or create an illusion of happiness. (Contemporary Indian Theatre 143)

This is the philosophy of Vijay Tendulkar (as told to Pushpa Bhave) whose style of writing was influenced by his predecessors, who, in turn, were influenced by Henrik Ibsen. Around 1938, a group of dramatists, senior to Tendulkar, started writing plays and were referred to as ‘Ibsenian enthusiasts’. They wrote realistic social drama called the drama/theatre of ideas. Their plays were open-ended and inspired one to think. Following the same group, Tendulkar also wrote in a similar mode, and wrote more about life itself. His major plays were written in the early 1950’s, when he experimented with one-act plays such as Ratra (1957), Ajgar Ani Gandharva (1966) and Bhekhad (1969). Tendulkar wrote his first full-length play Grihasta (1955) at the instance of his friend Damu Kenkre. The play was a flop when staged, and Tendulkar swore never to write a play again. But fortunately, he did write his second full-length play Shrimant (1955). Following this play came Madhalya Bhinti (1958), Manus Navacha Bait (1958), Chumnicha Ghar Hota Menacha (1960) etc. All these plays deal with the sufferings of middle-class man in an urban, individualistic society. They talk about the ‘shabby interiors’ of middle-class life. Tendulkar was very particular and sensitive as far as such problems were concerned. He felt compassion for his ‘little big man’. He wrote all these plays for amateur groups like Rangayan, Bhartiya Vidyā Bhavan and Avishkar, and this gave him an opportunity to ‘grow’ as a playwright. This was before he wrote Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe (1968) (translated into English as Silence! The Court is in Session). In a way the earlier plays directed him towards the later plays. After Silence! The Court is in Session the focus was on the ugliness and the inner psyche of the subjects. Tendulkar observed existence without sympathy, and in the process he created very ordinary characters who faced real problems and spoke normal language. He created
a respectable façade of middle-class life. *Silence! The Court is in Session* forms a bridge between his earlier plays and his later plays. Plays before *Silence! The Court is in Session* had no anger, but in the later plays anger begins to erupt and becomes most violent. Hence, there is a ‘clash’ between the characters he created. Kumud Mehta observes:

> With *Shantata* came a parting of ways. The transformation is difficult to explain. The change was possibly the result of a deep personal experience. For, on the one hand, it unleashed characters (Benare, Sakharam, Ghashiram) in a state of collision with accepted norms and, on the other hand, it revealed ineffectual middle class types with an ugly, vicious leer lurking under a smug surface. (SCS iii)

Tendulkar also talks about human relationships within and outside the family. He talks of the relationship between man and woman, and between individual and society. The characters of Tendulkar’s plays are real human beings drawn from real life incidents. He never romanticizes his characters or situations. He attacks middle-class pseudo-morality, craving for material gains and comforts, not being able to shed off the original completely, nor being able to take on the new identity. For his characters, existence is full of duality, artificiality, hypocrisy and a split self. Tendulkar’s women characters are victims of male/family/society dominance. They have to struggle to survive and create their own identity. Tendulkar sees women as exploited and marginalized in a patriarchal set-up, and as one who must marry and inherit ‘family values’. Another concern is that of the family; the family is the pillar of society and nation. The family in Tendulkar’s plays is shown as a political unit, which gives different subject positions to men and women. His ‘family’ is patriarchal where all men are superior to women. Maya Pandit observes that: “... The family in Tendulkar’s plays is essentially nuclear. In this family, women are equated with the ‘inner’ or the ‘private’ domain, whereas the ‘public’ domain is reserved for men” (8). Hence, all his characters emerge as symbols of rebellion against the social norms in some way or the other.

The themes of Tendulkar’s plays are social and political. Social themes include exploring of issues such as human behaviour, psychology, physical violence etc. His themes basically deal with real-life situations. He says in Bharata Jyoti: “I can’t write on themes about which I have no personal experience. I don’t like to write in the air. I
go from life to the theme and not vice versa”. He has been accused of using sex and violence very liberally in his plays. He believes that violence is a part of one’s life. According to Ashish Nandy, “Tendulkar’s... consistent, prolonged engagement with human aggression has made him one of the most distinguished social theorists of violence in the country” (ix). His first experience of raw violence was during his childhood when he had gone to the house of a Muslim friend whose father was a butcher. Tendulkar insisted on going to the butcher-shop. The raw flesh hanging with blood did make him sick, but it also fascinated him. He wanted to visit the shop again to watch a sheep being killed. In an interview with Ank, he says:

Violence cannot be a spectacle. If it is a recurring factor, it is so because violence is around us, it is within us, our times happen to be violent times. It is bound to reflect in our creative work in some form or the other, even if it is ugly and unpleasant.

Tendulkar has been awarded the Nehru Fellowship for the study of emerging patterns of violence. He believes that violence cannot be totally eliminated from any society; a human being is born with aggressive and sexual instincts. He never consciously wrote to shock the readers as he says in Free Press Journal:

I never wrote anything shocking. It may have shocked the middle-class mentality, but that is because of their ignorance. They are not aware of what is happening around them or do not see anything wrong in themselves. If I have portrayed animal instincts in man, then most of the people are like that and they do not want to accept this harsh reality.

This stark reality recurs in the form of characters, families, situations, relationships etc.

From 1970 onwards, Tendulkar’s active association with experimental theatre begins. He started experimenting in technique, theme and stage directions. A number of techniques are used to create excitement and build up suspense. His plays appeal more to the intellect than to the emotions. His plays pay more attention to structure rather than the story. They are open-ended and do not draw to a conclusive close. He uses the technique of a play-within-a-play (as in Silence! The Court is in Session), which merges illusion with reality. Fading lights are used to show passage of time. He also uses the folk form of Lavani and Dashavatar (as seen in Ghashiram Kotwal).
Tendulkar is a part of the new theatre movement and never thinks in terms of narrative logic. He has a dramatic imagination about which he tells Shanta Gokhale: "... A play is a work of art when it reveals its theme and essence exclusively through its mode and attendant detailing rather than through statement and speech" (106). Dialogues in Tendulkar's plays are not mere words. They are the medium of communication from the characters to the readers or audience. It is the language of the characters, which ranges from normal, to very raw, to aggressive and violent. He shows anger through language. His dialogues are terse and economical, and yet they express much more than what the literal meaning conveys. Tendulkar's opinion regarding dialogue in a play is that a good dialogue must express what it wants to, but not through words only. A good dialogue must express meanings in between the words and also beyond them. Though Tendulkar does not insist on a label or brand of modernity, his technique is essentially modern. His characters are not shades of black or white, but a more sober shade of grey. Most of his plays shed light on modes of existence, all fraught with contradictions.

Tendulkar's view about his writing activity is that he never writes with an audience in mind. He seems a little dissatisfied with the audience around him. He writes only for himself; he never imagines a special strata of audience for whom he could write. He is never conscious of the people present in the theatre; he is his own audience. He tells Goran Ramnarayan in an interview: "... your imaginative audience is the one that participates in your emotions" (Tralmasik 1-2). He says that he has never been a creative writer. He could not have written anything other than what he wrote and what he saw. He feels that he was 'fated' to become a writer. But Tendulkar has always loved life first more than creative writing. He says in an interview with Anj: "Creative writing has never been my first love... Writing to me is talking and I am not the one to fall in love with my own voice. I am more interested in other people's voices." Tendulkar feels that the coming times will see human beings running a rat race, but literature and art will survive this race, for he believes that man's quest for knowledge and expression will make him strive for it. The desire to acquire learning will overcome all obstacles. He believes that a writer cannot have a statistical outlook, but can have only emotions. He expresses the same idea in his speech during the acceptance of Saraswati Samman Award: "A writer is not a social scientist, nor is he an astrologer. He does not strive for answers on a mathematical
The major play that carved the path for Tendulkar’s experimental theatre and for his reputation as a playwright is *Silence! The Court is in Session*. From this play onwards, anger and violence became prominent and these gave him the name of an angry young man. This play is a perfect representation of all the features typical of Tendulkar’s writing. The idea for this play was sparked off in Tendulkar’s mind by a real-life incident. It was while on his way on a local train that he happened to share the compartment with an amateur theatre group, which was on its way to perform a mock trial at Vile Parle in Mumbai. The play was written for Rangayan on the request of Arvind Deshpande who directed the play. In 1970, this play was declared the play of the year. Satyadev Dubey has made it into a film with support from The Film Finance Corporation. The BBC has broadcast the English version of this play and it has been translated into several languages. Leela Benare, the heroine of this play, is made a victim of the sadistic, jealous and dominating attitude of the men who are her colleagues. Benare’s soliloquy at the end of the play is an onslaught against the norms of society and the upholders of these norms. Benare’s monologue is reminiscent of Nora’s banging of the door in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, declaring the independence and the dignity of the woman. The play is the result of ten years of Tendulkar’s experience in experimental theatre. There is said to be an influence of Durrenmatt’s novel *Dangerous Game* on this play. But it is very much the playwright’s play as it has Indian ethos and the psychological action is quite original. The play has two main aspects – play-within-a-play and trial. Both these concepts have been popular in Western literature, as seen in the works of Shakespeare (*Hamlet*), Kafka (*The Trial*), Osborne (*Inadmissible Evidence*) and many others. The European use of trial has a Christian undertone; Tendulkar satirizes the form of the trial, and also the law and morality that exists in Indian society. Through the mock trial, Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy of the judiciary system in this country. From this play onwards, begins a new style of Tendulkar’s writing which is more crude, poignant and devastating.

The next play *Gidhade* (1971) (translated as *Vultures*) was actually written fourteen years earlier. It is of an entirely different nature and proves the genius of Tendulkar. Girish Karnad has compared this play to “a bomb being blasted in a crowded place.” The play had to face many controversies and problems due to free use of sex and violence in it. Tendulkar has said that this play was born out of a
personal problem in his life. The seeds of this play were sown during his youth when he felt absolutely secure about his life; he feels that at such a time one is not aware of what violence or sex is. During this period, Tendulkar came to Mumbai and tried to get a job and a house. The real inspiration to write this play came to him when he observed the world of drunkards closely. Furthermore, while working with a daily in his early years, he was shrewdly and cleverly dismissed from the job. The person, who helped in his dismissal, was one of his colleagues, whom he also considered a good friend. Tendulkar was shocked to know that a person, whom one trusts could betray in such a manner. Yet, he pitied the condition of that friend – of being helpless, of doing an ordinary job in spite of a brilliant career. Though this was an ordinary event, it was quite significant for the playwright because it inspired him to write this play. During the same time he was writing a play for Rangayan, but due to such disturbances could not concentrate on the subject he had chosen. Then all of a sudden, he got the idea for the play Vultures. First he wrote the soliloquy for the illegitimate brother, Rajninath, and gradually the rest of the picture started becoming clear. He could create the other characters then. The character of Ramakant was also based on a real-life person whom Tendulkar knew; this person suffered from insecurity. He had never thought that he would write a play based on that person’s character. In spite of Tendulkar’s earlier dissatisfaction and nervousness, the play was completed; it was almost a ‘cathartic process’. Vultures does not have the humour of Silence! The Court is in Session. It is very morbid in the portrayal of action and characters. Each character has a social role and language of his/her own. Tendulkar says that he used to hear these characters in their own language, and he too, talked to them. And suddenly, all the characters took shape in his mind. The title of the play is metaphorical for the characters whose only intentions are to feed upon the flesh of others. The playwright exposes the degeneration of a family in a middle class milieu, where brothers beat their father and sister, and even abort her child. He portrays the sister’s gross sensuality and the free use of liquor as an indication of decaying human values. But Tendulkar has also shown some goodness and sensitivity in the play through the characters of Rama and Rajninath. Theirs is the only genuine and humane relationship that is in contrast to the rest of the play. Rajninath is a poet and his poems reveal the situation that the rest of the family is going through. He is like a narrator of the play. N. S. Dharan sums up the central idea of the play in a few lines:
‘Gidhade’... stands apart from the other plays of Vijay Tendulkar in that it is a play which displays... the unmitigated violence arising from drunkenness, greed, and immorality. Furthermore it is a play built on contrasting situations. On the one hand there is a gruesome portrayal of man’s greed and on the other, there is a portrayal of tender love. When the agents of these opposing qualities meet, a conflict of great dramatic significance results. (73)

This play has multiple scene structure and many of the scenes are replete with poems. Today, the play is judged with objectivity and considered one of the best works of Tendulkar.

After writing Vultures, Tendulkar felt that he could not write another play that is full of violence and sex. But sixteen months later, he wrote Sakharam Binder (1972). This play evoked more controversy from the censor board than Vultures had. This is, perhaps one of his most naturalistic plays. The character of Sakharam is again based on a real-life person about whom Tendulkar had heard a lot through his friend. This man was a binder, and used to bring home helpless women; he would take care of them and provide them security. But his condition was that they had to follow his code of conduct while living in his house and when bored with each other, they could leave at their wish. The man himself would go and leave them wherever they wished to go. He would give them clothes and money while parting so that the women are not rendered totally helpless. Gradually this man’s character started developing in the mind of the playwright and he decided to write a play on it. Tendulkar started hearing and feeling the character and wrote down the first four pages of the play. He, then, developed the character of Laxmi, one of the female characters of the play. He thought that any chaste Hindu woman would be like her. He created the character of Dawood who is a Muslim friend of Sakharam and is considered an outcaste by Laxmi. The character of Champa reminded Tendulkar of one of his acquaintances, Hansa Wadeakar who had also suffered a lot and faced various kinds of attacks. The play has Sakharam (a book binder) who, though a Brahmin, is a contrast to the general idea of that caste. Through the delineation of this character Tendulkar exposes the physical lust and violence present in human beings. The character of Laxmi rises in stature when she talks to insects. Such instances give a totally different effect, bringing out the soft humane side of some characters. Tendulkar feels that
when women cannot find people to talk to, they do so with their pet dogs or cats; their family is unable to understand their need for communication. Champa is a bold and strong woman who is not afraid of any of the harsh realities of life. She accepts life as it comes. In this play the playwright has demonstrated the basic human nature as neither white nor black, but as various shades of grey. All his characters are a combination of good and evil, strengths and weaknesses, and any kind of moralizing or judgement is avoided. Sakharam seems crude and violent, but he is also honest and frank. He exposes the shams of middle class morality, but in doing so he sometimes seems hypocritical too. His playing of the *mrdanga* is a sign of conforming to human nature, and the same is seen in the two women also. The play has a raw, aggressive language and is set in a lower middle class home of a small town. Tendulkar’s plays expose the economically backward households and thus shock the refined middle class readers or audience. This play has a definite structure – division into three acts. The first act delineates the relationship between Sakharam and Laxmi, the second act between Champa and Sakharam and the third exposes a triangular association between all the three characters. The end of the play shows Laxmi, the victim, as victorious over both Champa and Sakharam, and she shows her presence of mind to cover up the murder of Champa and take over Sakharam and his household entirely into her hands. The end exposes ‘the Rescue Triangle’ – a concept borrowed from ‘Transactional Analysis’, propounded by Dr. Eric Berne and developed by Stephen Karpman. According to it there are three roles in a Drama Triangle – the Rescuer, the Persecutor and the Victim, and in *Sakharam Binder* the Victim, Laxmi, becomes the Persecutor and emerges triumphant.

_Ghashiram Kotwal* (1973) has remained the most acclaimed play of Tendulkar. Tendulkar does not call this play historical; it is contemporary as it was inspired by the riots instigated by the Shivsena. Tendulkar wanted to show how the Shivsena had evolved as a powerful party, gaining authority over the people. But he did not write this play with this single intention, for that would have made the play limited in its appeal. Tendulkar had read a book called *Ghashiram Kotwal*, written in the beginning of the twentieth century. This book was neither totally about history nor was it fictional. There were some historical and non-historical events cited in the book with Ghashiram at the centre. Thus, the playwright had the character of Ghashiram at the centre of his play. The performance of this play has won accolades due to many reasons – it does not have the simple, naturalistic style of Tendulkar and it is a
musical piece, which makes use of folk theatre strategy. Tendulkar was familiar with the Tamasha, Bhavai and Dashavtar forms of folk theatre. But none of them could lend enough material for the play to be developed. While searching for a form, he came upon Khele of the Konkan. This form does not make use of any stage, lights, sets etc. It is performed on the streets, in the open space. The most attractive part of this form is the kind of human wall, which is also the chorus of the play; the chorus is, as is known, the narrative element, and it also sways to a rhythm. The individuals come out to perform their parts and then take their positions in the same wall. Thus, Tendulkar hit upon the idea of creating a human curtain of the Brahmins, which also solved the problem of the entries and exits of so many actors. The play is set during the rule of Nana Phadnavis, in the late eighteenth century Maratha kingdom. Nana was the Peshwa’s Chancellor in Pune. The play has been criticized for showing Nana Phadnavis and the Brahmins in an unpleasant light. It is a satire on the hypocrisy of the upper class chaste Brahmins and the politics of the rulers gives it an additional dimension. The characters do not simply speak, but deliver dialogues that are internally rhymed. The playwright has used the same kind of speech even for the greedy and lecherous Nana and the Brahmins. All the aspects of the play – form, dialogue, music, dance, songs, etc. – contribute to the meaning of the play. It was attacked by critics on the grounds of being anti-Brahmincal, of creating a wrong image of Nana and the assumption that it might create an uproar among the audience. Yet the play has survived and has been absolutely successful because of its relevance to contemporary times. Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis are universal, breaking all the barriers of time and place, as observed by Tendulkar himself (noted by Samik Bandyopadhyay): “This is not a historical play. It is a story in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place” (GK 2).

The next play Kamala (1983), again exposing another fact of society’s exploitation of women and the power politics in the field of media and journalism, was inspired by a real-life incident. Tendulkar had been a journalist for a long period and had also tried his hand at investigative journalism. Though this kind of journalism is the subject of this play, he had never felt like writing anything about it, not even when the story of the real Kamala became national news. The play is based on the real-life story of Ashwin Sarin, working with The Indian Express who had actually bought a girl from the rural flesh market in order to expose the reality of such
incidents even in modern times; he had even presented her at a press conference. But what struck Tendulkar was the interview of this journalist's wife who said of how the rural girl had asked her about the amount paid by her husband to buy her as his wife. This innocent question raised many other questions such as the authenticity of the modern-day success-oriented people, or the sacrifice of human values in the name of humanity. This question itself sparked off the beginning of the play Kamala. The main intention behind writing this play was to expose the position of women in Indian society. The exposure of the institution of marriage, considered as most sacred, and the exploitation of women in the name of that institution, lend a new outlook to this play. Jaisingh Jadav, the journalist in the play, buys a tribal woman, only to treat her as an object that would get him a promotion and fame in his job. What happens to the woman later on is not his concern. But in this process, his wife, Sarita, through the same question of Kamala, discovers that she too, is no less than a slave or an object for her husband. Like Ibsen's Nora, she does not rebel against him, but certainly realizes her individuality and self-esteem. She has a faint hope that she would be independent some day. Though the play delves upon the exploitation of women, the subject of journalism gets interwoven, as it becomes a medium of exposure. Through the characters of Kakasaheb and Jadav the playwright juxtaposes the old school of journalism and the modern-day, elite journalism. The concept of reporting and newspapers as the medium of information is shown in a critical light. The playwright also presents Jadav's colleague to expose the ever-growing cut throat competition in every field, which is quite relevant to the present times. There is nothing new in the structure or the form of the play, but as Tendulkar points out it is the content of this play that is important.

The play Kanyadaan (1983) revolves around the Dalit movement and its impact on the 'other' strata of society. Tendulkar had some experience of this movement as he was in close contact with its leaders. At that time he had a lot of affection for the movement and was trying to understand it, for sometimes the Dalits seemed cruel, while sometimes they seemed helpless and true to their beliefs. But gradually this movement collapsed. Meanwhile, he heard of a friend's daughter who married a Dalit boy. Though the mother was not against the caste, she did not approve of the boy in particular. But the daughter, being adamant, got married. The real problems emerged after marriage, as it becomes difficult to change the attitude and culture in which one is brought up. The same happened with the girl and her relationship with the husband.
Yet the girl decided to stay with her husband and keep on her fight. Dharan points out about this play: "As the title suggests, the play centres around 'marriage' in the sense that it brings in its wake complex problems -- problems at once self-created and unforeseen" (87). This situation sparked the idea of Kanyadaan in Tendulkar's mind. He sympathized with the mother; he could understand how she felt, for he himself had also gone through such emotions, and so began writing about it. While writing the play, he divided the character of the mother into two parts -- one with the daughter and the other with the father. He related himself to the character of the father. Tendulkar’s generation had been taught to dislike the behaviour of a human being, but not the human being himself; thus in this manner it was entirely Tendulkar’s play and nothing against the Dalits (as some Dalits felt). It was not possible for the playwright to deal with any other caste other than the Dalits for this play. Tendulkar points out that the play is about the parents of his generation, as it begins and ends with them. The Dalit character creates a dilemma in the play. As in the case of other plays, this play also faced controversies. But when it won the Saraswati Samman Award, the playwright justified these extremes as:

You are honouring me with the Saraswati Samman today for a play for which I once had a slipper hurled at me. Perhaps it is the fate of the play to have earned both this honour and that insult. As its creator, I respect both verdicts. (KD 71)

After the highly successful play Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar wrote many other plays such as Ek Ziddi Ladki (1967) (translated as An Obstinate Girl), Ashi Pakhrey Yeti (1970) (translated as This is How the Birds Come), Dambdwipcha Mukabala (1973-1974) (translated as Encounters in Umbugland), Baby (1975), Mitrachi Ghoshta (translated as A Friend’s Story) (1982) Saubhagyakankshini Chiranjeevi (or Anji) (1993) etc. All these plays are in the naturalistic style, exposing the stark realities of society, politics of the nation and the ways of the world. Most of these plays centre on socio-political issues. Encounters in Umbugland is a political allegory exposing the political scenario in India after the death of Nehru. It shows how democracy has been used as a disguise only to exercise autocracy and dictatorship. The young princess Vijaya is put on the throne after the death of the king, only to be used as a pawn in their game of power by the Cabinet Ministers. But soon enough the Princess learns all the diplomacies taught by those Ministers and uses it against them. She gains the trust of the tribal subjects and sends the Ministers out of the Island,
shocking them to an extent of disbelief. Thus, she turns them into pawns and uses them (a little ruthlessly) to achieve power for herself. Arundhati Banerjee observes:

... the indomitable Princess Vijaya,... who turns the tables on her advisers and refuses to be their pawn.... There is a definite development in her from a headstrong, self-opinionated but politically inexperienced young princess to an intelligent yet whimsical ruler who devises her own (successful) methods of vanquishing her enemies. (xi)

All the people in the play, in order to gain power, make use of falsehood leading to hypocrisy. Baby shows how the girl Baby is raped for days by Shivappa and then turned into his concubine by force. She is made to act like a bitch and has to lick Shivappa’s feet. She cannot do anything without his approval and in his company has to learn to drink and arouse him sexually. Yet at the end, she is kicked, beaten and called a whore by the same man. Shivappa himself is a rogue, but abuses Baby and treats her as a ‘fallen’, immoral woman. He is the one responsible for the degradation of Baby’s life, yet he does not find fault with himself. He compares Baby’s loyalty to his wife’s loyalty and thinks the latter to be much more superior. He tells Baby that she is not even as good as his wife’s shit inspite of the fact that his house is run on the earnings of the same ‘fallen’ woman.

In *Ek Ziddi Ladki*, the crisis is between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law, Mangala. When Mangala, who believes in hard work and honesty, takes over the charge of the house, the family turns against her because she cannot provide them extra money for their luxuries. The father-in-law has been successful in doing so by cheating the innocents. Thus, she returns the charge dejectedly, expressing her helplessness against people without conscience. Pushpa Bhave feels that: “He (Tendulkar) also convincingly brings out the position of women who try to rise against a male-dominated society and family. In Mangala’s defeat we see the loneliness and alienation of women who will not surrender to society and its norms” (144). In *Saubhagyakankshini Chiranjeevi*, the woman Anji who also works and takes care of the house, is on a search for a husband. Men have rejected her because she is not pretty. Then a man comes along who admires her, exploits her physically and disappears. She is sad and soon realizes the truth about the ways of the world. Anji’s exploitation is that of every woman who trusts men blindly. In *Ashi Pakhrey Yeti*, Saru, an innocent, introvert girl, gains confidence about herself and her beauty only
because Aran praises her. She begins to think herself beautiful and falls in love with Arun. But Arun does not want to be chained down by responsibilities and so escapes, thus leaving Saru, once again, a sad and rejected woman. Arun does not think of Saru's feelings and goes away being unconcerned about her future. *Mitrachi Ghoshta* is a play completely different from the other plays wherein Tendulkar depicts the concept of homosexuality and the problems related to it. This play was written in 1982, too early for Indian society to discuss the issue of homosexuality openly. The protagonist of the play, Mitra, is a lesbian who is misunderstood by society. Her desire to love another woman is curbed by her family and society. She is dubbed as 'abnormal', thus compelling her to commit suicide. Mitra is not allowed to grow in society for she is 'different'. Today, this subject is not unusual, but the problems regarding its acceptance still persists in society. Rohini Hattangdi (the actress who had played Mitra's role on stage) observes: "... one feels that if the references to the time in the play are deleted, the play is of 'today' because things have not changed much in the past few years for a 'different' person" (xv). This play reminds us of Mahesh Dattani's plays, which also deal with homosexuality and the problems related to it. Not only this play, but also all the other plays of Tendulkar are of 'today', for the same society and people exist even in the present times. Though there might be changes in some viewpoints, these problems still persist.

The themes of Tendulkar's plays are made obvious through his characters. He considers his characters to be in the forefront in the structure of the plays and their development leads on to the working of the themes, plot, dialogues or style. The social, political or socio-political themes are developed in his plays through his characters; hence to discuss his themes, one needs to discuss the characters first. As Tendulkar tells Gokhale: "I was never able to begin writing my play with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to have my characters first with me... living persons leading me into the thick of their lives where they would give me the theme" (80). Tendulkar's plays reveal the social differences among men and women, gender bias being prominent in the male-dominated society. But the plays do not limit themselves to this issue; they also go on to reveal the situation of an individual in an authoritative society and family. An attempt is being made now to discuss the themes in Tendulkar's plays through the discussion of the characters.

Tendulkar's plays poignantly bring out the suffering of women, especially in middle class society. His plays become a medium to show the authority of society,
especially over women. In such a society individuals are not allowed to speak for themselves. The women characters of his plays seem to have lost their individual identity and realize it only when the men overpower them. Tendulkar has portrayed his women characters in pairs, giving each one different traits of behaviour. Yet, underneath these differences, there lies a similarity about the interpretation of life, a common truth that the lives of both are commanded by men for mere pleasure. The weaker women realize their worth when the stronger women push them towards the harsh reality—of self-existence. Thus, the latter becomes the other side, kind of an alter ego of the former. The women characters of his plays, beginning with Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, arguably the best heroine of Tendulkar, can justify this point. Benare is in her mid-thirties, is a schoolteacher, full of life and vivaciousness. She has a penchant for her own individuality and identity. She feels proud of being on her own and capable of earning for herself. She makes fun of her colleagues in her theatre troupe, who are incapable, hypocritical and meek in one way or the other. She does not regret being in love with Professor Damle, even though she knows he is a married man. She also has enough courage to be pregnant with his child out of wedlock. It is also known that in her adolescence she had fallen in love with her maternal uncle, not knowing that it is immoral (according to society). Thus, all these ‘immoralities’ turn against her in the form of the men of her theatre group. When the theatre group comes to perform a mock-trial at a village, Benare’s finger is caught in the latch of the hall door. The latch is so tricky that if it is not handled properly, it slips automatically and the door gets locked from outside. These motifs are metaphorical of the imminent situation of Benare wherein she is trapped like an animal and hunted by the men. When the real play begins, all the colleagues decide to hold another trial—a game to show the legal proceedings of a court to Samant, the villager. Everybody unites and puts Benare to trial on the charge of infanticide. At first Benare manages to outsmart them all, but she cannot succeed for a long time. They make her a victim of their sadistic, psychological, violent attitude. What the actors do is to ask Benare questions on their own accord, which incidentally proves to be the actual case in Benare’s life. Hence, what begins as a game evolves into a hunt. Tendulkar tries to show the fate of a woman who ends up as a helpless victim in the male-dominated society. As Sukhatme puts it: “There’s not much difference between one trial and another. But when there’s a woman in the dock, the case does have a different complexion, that’s true…” (SCS 22). But Benare gives a tough fight against
all of them; she says very clearly that she has been a good teacher and has taught her children the best in the world, and nobody can point a finger at her. She says that she has not hurt anyone except herself and so no one has a right to throw her away from her job. She firmly believes: “... My life is my own - I haven’t sold it to anyone for a job! My will is my own. My wishes are my own” (SCS 5). She puts her hand on her stomach unconsciously, revealing the on-going trauma of her mind. Her love affair with Professor Damle is labelled as a crime, which is torn apart from time to time by her colleagues. Tendulkar exposes the suffering of a woman for being a mother out of the wedlock. Even if motherhood is considered the most sacred aspect of a woman’s life, it is looked down upon as a sin if it is outside wedlock. The man, who is equally responsible in the love affair, is never asked any explanations nor is he blamed. The same is done to Benare in the name of a game, but Professor Damle is not even mentioned by anyone. She is accused of being immoral. In Act II, the court becomes a metaphor for a game of educated people. The play gains momentum in this act, as there is constant chasing, fencing and pestering; violence is seen at a mental level. The court becomes an excuse for the so-called representatives of society to accuse Benare, an individual, and more importantly, a woman. She is not allowed to defend herself and a terrible one-sided judgement is inflicted upon her. All the while, the colleagues keep on reminding her not to take the ‘game’ very seriously: “Why are you so grave all of a sudden? After all, it’s a game. Just a game, that’s all...” (SCS 25). But their intention is to overpower Benare, whom they cannot over-power at an intellectual level as she is very strong. The double standards and hollowness of society is exposed as men make the laws of society in their own interest. They all hunt Benare and become the self-appointed guardians of society. Gradually the witnesses come up with stories about the relationship of Benare and Damle, which in real life turns out to be true. Rokde speaks out against her to avenge his humiliation, and what Samant innocently reads out from a book, turns out to be the actual facts of Benare’s life. The playwright has very imaginatively made use of Samant’s innocence; critic Utpal Bhayani puts this as: “Samant is totally ignorant of the real lives of the actors of the troupe who have come to perform in the village, just as he is of the court procedures” (21). She is shocked to learn about her colleagues’ knowledge of her personal life; hence she remains silent most of the time. She is clearly criticized as a seductress who tries to trap Rokde and Sukhatme. Benare wants to marry them so that she can give a father’s name to her child.
What is more surprising is that even Mrs. Kashikar, a woman, takes the side of the men against Benare. She gives her witness against Benare, and when the latter tries to escape, drags her physically into the witness box. Mrs. Kashikar's explanation as to why Benare is not married is: "... that's what happens these days when you get everything without marrying.... It's the sly new fashion of the women earning that makes everything go wrong. That's how promiscuity has spread throughout our society" (SCS 54). Mrs. Kashikar feels that Benare is too free with men and 'wanders' too much with them. Tendulkar shows Mrs. Kashikar's latent sadism, which maybe a result of her childlessness. She cannot attain motherhood and is always snubbed by her husband. She never gets a chance to speak her own mind. Yet, in public they put up a show of great love and romance, and this makes her believe that she is supposed to do what her man asks her to do. But Mrs. Kashikar does not remain quiet at all and mutters angrily against her husband's orders; the reason that Gokhale thinks of Mrs. Kashikar's subdued protest is: "... had she had the economic power that Benare has, she might have protested more actively.... the way things are, there is no choice for her but to be a participant in the patriarchal system" (83). Thus, she chooses to participate in the hunt enthusiastically so as to retain her self-esteem. And that is why she lashes out bitterly at Benare. There is no linear plot in the play, but there are only situations pitted against each other. In Act III, gender-bias is graphically delineated. All the while Damle is absent, and his absence is neither questioned nor considered significant. Banerjee is of the opinion that during the mock trial, Leela Benare's private life is exposed, revealing her love affair with Damle, while:

... Professor Damle is significantly absent at the trial denoting his total withdrawal of responsibility both social and moral for the whole situation in which he has landed Benare so that during the trial he is only the witness while Benare becomes the prime accused alone for being an unwed mother. (viii)

Towards the end, Benare is given ten seconds to defend herself. All the men have accused her and said so much against her for a long time, and she is permitted only a few seconds to speak for herself. Till the end, she has been totally silent, perhaps exhausted mentally to say anything. The soliloquy at the end is her outburst of helplessness, not a fight. Tendulkar emphasizes that this is the condition of most of the women even if they are educated and financially independent. Society is of prime
importance and though the prescribed social conduct is applicable to all, it is strictly enforced upon women. Mr. Kashikar wants to make a law where girls should be married off before puberty to let the social order remain intact, thus going back to the ways of the last century where girls were considered a burden and a risk and were married off in adolescence. At the end Benare says that she had thought of love as the most beautiful thing in the world. When she falls in love with her maternal uncle, she is too young to know what is wrong and what is right. She wants to marry him, but everyone is against this idea; her man also runs away being afraid of society. She tries to commit suicide, but is saved. She falls in love for the second time, this time with a married man. She feels the love is of a different kind, of an intelligent kind. But this is also a mistake as she says: "... I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went his way" (SCS 75). Bhayani makes a point here that: “

Benare’s crime is that she is of an independent temperament although she is a woman and guided by this, she ventures into ‘pure’ love twice – once without attempting to know the name of the relationship and then without attempting to give the relationship a name. (22)

She realizes that both her men had wanted her body and not her as a person. She says that she despises her body, and yet she loves it. Tendulkar gives voice to his thoughts about the reality of the world; one cannot reject one’s own body, for that too can give a moment of bliss and is a part of one’s identity. The body is a part of a person’s existence on the whole, as is depicted in Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, which deals with the issue of the equality of the body and the head. Benare wants to have her body for her coming child which will be a source of joy for her. She reveals the importance of life; when one cannot abandon life, one realizes its significance. Benare’s situation is summed up in one poem at the beginning of Act I, which is the crux of the whole play. The poems (written by Mrs. Shirish Pai) that Benare sings very prominently reflect her victimized situation:

Our feet tread upon unknown / And dangerous pathways evermore…. / Light glows alive again. Again / It mingles with the dark of night…. / And the wound that’s born to bleed / Bleeds on for ever, faithfully./ There is a battle sometimes,
where / Defeat is destined as end./ Some experiences are meant
/To taste, then just to waste and spend.... (SCS 10)

Tendulkar points out the hypocrisy of men in their behavioural traits and attitudes towards women. Benare finds the men of the troupe fearsome and violent. She feels that the so-called modern, cultured and educated men of the twentieth century are no more than ferocious hunters: “... Their lips are full of lovely worn out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires” (SCS 74). The men completely believe in the hypocritical norms of society and think themselves capable and authoritative of passing verdict on women.

Ultimately, at the end the fearless display of strength and self-justification of Benare is termed as her arrogance. In the mock-trial Benare is declared guilty of infanticide and the verdict passed is that she should abort the child. The men look upon Benare’s decision to continue her pregnancy as sinful. But it is actually (forceful) abortion, which is all the more sinful. This reflects the social, religious and ethical codes of society that are changed according to convenience. Men resent the enthusiasm that Benare has for life; these men hate her for having control over her emotions, ideas, thoughts, beliefs and life. In both her relationships, the retreat is on the part of men, and yet Benare is labelled as immoral. The men, in Tendulkar’s plays, basically seem to be interested in the body of the woman; the moment the use of the body is over, she is brushed aside as an object. The use of exclamations such as ‘Bravo!’ during the trial, show the delight of the men while degrading Benare. In the end everyone else comes back to normal routine and starts getting ready for the real trial of the play. But Benare lacks her usual enthusiasm and does not stand up to get ready for the real play. Although all the colleagues tell her that it was only a ‘game’, there remains no question of her being normal. The thin line between illusion and reality is already blurred and Benare cannot control herself like others. Geeta Kumar feels that: “Life for Leela Benare will never be the same again. This traumatic evening, which has just been a game to others, would be like a never-healing ulcer for her forever” (24). In the end, again a poem is heard in Benare’s voice:

The parrot to the sparrow said/ ‘Why, oh why, are your eyes so red?’/ ‘Oh, my dear friend, what shall I say?/ Someone has stolen my nest away.’/ Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow .../ ‘Oh, brother crow, oh, brother crow, / Were you there? Did
The crow is a representative of men and their society. A crow does not live in a flock, is indifferent towards others and has a scavenging nature — it is a carrion eater. All the members except Benare are like the crow. Even Damle is like a crow, as he runs away abandoning Benare, while she is like the innocent sparrow that falls a prey. Tendulkar shows how women, especially in the middle-class are treated as lowly creatures and isolated if they try to establish their individuality in society.

The same kind of treatment of women is seen in the next play *Gidhade*, literally meaning vultures. The men are like vultures, the birds of prey, hunting the impoverished and meek women. This play has violence not only at an emotional level, but also at the physical and mental levels. It depicts the issue of the cut throat lust for power, and even women are not spared from it. Again in this play, the playwright uses the imagery of the scavenging bird and the meek little sparrow. Rama and Manik form the pair of women in this play. They are more apparent in their internal contrast than Benare and Mrs. Kashikar. Rama is the ‘sparrow’, caught between the vultures Pappa Pitale, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik. She is the only compassionate character, along with Rajninath, the illegitimate son, in the whole play. Theirs is the only humane relationship that asserts hope in life. Rama is married to Ramakant for twenty-two years, yet is childless. She desperately wants to be a mother, but she cannot bear the ‘seed’ because of Ramakant’s drunkenness, thus forcing her to be barren. Her yearning for motherhood is described by Rajninath in his poem: “... After that living impotence / Of twenty-two endless years /... But she only knew / One longing,/... The need to swell with fruit /... Each womb-bearing woman’s right by birth...” (VS 202-205). Rajninath compares Rama’s innocence to a doe, especially an untouched one. She looks after the house and the family; she bears all the evil acts of her in-laws, but never utters a word. When she comes to know that the gardener has not got his pay, she feels pity for him, but cannot help him as she is suppressed. Rama represents women who are totally dominated by the family and have to remain silent.

Ramakant takes Rama to all kinds of doctors and saints with the hope that a miracle would help Rama to become pregnant. Rama is tired of such trips because she knows that there is no biological problem in her, yet she suffers silently; she has to fast and starve as the saints advise. In this play, Tendulkar portrays the victimization
of a woman in a family devoid of love and hope. Later on, Rama speaks out her condition of helplessness in front of Rajninath, the only ray of hope in her life. She tells him that for many years she has endured everything without a tear and without uttering a word of protest. She has suffered pain that is not a result of her own deeds. But she can no longer do so. She tells him that her womb is absolutely fertile: "... This womb's healthy and sound... I was born to become a mother. This soil's rich, it's hungry. But the seed won't take root. If the seed's soaked in poison... then why blame the soil?" (VS 241). One is reminded of Benare's long soliloquy where she also speaks out her heart. Rama tells Rajninath that in the olden days women who used to commit Sati, died only once. But she burnt every moment, died everyday of her life. She speaks of her wish to run away from the house and be free. Then suddenly she controls herself and says that she is very happy and should not talk such nonsense. Rajninath comprehends her sorrow and embraces her. Though Rama tries to free herself, it is a very meek attempt; she likes being in his embrace and feels secure and loved. Needless to say, she becomes pregnant without Ramakant's knowledge that the child is not his. Rama is very happy with the pregnancy and tells Ramakant that they should leave the house, for she knows the atmosphere of the house is full of despair and hatred. She is even ready to be a slave, starve or do anything to be out of that house: "... Let's get out of this overpowering house.... Will you listen to me?... for once? I won't ever tell you to do anything again.... I'll stay just as I have till this day. Mouth shut, head bent" (VS 251). But her husband silences her, saying that no one in his family would want to listen to a woman's advice. Rama is not allowed to have a voice because she is a woman. It's immaterial whether she can live happily or not. When Umakant tells Ramakant that the child that Rama is carrying is not his, initially he does not believe it. When the truth comes out, he is so angry that he wants to kick the child out. Meanwhile Manik, his sister, aborts Rama's child to avenge Ramakant for aborting her child. The last flicker of hope in Rama's life is also lost and she becomes lifeless like a stone: "... A statue of emotions chilled to stone. /... Left her a stark insanity of stone / Frozen from her tears. / Empty of pain / And empty of desires..." (VS 201-206). Being a mother is a source of joy for a woman; she may feel a kind of 'completeness' in that state. Rama has been yearning for the same state. But the power games of her family kill her unborn child, and in some way kill her too. When the house is mortgaged, she silently goes away with her husband. Her pain is expressed in Rajninath's poem: " ... Alive, she followed after /
That living death, her master, With the dogged loyalty / Of a barren beast..." (VS 201-202). Rama, like a 'true wife' follows her husband even after enduring so much, and Rajninath feels both sad and surprised at this. Sarat Babu notes that: "... Rajninath fructifies the womb of Rama while Ramakant aborts it. Thus, in the play, they symbolize love and lovelessness respectively" (142).

Manik, the woman paired against Rama, is a contrast to her, yet is not free from the tortures of male-made society. Manik has lived in a family where vices are considered more important than virtues, where liquor flows like a river and abuses are uttered in everyday language. Manik is in her mid-thirties, drinks and smokes right from the morning, is not married and sleeps around with different men. Her relationship with men is only out of her lust and her greed for money. She feels that her desire to buy a new necklace is more important than the gardener's pay. She does not trust anybody in her family - neither her father, nor her two brothers - as she knows that they are also equally greedy and can go to any extent to extort money out of somebody. She does not even trust Rama and tells her: "So I should leave it (door) open, should I? So you can come and strangle me, all of you? It's because I take care that I've survived in this house! Think it's human beings that live here?" (VS 207). Tendulkar has endowed her with cleverness, but she uses it only for wrong purposes. She is smart enough to realise that there is some more money left with Pappa. She helps her brothers willingly to extract this money from their father, and then drive him out of the house. But she, being a woman, cannot escape the tortures of patriarchal society. When there is no money left, her brothers decide to blackmail the Raja of Hondur, Manik's latest love, to extract money from him. Manik is against this, but they do not want her to meet him, so they break and fracture her leg as a gesture of helping her: "... our little Manik's a blockhead... We must help her. Must give her a hand, what?" (VS 236). They break Manik's leg as if they are breaking some object. Soon they receive the news that the Raja of Hondur has died of a heart attack, and all their plans fail. In their anger and thirst for revenge, they decide to abort Manik's baby, which is the Raja's: "... Let's abort him! Let's knock him bloody out!... Let little Manik scream till she bloody bursts!" (VS 247). Thus, the two men gang up and plan to torture the woman who is helpless. They do not think even once that Manik is their own sister; they make her abortion a game, as when Umakant says that Ramakant should kick Manik's belly because he himself did not have football practice, the latter replies: "... I'll give such a kick, he'll fly up to the
bloody skies...” (VS 248). They manage to abort Manik’s child and drive her out of
the house. This scene is one of the goriest in the play, where Manik runs with a
fractured leg and a bloodstained sari. Even though she is evil, one cannot help feeling
pity for this woman who has to endure such physical tortures at the hands of her
brothers. No doubt that when she aborts Rama’s child, she is avenging Ramakant and
not Rama. Gokhale rightly observes: “The contrast between Manik and Rama is black
and white. Yet, with all Manik’s crudeness, she is only a female vulture, and for that
she will ultimately move us to some compassion” (85). Tendulkar shows that a
woman, of any stature, of any kind, has to endure the norms of man-made society; in
some way or the other she is snubbed and overpowered by men who want to gnaw at
her physically, mentally and emotionally.

In *Sakharam Binder* the pair of women, Laxmi and Champa, belongs to the lower
middle class strata. Again, Tendulkar has shown a contrasting quality between the
two women. One is a docile and submissive kind, while the other is a bossy and
powerful one. Still, they have to suffer at the hands of their men. Laxmi is religious,
meek and hard working. Her husband has abandoned her because she cannot bear a
child. He has not cared to find out whether she is barren or he is impotent. Yet,
Laxmi, being the typical wife, does not say anything and leaves the house. She starts
living with Sakharam who brings home destitute women like her. Sakharam does not
believe in the institution of marriage and detests husbands who treat their wives like
beasts. But he too, is not free from ideas of being a ‘man’ and treats the woman as
inferior. He does not like women speaking against him, not obeying his rules and
orders, talking to strangers and not taking care of the house. It is compulsory for the
woman who stays with him to give him sexual pleasure and keep him happy: “... I’m
the master here.... I must be respected in my own house.... In this house, what I say
goes.... The others must obey.... you’ll have to be wife to me” (SB 125-126).
Sakharam denounces the husband-wife relationship, but he too demands one without
a formal ceremony. He feels he has the right to throw the woman out the minute he
feels bored or angry. Laxmi feels joyous when she talks to birds and insects. With
them she can laugh freely. Sakharam thinks this is madness and demands that she
laugh the same way at night to arouse him sexually. When Laxmi burns her foot with
coal, he thinks it a proper punishment for talking to herself. He does not care to know
if she is in pain. On the contrary, he wakes her up from sleep and asks her to laugh.
Tendulkar has portrayed Sakharam as a man who finds joy only in petty, selfish and
physical desires. Mere physical contentment is the only joy for men like him, and they do not even try to know whether the woman wants to participate in it or not. A similar issue is seen in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, where Marian just goes on agreeing with whatever Peter says; Peter is more interested in her body than in her as a person, which she realizes later on.

Laxmi refuses to allow Dawood to participate in the Ganesh Arti because he is a Muslim. This infuriates Sakharam. He beats her like an animal with a belt, and again at night demands laughter from her. Laxmi cannot bear this any longer, so she retorts back: “... How much more can a person bear?... work all the time. You torture me the whole day, you torture me at night...(SB 146). Tendulkar draws our attention to the fact that even though a woman has to go through so much suffering, she endures it silently till the end. He does give a chance to his women characters to speak out their hearts, yet they remain as voices in the void; Laxmi also voices her emotions in front of Sakharam:

I've never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders.
Curses. Oaths. Threatening to throw me out. Kicks and blows... There I was in agony after I'd been belted, and all you wanted me to do was laugh.... I am on the point of death and I'm supposed to laugh. Hell must be a better place than this.... (SB148)

At last Sakharam decides to break up his relationship with her and sends her to her nephew’s house. But even after such tortures, Laxmi is so attached to him and his house that she finds it difficult to leave. She considers Sakharam as her husband and wears a *mangalsutra* in his name. After she leaves, Sakharam realises that Laxmi has left a mark on him, but tries to feel detached from her, as she is weak in satisfying him physically. Dawood asks him to look for a new ‘bird’; the ‘bird’ being referred to means a woman, a mere object of pleasure to be caught and put into the cage made of men and society. The imagery of a bird is also metaphorical in the sense that it is helpless against human beings. Hence, in many plays the playwright has used the imagery of the bird to represent women.

The new woman who arrives is Champa, a contrast to Laxmi in many ways. She is independent, ravishing and very attractive. She has a voluptuous body and is younger than Laxmi. Like Sakharam, she uses foul language, chews tobacco and drinks liquor. Champa has walked out on her husband Shinde, breaking the rule of an
‘ideal’ wife. Her husband had bought her from her mother and tortured her physically for sexual pleasure. When she can no longer bear his impotence, she leaves him. When Sakharam is explaining the rules of his house to her, she immediately replies: “Rule! Is this a school or a court or something?” (SB 161). She informs Sakharam what a stupid man her husband was; to this, a little shocked Sakharam replies that the woman of the house should not use bad language. He himself is foul-mouthed, but wants the women to be good and ideal. He is surprised when Champa asks him to give her some food and prepare some tea for her. His instant reply is that it is a ‘woman’s job’ (SB 158) and she should do it. He feels jealous when she appreciates Dawood. Tendulkar exposes the differences of gender in patriarchal society through the character of Sakharam. A woman is not expected to behave like a man and to open her mouth against a man. The highest jolt comes to Sakharam when Champa beats up her husband violently and throws him out. He tells her: “What kind of a woman are you? Look, what you have done to him! He’s your husband. Haven’t you a heart?” (SB 167). While saying this, Sakharam goes back on his own beliefs about marriage and wretched husbands. Yet he feels threatened by Champa’s independence and her sensuous body. In order to snub her, he orders her to sleep with him, but Champa refuses blankly: “… Take care not to rub me the wrong way. I don’t like it – all that man-woman stuff” (SB 168). But she cannot resist Sakharam’s demands for long because she knows that she might be thrown out and then might have to sleep with many men for a living: “What else can I do? Go out in the streets? Face half a dozen animals everyday! Easier to put up with this one” (SB 181). She does not sleep with him willingly; she has to get drunk first so as not to be conscious enough to know what is done to her body. Champa detests sex because of the painful memories of her husband’s tortures; still, being a woman fearing destitution, she cannot refuse Sakharam. As Gokhale observes it: “In the ultimate analysis, however, she must still submit to Sakharam” (89). In her drunkenness she mutters that anybody can do anything to her body – even a corpse can have it. When the woman is a dependant, the right over her own body is also taken away from her. Tendulkar portrays how a male-dominated world rules over the female body too, irrespective of the class or culture that she belongs to.

The human side of Champa is seen when she takes in Laxmi who has been thrown out by her nephew and his wife on charge of stealing. Though Sakharam does not permit her to stay and beats her up, Laxmi clutches at his feet, and finally Champa
announces firmly that Laxmi shall stay to help her in the house. Champa tells Laxmi that Sakharam knows how to extract his money's worth out of a woman. Champa expresses the sufferings of women in society and tells the religious Laxmi: “They don’t come and live your hell for you – those gods and Brahmins” (SB 180). Sakharam is furious with Laxmi and tells her that he has nothing to do with her as their link has snapped. For a man it is only a link, a physical relationship and it does not matter to him what the woman feels about it. However, being helpless against Laxmi’s moral courage and Champa’s physical valour, he has to submit to the women’s will. Laxmi thinks Champa as immoral and a sinner, for the latter has left her husband, beats him and is disloyal even to Sakharam. She befriends Shinde and showers care on him. Her constant presence makes Sakharam impotent and Champa retorts: “... I didn’t mind it as long as you were a man. I won’t take you now.... A sound from the kitchen and you go cold.... You’re not a man – not since she came. She’s made an impotent ninny of you” (SB 193). Infuriated by these words, Sakharam asks Laxmi to go away. But she reveals to him Champa’s affair with Dawood, and in his fury Sakharam murders Champa. When he realizes what he has done, he is dumbfounded and cannot even dig a grave to bury her. In a turn of events, Laxmi starts to dig the grave. Kumar observes:

... Feeling totally petrified... For the first time in his (Sakharam’s) life he feels totally incapable of coping with the situation.... a fantastic turn-about of Laxmi’s character... it is she who gathers up courage. There is a miraculous change in her. In full control of her wits and situation, she rises to the occasion admirably. (28)

Laxmi tells Sakharam not to shout. It is she, who now orders Sakharam, turning the Persecutor into a Victim. She consoles him saying that:

... Anyway she was a sinner. She’ll go to hell.... My virtuous deeds will see both of us through... I’ll die with my head on your lap.... I’ll tell Him to count my good deeds as yours.... Don’t be scared.... She was unfaithful to you. You are a good man. God will forgive you.... I’ll tell everybody that she’s gone away. (SB 196-197)

Laxmi, even though a woman, goes against her own kind because of the strong social conditioning about ideal wives and women. Sub-consciously, she might have wanted
power over Sakharam; though it is Champa who takes her in authoritatively, Laxmi is the one who overpowers both Champa and Sakharam at the end. Kumar makes a point that: "... One can only admire Laxmi who, despite all odds stacked against her, probably has managed to carve a niche for herself in Sakharam's life and now of course he will never be able to get rid of her" (29). Champa is the 'real', tough woman, who does not care for men merely out of social practice. Unlike in the other plays, the two women characters here are strong enough to rule over men. Laxmi has such strong conventional and moral beliefs that Sakharam cannot denounce them and Dawood cannot help but respect them. The same beliefs rule and overpower everybody in the end. Champa has an attractive body to which men are lured; she makes Sakharam forget his work and is bold enough to speak against him easily. Thus, Tendulkar exhibits the silent power of women at a sub-conscious level that can wield authority even over men.

The next play Kamala depicts women from two different strata of society. Sarita belongs to the upper class - educated, sophisticated and urbane, while Kamala belongs to the lower class - poor and uncouth. A feature of this play is that any kind of violence is not seen at an explicit level. It is totally hidden, and can be found only on close scrutiny through the dialogues of the characters. Sarita is the literate woman who thinks that her joy and responsibility are in serving her husband Jaisingh Jadav, a journalist who remains out of town frequently without informing her of his whereabouts. Jadav has strictly instructed Sarita to note every phone message in his absence; if not done so, he might get infuriated, as Sarita tells her uncle: "... My husband sees it differently. If I say they didn’t tell me their names he gets angry with me for not asking" (KA 5). Jaisingh orders Sarita to keep everything ready for him, so that he does not have to do anything at home except get ready and leave for work. He considers this as his privilege. He takes Sarita around at parties or gatherings to show off his educated and cultured wife, and thinks it his right to enjoy sexual pleasures with her. Sarita does all these happily, thinking of it as a duty and pleasure, for she is socially conditioned to do so, as her uncle puts it: "... You may be highly educated, Sarita, but you are still a girl from old Mohite wada!" (KA 5). Sarita does not realize her worth until Kamala, the poor tribal woman, comes into her life.

Jaisingh buys Kamala from a remote village near Bihar. She is bought from a flesh market for two hundred and fifty rupees. What Jaisingh wants to do is to bring the issue of the sale of women to everyone's notice, and thus achieve fame. He is
doing it merely out of his need for fame, laurels and awards, and not out of a concern to bring awareness about the issue or to help such women. Jadav is not concerned whether his act is ethically correct or not or whether Sarita would approve of it or not. Sarita finds it utterly disgusting and does not want Jadav to act in such a way and tells him: “But for that did you have to buy a woman?” (KA 15). She cannot even stand the description of the flesh market, which her husband gives very coolly and casually:

... They have an open auction for women of all sorts of ages....

The men who want to bid handle the women to inspect them.

Whether they are firm or flabby. Young or old. Healthy or diseased. How they feel in the breast, in their waist, in their thighs and.... (KA 14)

Jadav does not hesitate talking about Kamala and issues concerning women. Sale of women and children had been a part of society even in the past. In present times, in the remote areas of the country, such incidents do take place, yet either they are not noticed or are not considered seriously. Reporting in media is done to promote the papers and magazines, and not to solve such problems. Jadav is also one of the same journalists who is interested only in acquiring fame out of it:

... There is a way of doing these things.... Women are sold in many places like that, all over the country. How do you think all the red-light districts could operate without that?... The point is how we project Luhardaga – the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case – not in the case itself! (KA 15)

Jadav is going to present Kamala at a press conference and surprise everyone. He strictly tells Sarita not to bathe her or give her another sari as he wants to present her in the rags in which she was brought: “I tell you don’t give her a thing without asking me” (KA 21). Sarita cannot do anything without consulting her husband. His order has to be her will and also everyone else’s. When Kamala feels shy to attend the conference, Jadav rebukes her saying: “I order you to come there with me. Today” (KA 20). Jadav is used to ordering his women around as he considers them inferior. His arrogance has made him crude and selfish; he reminds us of Sakharam, who brings home women (without paying money for them), and treats them almost like slaves. Though Sarita is not a slave, she is almost like one, for Jadav treats her that way. Jadav’s colleague, Jain rightly describes Sarita, when he calls her “a lovely bonded labourer” (KA 17).
Sarita is shocked to know the kind of questions that were put to Kamala in the conference in front of men. She is asked questions about free sex, the number of men she had slept with, had she slept with Jadav, and if she had, how did it feel etc. Jadav and Jain talk about all these things very casually because they are not interested in the dignity of a woman, but in their own gains. They never care about the fun made of Kamala and can laugh away at the questions put to Kamala at the conference. Sarita is furious and tells them: “So while they were asking her those terrible questions, and making fun of her – you just sat and watched, did you?” (KA 30). Even then, they take the whole issue very lightly and laugh at it. Sarita, who is angry with Jadav, refuses to sleep with him; Jadav is surprised and tells her, a little irritated: “… You’ve never done that before…. I’m your husband, after all…. Don’t I have the right to have my wife when I feel like it?… I’m hungry for that too – I’ve been hungry for six days” (KA 32). He does not care to find out whether Sarita wants to sleep with him or not; he speaks only of his desires, for he thinks that being a husband he has a right over his wife’s wishes too. In many of Tendulkar’s plays women are forced to sleep with men (as in Sakharam Binder) and are even raped if they do not do so willingly (as in Baby). The playwright points out the fact that in a male-dominated society women are not given liberty even about their sexual desires. Jandhyala points out: “With woman’s sexuality so closely bound with marriage and her role as wife and mother, there was no possibility of considering her sexual needs and desires”.

But the crucial realization of individuality dawns upon Sarita when she talks to Kamala, who asks her such innocent questions as, “Where does he sleep?” or “No little ones?” (KA 34). The most ironic question of Sarita’s life that Kamala asks is: “How much did he buy you for?” (KA 34). Sarita realizes that, she too, like Kamala, is no more than a slave for Jadav. As Gokhale rightly puts it: “Once Sarita sees herself in the light of a slave, the sole purpose of whose life is to please the master, everything falls into place” (93). Kamala tells her that as the ‘master’ has spent a lot of money on them, they should co-operate and serve him rightly. She will look after the house and produce children, while Sarita can keep the accounts and party with him: “… Don’t worry about it… Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I’ll sleep with him” (KA 35). Sarita agrees to this arrangement, not wanting to explain anything to Kamala who says all this out of innocence. She comes to realize that there is not much difference between her and Kamala. In fact, Kamala is bought as a slave, while she is a slave whom: “… he got
Jadav considers a slave as an object that can be bought and thrown away according to the need. He does not care what Kamala feels once she has entered the house; without her consent and against Sarita’s wish, he leaves Kamala in the Women’s House only because he does not need to show her around anymore. Also, he does not want to risk the police arresting him with evidence. To Sarita’s arguments, he snaps at her: “It’s I who takes decisions in this house, and no one else. Do you understand?” (KA 42). Sarita feels like a pawn in Jadav’s game of chess, and becomes determined not to follow him blindly. She refuses to go to a party with him because she does not feel like going; Jadav is infuriated and leaves without her.

As seen in other plays, in this play too, Tendulkar gives the woman a chance to speak out her heart and pain. The women are given a chance to reveal all their feelings and sufferings at least once. Even though it does not change the situation for them it helps them to grow. Sarita tells her uncle, Kakasaheb, that Jadav has made a slave out of her who has no rights over the house. She must labour silently and abide by the orders of her master. She speaks her heart out to her uncle:

... I was asleep. I was unconscious even when I was awake. Kamala woke me up. With a shock. Kamala showed me everything. Because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I’m a slave. Slaves don’t have rights... They must only slave away.... After this, I’ll never think that this is my house. (KA 46)

Sarita, like Nora in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, undergoes a drastic change as she gradually realizes the fact that while ‘serving’ Jadav her own individual identity has been nullified. She raises her voice against men and manhood saying that when a man does not have greater sense than a woman, why must he be superior; why can women not lead and men follow? She points out that the rules must be changed. Men and women should be equal, and discrimination of gender should be based not on sex, but on their abilities and deeds. She questions the very authenticity of ‘manhood’: “… If a man becomes great, why doesn’t he stay a great man? Why does he become a master?… What a man does is manhood. Even if he washes people’s dishes, that’s manhood” (KA 47). Even her uncle confesses to having troubled his wife a lot, believing that it is his right to do so.
Meanwhile Jain, Jadav’s friend, informs them that Jadav has lost his job and is in trouble. Jadav is heavily drunk and furious; he shouts, but soon his voice and body weaken and he collapses on the sofa. Kakasaheb points out to Sarita that: “This is the mistake men make. That manhood makes” (KA 51). Sarita still believes the same things she has talked about, but in the present wants to support her ‘helpless’ husband. Like Rama in Gidhade, she silently goes back to serving him, though devoid of the same feelings. Gokhale explains this:

Sarita is a Nora who has stopped short of the final breaking out. Though she does not make a dramatic exit at the end of the play, however, she has understood her situation as surely as Nora does. It is the illiterate Kamala, one step ahead of her in understanding what the man-woman relationship is all about, who teaches her to see where she stands. (93)

Unlike Nora, Sarita neither walks out on Jadav nor bangs the door, thus proving that she is still a compassionate person even if she has stopped being a slave. It is the uneducated Kamala, who shows her the real way of understanding man-woman relationship. Sarita has certainly gained some kind of self-dignity and confidence on her own, for she declares at the end:

I’ll go on feeling it. But at present I’m going to... forget about it. But a day will come... when I will stop being a slave. I’ll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I’ll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I’ll pay whatever price I have to pay for it.... (Looking at Jaisingh) How innocent even the masters look when they are asleep. (KA 52)

Perhaps, like Laxmi, some day Sarita too will take over the power from Jadav, caring for him at the same time. But at the end of the play, Jadav is also rendered as helpless, inferior and dependant. The illiterate woman Kamala becomes the symbol of exploitation and oppression, as Tendulkar tells Sunil Shanbag: “Kamala after a time becomes a symbol. The wife of the journalist becomes ‘Kamala’, and ultimately he (the journalist) becomes ‘Kamala’.” Though the play is in two acts and there is nothing very new in the story, it is the issue and the awareness that it brings about in society, which is more significant.
Tendulkar’s play *Kanyadaan* is yet another example of women’s exploitation. The playwright has depicted the mental state of a girl who is conditioned and illusioned by reformist values. The playwright tries to expose such questions as to what happens when a woman’s mind is ruled over, especially by men. Though a moment may come when she realizes her own identity and feelings, if it is too late then she has to suffer. And the same happens with Jyoti, Nath Devalikar and Seva’s daughter. Both her parents often remain out of town for some social reform activity. Hence, Jyoti and her brother Jay Prakash are left alone to think and decide for themselves. They are brought up on values and ideals of equality and liberty, especially taught by their father. Nath and Seva have been fighting against untouchability. Jyoti is influenced by her parents’ activities and ideals and she too sympathizes with the Dalits. This leads her on to get engaged to a Dalit man Arun Athavale who is doing his B.A. and is also a poet. While Seva finds it difficult to accept this relationship, Nath says immediately: “... if my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn’t have pleased me as much...” (KD 8). Nath is full of romantic ideals which are illusory and do not last long. He does not comprehend the sanctity of relations and marriages. He thinks of it as a wonderful idea, something that would flatter his idealistic ego. He fails to explain to Jyoti that such serious decisions of life are not made hastily without giving it even a second thought. On the other hand, Seva is very practical, and with a motherly concern tells Jyoti to think again about Arun, for a marriage requires some stability and compatibility. She explains to her that she does not have a problem with Arun’s being a Dalit as she has been fighting untouchability for ages; the actual reason for her denial is, as she explains to Jyoti:

... But your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it.... And later there is no chance for a woman to hide or run away. (KD 13)

Jyoti brings Arun home so that her family can meet him and Nath gives his full support to their marriage, saying eloquently:

... until today, ‘Break the caste system’ was a mere slogan for us. I’ve attended many inter-caste marriages and made speeches. But today I have broken the caste barrier in the real
sense. My home has become Indian in the real sense of the term. (KD 23)

The problem with Jyoti is that she is highly influenced by Nath’s ideals and considers his opinion as the best. What she cannot understand is that Nath supports her merely to achieve admiration for himself. Jyoti decides to marry Arun against Seva and Jay Prakash’s wishes. Seva’s main concern is that of a mother, but as a woman she also knows the difficulties regarding adjustments for a woman after marriage. She is very sensible in her opinion but it is overridden by Nath. Seva reminds us of Lalitambika in Karnad’s Tale-Danda who is also concerned about the marriage of her Brahmin daughter to a cobbler boy. By the first half of the play Nath can be seen as a selfish man who pretends to be modern-minded, but is actually trying to thrust his ideals on others. His wife Seva and his son are of an independent bent of mind and do not come under his influence. But Jyoti lacks this independence and trusts Nath blindly. Hence, she trusts his opinion about her relationship with Arun with complete faith.

Arun comes across as a sadist and a disgruntled human being who is out to avenge all the high castes for inflicting torture on Dalits for generations. At Jyoti’s house, he tells her that he feels uncomfortable in such a large place and wants her to sit with him. When she asks him to sit with her in the kitchen, he retorts: “No, men who sit and chat in the kitchen are pansies! We will sit right here ... You sit here” (KD 17). Arun has no consideration for others and thinks of women as inferior. He tries to gain sympathy from Jyoti so that she would marry him and he can then avenge the past attitude of the high castes against the people of his caste. When Jyoti opposes wife beating, he twists her arm painfully. Jyoti is more shocked than hurt, and Seva who notices this is infuriated. Arun is discourteous even with Seva and tells her that he plans to brew illicit liquor to earn money. He goes to the extent of telling her how his wife and children can help him in his liquor business, and when Jyoti tells Seva and Jay Prakash that he is joking, he snaps back at her in front of them: “You don’t know a shit. Shut up” (KD 21). Seva and Jay Prakash are shocked, but Arun neither cares about them nor about Jyoti’s dignity; he is only concerned about his ego. Meanwhile, Nath comes in and is not at all shocked by Arun’s rough behaviour. On the contrary, he justifies Arun’s crudeness:

Not only is he not a middle class man, he is a Dalit. He has been brought up in the midst of poverty and hatred. These people’s psychological make-up is altogether different... We
must try to understand him and that is extremely difficult. (KD 27)

Nath considers this marriage as an experiment and Seva is angry to know this. She tells him that she will revolt against the marriage and not allow Jyoti to suffer. Yet, Nath tries to justify his stand by giving explanations such as:

... He (Arun) is like unrefined gold, he needs to be melted and moulded.... Who can perform this task if not girls like Jyoti?... if Jyoti breaks her word... It would amount to running away from the challenge.... It upholds the norms of civilized humanity... let us see what happens. (KD 31)

Nath has reduced the institution of marriage to a mere challenge, experimenting with Jyoti’s life and relationships without thinking of how far such ideals and reforms be useful or be applied practically. If it ruins a life, such conditioning cannot be called a reformation for society, and then the cost at which Nath upholds and experiments his reforms is too high.

Soon enough Jyoti, being fed up of Arun’s ways, leaves him and comes to Nath’s place after work. She seems weaker and tired, and also hardened a little. She does not care much for her parents’ feelings anymore. When Nath asks them to stay at his place, Jyoti refuses saying that Arun will never agree to the proposal. When she declares that she has left him, Nath is shocked and talks her into going back to Arun. He tells his wife: “Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail!... We must save this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake... This is not just a question of our daughter’s life... this has... a far wider significance” (KD 41). In his selfish motives, Nath forgets that he has neither asked Jyoti her wish nor thought about her life at such a young age. Arun comes to take back Jyoti, fully drunk, apologizing and pretending to kill himself with a knife. He tells Seva that he is neither civilized nor cultured like them, and has learned only the crude ways of life such as drinking, wife-beating etc. His education or talent has made no difference in his thinking or culture, for he behaves like an illiterate savage. He tries to justify himself to Seva:

What am I but the son of scavengers. We don’t know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives... we make love to them... but the beating is what gets publicized... I am what I am... and shall remain exactly that. (KD 44)
Aran refuses to change his barbaric ways under the pretext of being a Dalit, which is only to satisfy his male-ego. He almost blames Jyoti for marrying him, saying that she knew how he was and yet married him out of her own free will. When Seva tells him that Jyoti had expected improvement in his behaviour, his ego retorts: “If she thought so, your Jyoti is a stupid fool” (KD 44). Nath does not approve of Jyoti leaving Aran, so she goes away with Aran, a little more hardened, and not to return again. She seems to have lost faith in both the men in her life – her father and her husband, for both the men exploit her physically and mentally in some way or the other. They give her no freedom of choice and render her helpless. When Jyoti leaves with Aran, Nath feels joyous: “Jyoti, I feel so proud of you. The training I gave you has not been in vain” (KD 45). Jyoti is expected to accept and abide by the wishes of the men, who cripple her individuality. But, she too, unlike Seva, fails to develop her own individuality, and allows the men to dominate her thoughts and feelings. It is a little surprising that Jyoti, an upper class and educated, modern girl should allow such experimentation with her life. Perhaps, the playwright, in some way, offers the answer towards the end, when Jyoti is completely disillusioned.

Seva tells Nath gravely that Jyoti has been advised rest by the doctor because of her pregnancy, but she has refused to come to her parents’ house for rest. Meanwhile, Nath has finished reading Aran’s autobiography and is all praise for it. But when Seva tells him that Aran beats Jyoti everyday and even kicks her in the belly, he is shocked. He cannot believe that a man, who could write such a wonderful book, can be so cruel towards his wife. Seva speaks out her pain to Nath, disillusioning him about Aran:

... The truth is that your Dalit son-in-law, who can write such a wonderful autobiography, and many lovely poems, wants to remain an idler. He wants his wife to work. And with her money he wants to drown himself in drink, and have a hell of a time with his friends. On top of that, for entertainment, he wants to kick his wife in the belly. Why not?... In this way he is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste. It appears that this is the monumental mission he has set out to fulfil. (KD 47-48)

Nath seems to break down completely on hearing the truth. He cannot come to terms with the fact that his daughter is tortured so cruelly. When he is asked to speak about
Aran’s book in public, he refuses to do so. Seva’s opinion about the book is that whatever the author has said about exploitation and injustice is hypocritical because the same man exploits her daughter, beats her and abuses her and her parents for their high caste. Seva is so furious that she wants to tell this to everyone in the world. Tendulkar brings to fore the injustice done to a woman on the basis of caste and creed; not only the woman, but also her parents are abused only because the husband feels inferior and wants to pamper his ego. Just as Jyoti knew of Aran’s caste before marriage, he too, knew of hers; so there is no reason for him to abuse her on the pretext of the caste. But Arun feels that he has caught a bird whose wings he can clip at his will. He taunts Nath: “… It is my great good fortune which made a fair and lovely bird from a well-to-do high-class background, fall to my lot” (KD 56). When Nath refuses to give a speech on Arun’s book, he blackmails him saying that people will gossip about Arun’s torturing Jyoti and throwing her out of the house, and would also doubt Nath: “… The rise of the Dalit son-in-law to literary heights caused heartburn in the upper caste, socialist father-in-law” (KD 55). After Arun goes away, Nath realizes his mistake of trying to justify the former and feels angry. But he has to speak on the book so that Jyoti might not suffer more. He speaks without any interest, praising Arun’s book. After the speech, he is completely disillusioned and shattered. He blames himself for letting Jyoti think too high of him and pushing her into marrying Arun: “I was a fool then. An ignorant fool…. it is an autobiography…. But the book… is a hoax…. Nothing is real in that book. Neither the man nor his values.” (KD 60)

Nath realizes that he has ruined his daughter’s life for the sake of his ideals; he has put his social reforms to test and pushed Jyoti into misery. But it is too late to repent for it because Jyoti comes and tells him that she will never return to Nath’s world. She also asks them not to come to her house and tells Nath bluntly that she does not belong to his family anymore and his speech was hypocritical and delivered against his own wishes. Jyoti has hardened completely and has no strength to shuttle between two contrasting worlds. She lashes out at Nath, blaming him for her misery. She tells him that it was he who had compelled her to think that a human being is always good, only his tendencies are evil. But she had come to learn that it is not always so:

… man and his inherent nature are never really two different things. Both are one, and inseparable…. You made me waste
twenty years of my life before I could learn this. I had to learn it on the strength of my own experience. I had to meet a man named Arun Athavale. Arun gave me what you had withheld from me. I must acknowledge my debt to him. (KD 67)

Jyoti is absolutely shattered and is no longer interested in life. She tells Nath that the same Arun is a poet and a lover and also a beast and a demon. Both the ‘Aruns’ are together, and are the same person. Nath had taught them never to run away from any situations; even if others did so, they should march on. Thus, all this learning had caused her sufferings. Jyoti feels that Nath has injected them with a drug of goodness and truth; hence she suffers more from her thoughts than Arun’s blows. Nath has suffused her innocent mind with views that are not applicable in life, as S. Babu puts it: “… she realizes the truth and tells her father in his face how he crippled her mind by setting unrealistic ideals” (115). Babu describes it as a ‘mental deformity’ that can help to exploit a person. Jyoti compares Nath to an exploiter of children: “… Someone said these people kidnap little children, break their limbs and make them cripples. Bhai, forgive me for my words, but you have made us… (She cannot go on)” (KD 69-70). Jyoti refuses to have any contact with Nath saying that she is no more not his daughter but only Arun’s wife. It is tragic to find that Jyoti has become as hard and harsh as Arun, a Dalit, whom she had dreamt of improving or making more humane. Dharan feels that: “The evolution of Jyoti from a soft-spoken, highly cultured Brahmin girl into a hardened Dalit girl is really incredible and distressing” (88). There is no come back for her, and she does not even want to do so, thus inflicting punishment on herself and on Nath. She readily accepts being a Dalit and her last words completely disillusion Nath: “… I am an untouchable, a scavenger. I am one of them. Don’t touch me. Fly from my shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable values” (KD 70). She sounds like Arun, thus becoming ‘Arun’ herself. After these words, she leaves Nath’s house, never to return again. The playwright has portrayed exploitation of women in this play in a slightly different manner; he shows that mental exploitation is equally painful or even more painful than the physical one.

_Ghashiram Kotwal_ also deals with the issue of women's exploitation. The play is about achieving power at any cost; the ‘cost’, here, is paid by a woman’s life. Ghashiram wants to avenge the people of Poona who had humiliated him. In order to do so, he has to be very powerful. So he decides to become a _Kotwal_ and wield
power. He uses his young daughter Gauri as bait to trap the lecherous Nana. Nana considers women as mere objects of sexual pleasure and once his lust is satisfied, he throws them away. He has an eye on Gauri and tells her that she should come to him without being afraid of Lord Ganapati as: “… he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won’t say anything!” (GK 28). In his blind lust he runs to catch Gauri, but instead catches Ghashiram. He persuades Ghashiram to bring the girl to him or he would punish the whole of Poona. Nana is only interested in exploiting women physically and describes Gauri’s beauty in words full of lust: “… What a bosom! Buds just blossoming… We’ll squeeze them like this!” (GK 30). Ghashiram agrees to give his daughter to Nana only under the condition that the latter would give him ‘power’ in return. Ghashiram, very shrewdly, sends his daughter Gauri to satisfy Nana’s lust so that he can blackmail him later on: “Now he’s in my hands…” (GK 31). He expresses his sorrow at giving away his daughter to the wrong person and ruining her life:

Oh, my daughter... The beast I’ve given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf!... Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter – a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach.... (GK 31)

But Ghashiram feels triumphant at the prospect of power that he will gain from this deal. This is proof enough to show how a father can sacrifice his daughter and his morals to attain power. Even though Ghashiram knows that he is ruining his daughter’s life by making her Nana’s whore, he does not hesitate to do so. Nana (and Ghashiram too) thinks of Gauri in terms of objects such as buds and fruits, things to be enjoyed for a moment and then thrown away. Gauri is not asked whether she is ready to sacrifice her life for her father or not. When Nana wants to spend another night with Gauri, Ghashiram asks him to give him the Kotwali by which he would keep people’s mouths shut. Ghashiram promises that if he is given this post, he would send Gauri to Nana’s place:

Ghashiram: This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to this palace again.

Nana: No! Send her. I’ll make you Kotwal. When will you send her?
Ghashiram: After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand! (GK 34)

Once Ghashiram is made the Kotwal, he makes rules stating that no one in the city of Poona will be involved in ‘immoral’ deeds:

Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit misdemeanour, to steal, to live with one’s divorced wife, to remarry if one’s husband is alive, to hide one’s caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide, without a permit, is a sin. A good woman may not prostitute herself, a Brahman may not sin, without a permit. (GK 37)

He makes rules for such deeds, which he himself has committed to become the Kotwal, forgetting the fact that he himself has done an immoral deed – that of making his daughter a whore. This brings out the hypocritical nature of Ghashiram, of how men make rules of their own for women and other inferior beings only to suit their needs.

Once Ghashiram is satisfied with his powers, he decides to get Gauri married to some ‘nice’ man, thinking that nobody would dare to refuse him. But when he goes to find Gauri, he learns that Nana has forced Gauri to abort, got her killed and is marrying (for the seventh time) a fourteen year old girl who is described as: “A just-this-year ripened bride” (GK 50). Nana has bought the girl with a bribe of hundred gold coins and a piece of land. Ghashiram is furious but can say nothing against Nana, as the latter is more powerful than him. When Ghashiram repents for his misdeed of exploiting Gauri, it is too late. Thus, in this power game, Gauri has to suffer moral degradation and face death even when she is innocent. All through the play Gauri is neither asked nor allowed to speak about the deal made between her father and Nana. She becomes a mere instrument in the hands of men who exploit her physically. For Nana, be it Gauri or any other woman, they are all ‘fruits and flowers’ to be ‘enjoyed’, ‘crushed’ and ‘thrown away’. He has seven to eight wives, yet he enjoys sexual pleasures with Gauri and marries another fourteen-year old girl for mere lust. Tendulkar, once again, depicts the helpless state of women who become mere pawns in the hands of men.

As has been seen, Tendulkar has successfully depicted the exploitation of women in his plays, and that has been his prime concern. Yet, the issues that he deals with in his plays are not limited to sufferings of women in society. He also portrays the male
counterparts as victims of same society, their individuality being drowned in the vast expanse of social norms and necessities. Thus, they are the helpless, sadistic, furious men who lash out their anger towards women and other inferior beings. Tendulkar’s plays give expression to the tormenting solitude and alienation of a modern individual in an urban society. These problems can be solved only when there is a feeling of equality towards all human beings in society, and ‘all’ includes men too, regardless of what class or caste they belong to. Silence! The Court is in Session characterizes not just women but even men who suffer due to their lack of ‘being something’ in society. To a large extent, Rokde also falls into the category of the minority; he is a victim of this society. Mr. and Mrs. Kashikar have adopted Rokde physically, but not psychologically. He is neither allowed to be on his own nor have an individual identity or power to take his own decisions. When Benare proposes to Rokde, his answer, in the words of Karnik, is: “I can’t do anything without Mrs. Kashikar’s permission. Don’t press me... I can’t help it. That’s one’s luck. I can’t think of marriage” (SCS 65). This shows the inability of Rokde to attain an independent, adult existence. Hence, he lashes out his sadistic frustration towards Benare by accusing and humiliating her. All the other male characters in this play also want to establish their own identity in society, but being failures, they have been deprived of it in some way or the other. Benare describes them all sarcastically – Mr. Kashikar is “Mr. Prime Objective” (SCS 6), Sukhatme is “An Expert on the Law” (SCS 6), Ponkshe is a “Sci-en-tist! Inter-failed!” (SCS 6), Damle as “an Intellectual” (SCS 6) and Karnik is a failed theatre actor. These men are unable to establish themselves in society and so take out their anger towards a helpless being like Benare. Dharan describes the attitude of these men as:

The Kashikars, Balu Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik of Silence!... merge as individuals belonging to the middle class who prove to be ineffectual and discontented. Their words and actions prove, beyond any doubt that they are neurotic, sadistic, conspiratorial and even treacherous. It is not out of genuine love for drama that they have turned to theatre activity, but out of sheer sense of their own personal failures in real life. Dejected, discontented and still daring, they can only behave cruelly towards one another. To expect them to be refined, truthful and generous is perhaps to ask for the impossible. (59)
In *Sakharam Binder*, though Sakharam believes in living in his own way, there is a little humane side to him too, which is seen in his playing of the *mrdanga*, doing *puja* everyday or bringing Lord Ganapati home. His humanistic approach is seen in his tribute to the whores whom he does not consider as immoral:

... She’ll go up 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 anybody.... 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 equals: O Lord: If anyone has sinned at all, it’s the others. Not me.’ (SB 130)

Sakharam mellows a little for Laxmi; he feels a tinge of compassion for her when she leaves. His crudeness is mainly because of the society that he has lived in, which makes an impact on him.

In *Kamala*, Jadav is caught up in the rat race of success and out of arrogance does everything that is unethical. Yet, one cannot help but feel slightly sympathetic towards him at the end, when he too becomes a victim of the same society. Try as much as he would, he can never overpower the authorities that are above him and has to give in to their decisions. In the end, being drunk he falls asleep and is rendered totally helpless. Dharan explains Jadav’s situation as:

... Jadav... exposes himself to ridicule all around because of his insensible pursuit after worldly fame. In the process, despite his initial success, he loses his job and lands in a situation that can be saved only by his wife’s sympathy, care and understanding, though he has been treating her all along with utmost impudence. (59)

*Kanyadaan* shows how Nath is disillusioned about Arun and suffers for Jyoti; he accepts sadly that Jyoti’s tortures are a result of the hollow ideals he had taught her:

... If she has committed any crime it is this: she took her father’s words for gospel truth. She adopted her father’s values. She was guided by her father’s humanism and liberalism. Jaya Prakash... Reject your father.... Don’t ever rely on his wisdom. (KD 62)
Nath suffers because he sees that what he has learned from the society of his youth cannot be applied anymore in the present times. He would have to unlearn everything, and also see his daughter endure mental and physical misery.

Rajninath in *Vultures* suffers the most because he is an outcaste not only from his family, but also from society. He is an illegitimate son and is allowed no rights over anything. He is a loner, despising the environment he sees in his father’s family. Hence, when his father offers to give him money so as to win him over to his side, Rajninath scowls at him and asks him to go away. He is a failure which is not his fault, and in a heart-rending speech he tells Rama: “... Why did you tell all this to someone whose own life’s a burden to him? Someone as barren as yourself?... I am a failure myself” (VS 243). Tendulkar points out the failures of his male characters in a very subtle manner, and they too become a minority in their own way. Even Ghashiram in *Ghashiram Kotwal* becomes a victim of society. He tries to overpower Nana, but fails because of the latter’s political moves. The people are very angry about Ghashiram’s ways of wielding power. He loses his power and his only daughter while trying to become the most powerful person of Poona, and meets his end tragically. Thus, the ‘victimizer’ is also a ‘victim’ in some way, showing the alienation and fragmentation of human beings. Men, in Tendulkar’s plays, usually suffer due to a conflict between individual identity and family values. Even the family is a source of divisiveness for contemporary human beings; the plays of Tendulkar show how family itself can turn out to be destructive for an individual. As Maya Pandit puts it:

> The characters have a wider range of social location.... Yet all of them debunk the myths about family as a place of security, comfort and protection. They bring out the sham, the hypocrisy and double standards for men and women. What is common to all of the characters is the control of the rigid norms of patriarchy exercised on the behaviour of both men and women. (8)

Though Sakharam in *Sakharam Binder* says that he does not believe in the institution of marriage and shuns husbands, the rules he has made for his house are just like the ones in a marriage. He is equally cruel to women, and also capable of being a zombie. One is not shocked by the fate of Sakharam, Laxmi or Champa as much as by the moral degradation that creeps into the soul of the sanctity of family as an institution.
All three are victims of the ‘family norms’. *Kanyadaan* shows how the family can influence and mould the sensibility of an individual. But the playwright shows that this influence is not for good, instead for a destructive purpose. Jyoti’s life becomes a medium to experiment with the ideals that her family thinks of as being great. Thus, she too, treads on the same path carved by those ideals, and when she realizes her mistake, there is only one alternative for her – to go back to her cruel husband’s family, the way of wilful self-destruction. *Vultures* depicts the picture of a family, which is completely violent and murderous. It is a rat race for the family members – to cut each other’s throats for money and break the family apart. This play portrays the disintegration of a family, where the outward façade has also decayed. *Ek Ziddi Ladki* shows how a family, being corrupted by the head, refuses to allow control to an honest individual, thus depriving the person of self-dignity. The playwright indicates that this individual moral degradation moves even into the wider context – that of society; society makes and breaks a person. All human beings are social animals and cannot live without the company and approval of society, even if it compels them to abide by its set norms. The same is seen in the plays of Tendulkar. He, basically, proves that any individual – be it a man or a woman – who is a part of society, is expected to live by its norms. No one is free from the tangles of society, which has been ruling mankind for ages. Everyone is categorized according to class, caste or sex, and is graded as superior or inferior on the basis of their importance decided by society itself. Hence, society plays power games at the personal as well as social level. But society does not concern itself only to issues related to family or individuals. It is also concerned, in some way, to issues of politics because there is a significant effect of politics on society. Thus, the issues become socio-political, as exposed by Tendulkar in his plays. His plays expose the political and socio-political defects prevalent in society.

Politics is a power game played at all levels of human life – internal as well as external. The plays discussed above depict politics at social and familial levels. But the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* depicts politics not only at social or familial levels but also at the level of power and authority in a State. This play marks the playwright as a genius not just in playwriting, but also as an expert in folk theatre and theatre devices. It is a musical, historical play set in the late eighteenth century, exploring the degeneration of the socio-political fabric during the last days of Peshwa rule. Nana Phadnavis (Balaji Janardan Bhanu) was the Chancellor of the Peshwa in Poona; he
was a Machiavelli who maintained his power till his death. He was a shrewd administrator, successful in keeping the Britishers at bay and preventing them from entering Poona. Thus, the people ignored his flaws and trusted him blindly. He became a cult-hero in history, and when Tendulkar, through this play, depicted his drawbacks, he had to face strong criticism. The play is a satire on the power politics and the social hierarchy not only of those days, but also of contemporary times. The aim of the playwright is to expose such political games by making it relevant even to contemporary politics. Ghashiram is not a mere individual, but a subject and a metaphor, expressing the opinion of the playwright. Tendulkar tells Bandyopadhyay that ‘Ghashirams’ or ‘Nanas’ are never dead:

... Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashiram; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow, and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams. (3)

The play begins with Ganapati *vandana*, which satirically makes fun of God, and also of the chaste and learned Brahmins of Poona who perform sacred austerities by day and indulge in lecherous deeds by night. The *Sutradya* sings the *vandana* along with the chorus of the human wall made of the Brahmins: “Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance. / We the pious Brahmins bow and prance” (GK 12). The *Sutradya* informs the readers or audience that all the Brahmins are highly learned scholars, and their slyness comes out through their language, for instance when the *Sutradya* bumps into a scurrying Brahmin the dialogue that emerges is:

Brahmin: Oy, oy. You son of a bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?... You bumped into me, you son of a Bastard....

Bumps into a holy Brahmin!

Sutradya: But not a Brahmin's wife!

Brahmin: Enough!... Then I would have you riding backward on a donkey with sindur all over your head!

Sutradya: But there is no donkey.

Brahmin: ... No donkey in the Peshwa's kingdom? What do you think the Peshwa is? If the Peshwa wanted he could have one thousand donkeys all lined up in the city of Poona.

58
These lines are comic in effect, but are also ironic comments on the ways of the Brahmins. Hence, the reference to the Brahmin's wife becomes ironic because as night falls, the Brahmins begin to go to Bavannakhani, the red-light area of Poona. The Brahmins are hypocrites as they go to this area on the pretext of going to the temple for *kirtans*. The Brahmin wives stay at home to make love to their Maratha landowners. This exposes the corruption in the fabric of society and in the institution of marriage. The Brahmin wall sings of Bavannakhani as: “Bavannakhani / Mathura avatarli” (GK 19). They compare it to Mathura where Lord Krishna sang and danced with the milkmaids. The comparison itself is ironic because there is no religious or spiritual aspect attached to it, but is a mere sexual instinct.

Ghashiram, a newcomer from Kanauj, dances ludicrously with Gulabi, the prostitute, while the Brahmins eye with lust her erotic dance. Soon enough, the announcement of Nana’s arrival is made: “… The night progresses / And the Peshwa’s Chief Minister, / Nana of the nine courts, / Nana of the wealth and power, / Nana Phadnavis / To Gulabi’s place proceeds” (GK 18). Nana comes and dances, and while doing so he sprains his ankle. As he is hobbling, Ghashiram offers Nana his back to place the sprained foot on. When Nana sees him, he thanks him and offers him a reward. The smart Ghashiram, while pointing to the foot in his hand, at once replies: “In my hands has fallen – grace! / All here envy me my place. / This is a gift to last me all my days” (GK 20). Nana is flattered by these words and gives him a pearl necklace. When Nana leaves, Gulabi snatches the necklace from Ghashiram and gets him thrown out by her thugs. When the great *dakshina* ceremony for the Brahmins is held, Ghashiram also goes there to get some gifts. But instead, he is thrown into prison on charge of theft. No one listens to him or the Peshwa who says that Ghashiram is not a thief. In the prison, the *Sutradhar* acting as a fellow prisoner tells him that it is no use screaming, for the police will not listen to him. In an ironic comment, the *Sutradhar* tells Ghashiram that the thieves are at the mercy of the police: “… It’s a partnership. / The thief is a simple thief. / The police are official thieves. / If a thief wants to live / To the police he’s got to give” (GK 26). What the *Sutradhar* says is quite relevant even in the present times; the issues of bribery and exploitation are not unknown to people today. Those in power exploit the weaker sections for their selfish motives. Ghashiram is thrown out on the street and ordered
to leave the city on pain of death. All the citizens of Poona look down on him, and Ghashiram feels greatly humiliated. He vows to avenge his humiliation on the people of Poona:

... I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone!... There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You've made me an animal... I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you.... Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more. (GK 27)

With this announcement Ghashiram goes away. So far in the play, Ghashiram belongs to the weaker section and hence, is made a victim of the power and authority of Poona city. But being enraged, Ghashiram decides to take revenge, and soon enough power comes into his hands; thus, the victim becomes the victimizer. Ghashiram is the symbol of authority, which is established and destroyed by others. Though 'Ghashirams' are under the notion that in political intrigues they are all-powerful, they become mere pawns in the hands of the most powerful.

As avowed by Ghashiram, he comes back to Poona to avenge his humiliation; he uses his daughter to establish his power and authority. A few days later, when some people go to the temple of Lord Ganesh to listen to a Haridasa reciting a religious tale, Nana also comes there to leer at women. When the recitation is over everybody goes away except a pretty girl on whom Nana sets his eyes. He tells her that she should come to him and he will fulfil all her desires. He assures her that no one has the guts to question him, the great Chancellor, and hence, she should not be afraid of anyone. When the girl replies that the Lord is watching, Nana tells her: "That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati?... Look, he has two wives" (GK 28). Nana assures her that she need not be frightened of him as she is like 'someone else's' daughter for him and he chases her. In this chase blinded by lust, he catches a servant who is none other than Ghashiram in disguise. Ghashiram promises to bring her the next day, but Nana urges him with: "If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you, if she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan!..." (GK 30). All the citizens of Poona know that there is no one who can overpower Nana as fear of him grows day-by-day in the city. Ghashiram sends Gauri to Nana and though he expresses his anger and sorrow for making his daughter a whore for Nana, he is not ready to give up his fight for revenge. This
shows that Ghashiram, a father, loves power and his ego more than his daughter and her morals. He is ready to sacrifice both to attain authority over the city of Poona.

Nana is not satiated and wants to enjoy erotic pleasures with Gauri again: “Just one more time, Ghashiram... you bastard” (GK 32). But Ghashiram is clever enough to take advantage of this opportunity and he refuses saying that people will talk about him and his daughter and they would lose their reputation. Nana asks him to do anything to get Gauri:

Nana: Don’t say no, you outcaste! Don’t you have a heart?
Ghashiram: The heart that gives a daughter to your whims and fancies, Highness. (GK 33)

Ultimately Ghashiram gives a solution to Nana, which would stop people from gossiping about his daughter. He asks Nana to make him the Kotwal of Poona. Nana tries to persuade him to demand something else, but Ghashiram does not change his demand. Thus, Nana has to accept this solution to fulfil his lust. He tells Ghashiram:

Nana: Bastard. You’ve got me in a narrow pass.
Ghashiram: Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter. (GK 34)

Nana knows that he has no other choice, and to fulfil his lust, he issues the order of handover of Kotwali to Ghashiram. But sly as Nana is, the politician in him is not defeated and is only happy to let Ghashiram do that which he himself wants to do. After Ghashiram leaves, he speaks of how he can exploit the latter’s authority once his lust is satiated:

Go, Ghashya, old bastard.... We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don’t know the ways of this Nana. This time there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we’ll fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we will make the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you’re a foreigner. I have put you on Poona’s back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. you’ll not be able to join them; they’ll never trust you even if you do. Because you are a stranger, you’re an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the position of Kotwali! We are your sole support... What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our Kotwal pays for it... (GK 34-35)
Even before Ghashiram can take over power into his hands, Nana has planned to overthrow him. Though Ghashiram thinks of himself as smart, nobody can outsmart Nana, the vilest politician who takes full advantage of the power given to Ghashiram. Thus, Nana enjoys all the fruits without any loss on his part. Both, Ghashiram and Nana, need each other and have to keep up with each other in order to progress.

Samik Bandyopadhyay observes that:

Nana needs Ghashiram, and Ghashiram needs Nana; but in the shifting game of power, it is only a temporary adjustment that Nana exploits as long as necessary and can drop unceremoniously the moment it has served its purpose. (3)

Mediations of power only act as masks that hide the actual exercise of power. This profound politics is beyond Ghashiram's comprehension and only a statesman like Nana can understand it. The most bitter and autocratic part of politics is that it is capable of wielding power in such a manner that even the authority who has the highest power, fails to understand it.

Once Ghashiram is made the Kotwal, he becomes arrogant and starts exercising his power ruthlessly. He passes orders banning all kinds of immoral deeds such as prostitution, pimping, stealing or even committing suicide, and bans any action done without his permission. He demands permits even for every routine activity. Ghashiram goes around the city late in the night to keep a watch over his people:

Ghashiram Kotwal started making the rounds of Poona at night, after the eleven o'clock cannon. Started ruling in person. Accosted anyone he met in the streets. Whipped people. Arrested people. Demanded people's permits. Imprisoned people. Sued people. (GK 37)

He lashes out mercilessly at them and the whole of Poona trembles at his name. Revenue increases and crimes decrease; prostitutes' houses go vacant, pimps turn into beggars and counterfeit coins become worthless. The reign of the Kotwal is summed up in two lines: “Gauri orders, Nana does, Ghashiram rules.... All of Poona loses heart” (GK 37). The same situation in which Ghashiram was humiliated and beaten up, takes place in his rule, but with a reversal – Ghashiram is the Victimizer, while the people of Poona are his Victims. He is happy to have the whole city straightened out, even if it is at the cost of the innocents. For instance, he captures a Brahmin on the pretext of stealing, throws him in prison, makes him go through a torturing ordeal
and compels him to confess the theft. He also gets his hands cut off and throws him out of Poona. The Brahmin curses him of dying childless and suffering endless torture just like him, which foreshadows the future of Ghashiram. But it does not affect Ghashiram, for he is too blind in his lust for power and authority. When he feels satiated of his deed, he decides to get his daughter married to a worthy man:

I've got the Kotwali and I've got Poona straightened out! All these hard, proud Brahmins are soft as cotton now. No one dares to look Ghashiram straight in the eye! Now, once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter... and get her married, then everything will be the way I want it.... no one’s tongue will dare utter one word about my daughter. And if some tongue starts wagging, it’s easy to cut it off!... It’s easy to find a bridegroom when one has money, jewels, and respect! (GK 48)

It is clear that through the wedding, Ghashiram wants to exercise his power, for unless his power is known, no one will accept his daughter who sleeps with Nana. Ghashiram thinks that his power and wealth can fetch a husband for Gauri. But things do not take place as he has planned. Nana, a sly fox as he is, gets an upper hand over his Kotwal. He forces Gauri to abort his child, gets her killed and marries for the seventh time, a fourteen-year-old girl whom he has bought by giving hundred gold coins and a piece of land.

Ghashiram is infuriated to know about his daughter’s death. He approaches Nana furiously who is firm in his attitude: “Ghashya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened protocol should not be forgotten. Don’t forget that. Whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now – bow” (GK 54). Ghashiram has to obey Nana like a tamed animal. Nana praises his work of Kotwal and consoles him by quoting the scriptures. He explains to Ghashiram very ‘philosophically’ not to cry over the dead, for everybody has to die one day. It is an irony that a lecherous and cunning man like Nana explains such high-levelled scriptures to Ghashiram, and that too, for the death of the latter’s daughter whom he has killed mercilessly. Nana uses Gauri for his selfish pleasures and then throws her away. His power is such that no one dares to say anything to him. He tells Ghashiram that they are bound by their respective duties, and must perform them without any deviation. Nana allows his Kotwal the liberty to cut off any head that speaks against them, for he does not want
his own name to be spoiled: “... What has happened, has happened. All the world
need not know.... Your reputation is our reputation.... Every care should be taken
that no one anywhere speaks of this” (GK 56). Ghashiram had once used his daughter
to achieve power, and now he utilizes her death to exercise power. But this time he
becomes all the more infuriated and blood thirsty. The scenes of tortures (that
Ghashiram puts the people of Poona through) remind us of the Elizabethan revenge
plays, full of violence and bloodshed. The citizens of Poona fear the very name of
their Kotwal as he has acquired a penchant for human blood. For instance, he
condemns the Brahmins of South-India on a false charge of theft. The prisons are
overcrowded and some prisoners die due to suffocation. The people are enraged and
rise against Ghashiram demanding the order to behead him. Nana is too happy to pass
the order, thinking that: “Use a thorn to take out a thorn.... The disease has been
stopped. Anyway, he was no use any more” (GK 63). Ghashiram’s head is shaven
and anointed with sindur, he is taken around the city on a camel and tied to the leg of
an elephant. His hands are tied at the back and he is thrown to the angry mob. The
people start pelting stones at him, and thus he meets his fatal end: “And in the end
came The End” (GK 64). Before breathing his last, Ghashiram, overcome by remorse,
still dares the irate mob. He tells them to beat him some more, infuriating them by
calling them pigs and cowards. In this manner, he also repents for wasting his
innocent daughter’s life: “… I danced on your chests but I wasted the life of my little
daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. ... Cut off my
hands and feet. Crack my skull!” (GK 65). Ghashiram falls dead and the people are
relieved to see him die. Bandyopadhyay calls this a “political relief” (7) for the
people. Superiors such as ‘Nana’ take advantage of illusory power such as
‘Ghashiram’ to keep a hold on their authority. Nobody is affected by the death of
people like Ghashiram; when he dies, Nana comes on the scene and announces:

... A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today....
A disease has been controlled. The demon, Ghasya Kotwal,
who plagued all of us, has met his death.... Let the corpse of
sinful Ghasya rot.... All the relatives of Ghasya Savaldas
will be found, bound and expelled from the city.... We have
commanded that there be festivities for three days to mark this
happy occasion. (GK 65-66)
Then Gulabi comes dancing on the scene; Nana and the people also join her in the dance. Thus, the fall of Ghashiram from being a Kotwal to dying a dog’s death is not just a political intrigue, but also a symbol of violence and degradation that has corrupted the roots of every society. Tendulkar points out that the death of this Ghashiram is the death of a mere individual. ‘Ghashirams’ and ‘Nanas’ will be ever present in a society as long as the hierarchy of power exists. People think that Ghashiram is dead, but someone or the other will play his role. The aim of the playwright is neither to create a historical or sensational play nor to comment on the Peshwa rule and rulers, nor to expose the hypocrisies of the Brahmins. He created Ghashiram, making his relevance unlimited to any time or place. Tendulkar considers Ghashiram as a creation of socio-political forces. Bandyopadhyay’s analysis can sum up the intention and mode of the play:

In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, power is defined ‘horizontally’... in terms of individuals; from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; played out against a back-ground of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on the strategies of power. A whole aura of hymns and religious ceremonial provide the ironic screen that is pierced through and through by the crudest exercises of power. (3)

The playwright is of the opinion that this play can be relevant to many such contemporary events wherein the creators of power are themselves the destroyer of it, as in the words of Girish Karnad:

In his *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar uses *Dashavatara*... to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of ‘demons’ in public. These demons are initially created by political leaders for the purposes of their own power games, but ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy their own creators.... (A decade after the play was written, in Punjab Sant Bhindranwale and Mrs. Indira Gandhi seemed to be re-enacting the theme in real life in horrifying detail). (15)

It is important to understand the theme of this play or there might be a misconception about the theme of this power game. Even the religious sanctity in the play is full of sham and hypocrisy. The Brahmins keep on reciting the chants of gods, singing the
Ganapati Vandana or comparing the domain of courtesans to Mathura. But along with this, they sing and dance sensually, leer at the prostitutes and commit all the misdeeds unfit for them.

Tendulkar’s plays deal mostly with realistic aspects of life. Various facets of human characters and life are found in his plays. As Banerjee puts it:

Thematically, his plays have ranged from the alienation of the modern individual to the contemporary politics, from socio-individual tensions to the complexities of human character, from the exploration of man-woman relationships to reinterpretations of historical episodes. But it is probably only natural that his works should have such a wide ambit when one considers the multifacetedness of his creative genius. (xix)

The use of devices in some of his plays proves his genius and help in emphasising the theme of the plays. Tendulkar does not use folk-tales, legends, myths or history for his plays. Whatever devices are seen are mostly in the form of symbols. Yet, the most unique aspect in his plays is the use of the device of the human wall in Ghashiram Kotwal. Tendulkar uses this device as a part of the theme and the play centres around it. It is a borrowed folk form and its presence creates not just a unique technique, but also lends a helping hand to the movement of the theme. All through the play, the human wall of the Brahmins of Poona act as a chorus or mob, gives entries to the actors to fill the gaps, dances and sings and also narrates the incidents. When they all turn their back to the audience, it is to be understood that the wall’s presence is not there; it also works as a curtain to conceal another scene, supposedly in another place and depicts various backgrounds for the actions or the scenes. The human wall represents the people of society as a whole and who can stand up against an individual. As Bandyopadhyay puts it:

The human wall serves as an excellent symbol of the mechanism of secrecy, hiding and revealing happenings by human devices. It is the all again that as the singing chorus uses the chant of saints’ and gods’ names as yet another screen of complacence or consolation cast over the yawning horror of corruption and tyranny. (5)

Again, the use of music and dance sets this play apart from his other plays. The Theatre Academy, which did the Marathi production of this play, describes this
device as: "... A touch of opera with verse, music and prose fusing into one another in a strange, compelling alchemy. The ballet, blending with the traditional folk dances, sets the mood and tempo of the decadent and bawdy era." However, Tendulkar has not used a similar kind of device in any of his other plays; hence Ghashiram Kotwal can be acclaimed amongst the best plays with such unique devices, containing music and dance.

Another example of Tendulkar’s genius in the use of devices is seen in the play Silence! The Court is in Session. He uses the technique of a play-within-a-play. The actual play is to start later in the evening. The actors decide to rehearse the play and also teach a villager court procedures. In doing so, they enact the actual case of Leela Benare who is completely shattered at the end when confronted by so many colleagues. As Dharan points out:

The ‘play-within-the-play’, namely the ‘mock-trial’ is so conceived and executed that the ‘make-believe’ or ‘illusion’ itself assumes the garb of reality. The ‘mock-trial’ originally designed as a means to pass time, eventually, becomes a real trial at which Benare’s private life is ruthlessly exposed, much to the malicious glee of her tormentors. (97)

This technique gives a glimpse into the past of Benare and informs the readers or audience that whatever is being said has actually happened in Benare’s life; the mock-trial works as a flashback. The mock-trial is similar to the plot of Karnad’s Hayavadana or Naga-Mandala, where Karnad has employed the technique of ‘story-within-the-story’. The play also makes use of symbols such as the door latch, which gets locked from outside if not handled carefully. The latch is a metaphor for a family or a society that tends to ‘lock’ the individuality and liberty of a person. Similarly, the phone calls in Kamala are significant as they indicate how busy and well-known Jadav is. Most of his work is carried out on the phone and so it is his order for all the members of the family to attend to the phone calls and take messages. These phone calls also bring out the ‘bonded’ situation of Sarita, who has to inevitably attend all calls and take down messages to avoid her husband’s wrath. Dharan observes:

The phone calls also serve to indicate how slavish and claustrophobic Sarita has been reduced to, having been married to Jadav. She is expected to note down each call and
if she fails to do so, Jadav gets furious with her and abuses her.

(64)

These phone calls also help the playwright to suggest many incidents, which are not shown on stage. For instance, the whole incident of 'Press Conference' is not shown on stage, but arranged through the phone, and on his return from the Conference, Jadav is congratulated over the phone for its success.

Tendulkar makes use of the imagery of birds to symbolize the weaker and the stronger personalities of characters and the evil and the good in human life. Leela Benare is the innocent 'sparrow' caught among the 'crows' that have a scavenging nature. The 'crow' is also Professor Damle who does not care to know what happens to Benare once he leaves her. The 'crow' in Tendulkar's play is quite different from the 'Crow' of Ted Hughes who comments on the disillusioning and existential nature of life. In *Vultures*, Rama is compared to a 'sparrow' trapped amongst the 'vultures' bent upon eating the flesh of others. Her family is engulfed in utter violence and selfishness. Thus, being meek, she has no other alternative but to follow them. Rajninath's poem properly describes them as the 'vultures' cursed to live in the guise of men: “The tale of the five vultures / Had this end. / The story of men accursed. / Or else of vultures cursed / To live their lives as men” (VS 265). In *Sakharam Binder* Dawood suggests to Sakharam that he catch a new ‘bird’ after Laxmi leaves the house: “… when are you going to get a new bird?” (SB 154). The connotation of a bird with reference to women is aptly suggestive of the issue of gender discrimination that is dealt with in Tendulkar’s plays. In plays like *Vultures* and *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar makes use of the device of poetry. Rajninath is a poet and he narrates most of the incidents in poems. Banerjee’s observation about these poems is: “Tendulkar makes Rajninath recite three poems, at the beginning and end of Act I and at the conclusion, which add a special dimension to the play” (xiii). Through his poems, Rajninath speaks of the degraded atmosphere in the Pitale family and Rama’s condition in that house. His poems also reveal his angst of being an ‘Outsider’ among his own people; the poems recited by Benare reveal her situation of helplessness in society and bring out her deep, innate feelings. *Ghashiram Kotwal* has dialogues in verse form – a device, which is reminiscent of the Sanskrit plays and of those of the earlier generation playwrights like Tagore and Aurobindo. The use of lights in stage directions convey the passage of time, for instance, when the lights in *Kamala* fade out, it suggests the passage of the day (from morning to evening). The same is seen in
most of the plays. The lights also work as an indication of the inner workings of the characters’ minds, especially when there is a stream of light on a particular character.

An attempt has been made to analyse the themes and the devices in Tendulkar’s plays and relate them to contemporary times. It may sometimes seem a little difficult to find an exact relevance of his themes in modern times because conditions have altered. Yet they have not been eradicated totally. Issues have merely changed colour, but even today solutions need to be found. There are some changes in the roles of women or of any individual in society of present days; society, today, has become more tolerant in many ways. But the problems do not cease to exist. Tendulkar’s belief that whatever is the condition, violence will still exist at some or the other level, proves itself evermore. As Ashis Nandy points out:

His consistent, prolonged engagement with human aggression has made him one of the most distinguished social theorists of violence in the country.... Even when violence is not ostensibly his theme, it casts its shadow on his characters... By bringing their world close to ours through his creative powers he has shaped the way we look at ourselves. (ix)

The latent theme of violence – though not overtly, yet covertly – is of utmost significance in all of Tendulkar’s plays. Violence is the way of life, as the playwright believes, and all his plays, those discussed above and even those, which are not discussed, have violence hidden in them. Tendulkar writes in a humanistic mode. Human being is the centre of all activities. Hence, his plays can be categorized as humanistic and naturalistic, depicting the stark realities of life. Tendulkar accepts this category and tells Bhave: “I write about the life around me. If it is accepted that I depict human life from my point of view, then I am ready even to accept that I have borrowed when actually I have not” (CIT 145). One cannot help but believe that the works of this playwright have been his interpretations of life as he has observed it.
NOTES