CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Ever since the introduction of American Studies in India in the late 50s, American literature has become an integral part of syllabi in almost all the departments of English. With the establishment of the American Studies Research Centre at Hyderabad, a strong impetus was given to research in American literature. Thus, in a period spanning roughly about forty years or so, research in American literature in India has had a substantial history in terms of thematic studies, author studies, genre studies, etc. Surprisingly, with the occasional exception of a research study like Whitman and Subramaniam Bharati, the phenomenon of the relationship between American literature and regional literatures in India has not received the kind of critical attention it deserves. The present researcher believes that this relationship can be studied at several levels—the study of the literary interface between Vijay Tendulkar and Tennessee Williams being one of them. The present study is therefore a modest step in this relatively unexplored area of research.

The term ‘literary interface’ suggests the common spaces shared by two or more literary traditions, two or more literary icons, etc. A study in literary interface, therefore, explores the ‘facts, problems, considerations, theories, practices, etc.’ shared by two or more literary traditions, two or more literary icons. The present researcher has made a modest attempt to explore the literary interface of Marathi theatre and American theatre in general and Vijay Tendulkar and Tennessee Williams in particular.

The history of Marathi theatre is characterized by a number of translations of American plays made into Marathi. It was Vijay Tendulkar who spent one full year in producing the Marathi translation of Williams’s Streetcar Named Desire as Vasanachakra. Almost all his plays written after Shantata Court Chalu Ahe are characterised by his recurrent pre-occupation with the themes of sex and violence, a concern obviously having remarkable association with the similar concern with sex and violence pervading Williams’s plays. The present study examined this complex literary relationship between Tendulkar and Williams.
The failure of international academicians to deal with the modern corpus of indigenous writings in India, its relation with the colonial past or its relevance to the contemporary canon highlights the misguided critical focus rather than intentional negligence or indifference. The present analysis therefore intentionally focused on Marathi theatre that goes unheeded at home and abroad equally.

Vijay Tendulkar’s Marathi plays are manifestations of the cultural matrices, deeply rooted in the postcolonial Indian milieu. They carry emotional and sociopolitical meanings quite similar to those associated with the bourgeois domestic sphere in western drama. Tendulkar’s works show an impact of Ibsen but certainly cannot be labeled as servile imitation. As a prolific writer, Tendulkar’s plays show a kaleidoscopic variety of themes and styles. His delineation of women is most endearing and convincing in the context of Indian drama. These characters are not idealized or glorified, instead they are lively, vivacious, fully-drawn figures that reveal a broad spectrum from gullible to manipulative such as Benare, Champa, Vijaya, from flexible to headstrong best illustrated by Laxmi and Baby, conservative to rebellious—Rama and Anjali Bhide and sacrificing to exacting women such as Sarita and Mitra. Equally appealing are the pen-portraits of the male figures such as Jaisingh Jadhav, Mahipati Porparnekar who are qualified by their professions in the social circle that they belong. Sheer malignity is incarnated by Ramakant, Umakant, Papa Pitale, Kashikar, Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Sakharam and Ghashiram. These men are clearly opportunists who reflect the moral deterioration in the materialistic world. They unscrupulously commit physical, emotional and moral atrocities. These male-chauvinists exploit the women, the vulnerable lot to masquerade their potent weaknesses. In Gidhade the brothers torture Manik and Rama, whereas Shantata Court Chalu Ahe depicts the false bravado of the men who target Benare. If Sakharam exploits Laxmi and Champa, Ghashiram barters his own daugher and Arun seeks sadistic pleasure in torturing his pregnant wife. Shivapa ruins Baby’s life and Nana kills Gouri after impregnating her. These men dishonour the sanctity of the institution of marriage and render the value system defunct by trampling on individual freedom and the rights of the women.

Besides memorable characterization Tendulkar excelled in technical innovation and stylistic devices. His potentialities as an experimental dramatist are illustrated by the
superb blending of folk forms with the mythic and historical material in *Ghashiram Kotwal* and his presentation of human wall testify to his craftsmanship. His radical ideas manifested in variegated dramatic forms that employed realism, naturalism, expressionism, surrealism, attested his artistic supremacy in the world of drama and correspondingly awarded a distinct status to Marathi drama among canonical works. Tendulkar’s innovative techniques, his gallery of characters, the thematic variance promoted by anthropological-intercultural approaches of the West regardless the deprecatory vituperations as being ‘uncreatively derivative’ leveled against some of his plays, undisputedly establish him as an avant-garde playwright of Indian theatre.

Despite some lingering critical fixation on the personal element in Tennessee Williams’s plays, it is feasible that spectators now have enough objectivity to see his most individualized works on their own terms and to assess whether they are viable unaccompanied by the biographical perspective. Far removed from the superficial sophistication and glibness that catered to the public tasks Williams ventured to create a favorable ambience for androgynous relationship through his artistic enterprise. Significantly the homosexuals like Skipper, or Allan, the teen-aged husband of Blanche, unable to exhibit forbearance, meet their pre-destined end. Williams withdrew from melodramatic portrayal of characters as either white-washed or abominable creatures. He dared to present thoughts and ideas that were generally considered incredible and repulsive. The women he projected seem to be archetypal configurations of his own thwarted hopes and desires. Laura and Blanche have their own illusory worlds; Maxine and Alexandra are characterized by their voluptuousness; Alma and Lady willfully indulge in promiscuity though for different reasons. Alma, Maggie, Catherine and Hannah are emissaries of truth who help the weak men to confront reality. Presumably Williams’s upbringing in a female dominated household afforded a better exposure to the women’s psyche and complex emotional patterns. Nonetheless his male protagonists too display the masculine zeal and virile energy. Gay or straight, weak or strong, they successfully demand attention to their own microcosmic spheres. From escapists and fugitives like Brick and Tom to domineering Big Daddy and Boss Finley, the range of male portraits is confounding. Williams’s personal lyricism, his authentic depiction of dehumanized passions of power and relationships, his unparalleled contribution of
“plastic theatre” that laid perennial thematic emphasis on the need to abolish loneliness and alienation, featured his dramatic dexterity and craftsmanship. Further, it is evident from Williams’s own remarks that he orchestrated his plays from his own experience as resilience and an impetus to seek new forms. His plays cannot entirely disclaim biography, nevertheless have become supercharged electromagnetic fields that allure responses from critics and scholars. Although it has been difficult to disentangle Williams’s works from the antagonistic biographical criticism, his canon merits much more attention and appreciation for his intricate use of symbolism, his ingenious, revolutionary “plastic theatre” and unique characterization.

The present researcher has argued that there is a very complex literary interface of Tendulkar and Williams. Their plays are chosen for comparative analysis, not on the basis of some uniform notion of typicality or significance, but on account of their compatibility with the thematic concerns. The emphasis of the co-relation is primarily the treatment of sex and violence that indisputably endorses the proximity amid the two playwrights and the struggle both undertook to battle public censure and social abhorrence for being radical, unorthodox in their literary odyssey. Another significant fact, as mentioned earlier, is Tendulkar’s translation of Williams’s *The Streetcar named Desire* as *Vasnachakra* in Marathi which singularly substantiates the intertextuality and ultimately dissolves the hegemonic disparity establishing the resemblance between the two great writers.

The social environment in the contemporary world is too glib for the ordinary folk and since they do not find a challenge in social life, they attempt to find fulfillment in the cozy comfort of private lives. Momentarily, private life offers them the illusion of fulfillment that is denied in public life; and the disenchantment in social life goads them to the haven of domestic happiness. These new protagonists recognize the ineffectiveness of protest against gigantic structures of commercial, urbanized, industrial civilization and in their abandonment and calm, refuse to accord any importance to contemporary society. So complete is their refutation of social values and ethical norms that they become signposts indicating the spiritual bankruptcy of the mass technological age. These are the qualities that define the characters of Williams’s and Tendulkar’s artistic world. Significant changes in the cultural ethos after the first and second world wars are
effectively reflected in the works of both the dramatists. Being journalists at one time in life certainly granted a new insight to both the playwrights who tried to capture the essence of the transitory phase of the society. It is remarkable that both these playwrights who were poignantly aware of their times—erosion of social values, lack of sensitivity, and fragility of relationships—tried to develop a new quasi-human language of realism that compelled the readers and audience to penetrate the issues and set them thinking.

Williams and Tendulkar seem to be artistic crusaders who raise the important issues of moral and physical excesses in the form of sex and violence. Though the duo does not assume any moralistic stance and refrains from commenting on the solutions, if there are any, they certainly play a vital role in creating awareness about the moral decay and corruption, rampant social evil that is all pervasive. Like Tendulkar’s title Manus Navache Bet (An Island Called Man) and Williams’s oft quoted line ‘We’re under a life-long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skin’, the climate of alienation has been a dominating thematic concern in their works. The playwrights in their criticisms and vilification of the materialistic customs have paved the way for a more meaningful humane culture.

A close scrutiny of the texts authored by the two playwrights brings to light certain more important similarities and differences.

There is no common thread or customized pattern that evolves in Tendulkar’s works; rather thematic variance attests his singularity among the writers of his age. Even in the portrayal of sex or violence he displays various shades of possibilities. Portrayal of unmitigated violence signifies its unmatched strength that discards the possibility of resistance. Depiction of sex in variegated shades also reflects the demoralization and deterioration of values in the society. If sex is brutalization it is salvation also. Seeking carnal pleasures is also a means to assert their individuality for character such as Lady, Alexandra, Serafina in Williams’s plays and Champa, Anjali in Tendulkar’s drama.

Although Williams created memorable female characters, his gallery of portraits is peopled by men who are powerful and irresistible. Stanley’s bestiality is both repulsive as well as enticing; Shannon’s spook does not allow him to rest content; Chance is handsome and uses his charms to appease the hunger of Alexandra; John has sexual overtures with many girls without any moral scruples; Val sacrifices himself at the altar.
of love; Sebastian lures the innocent children and goes to the inhuman extent of sex and cannibalism. On the contrary, Tendulkar’s plays revolve around women and men appear as anti-heroes rather than as dominant figures in his works. Sakharam is a sadistic womanizer and Ghashiram is a brutal wretch; Nana Phadnavis is an unscrupulous diplomat who exercises power and force unfairly to trap innocent girls. These men exploit women for their pleasure. Ghashiram is a greater culprit for he sacrifices his own daughter Gauri for securing political power. Even the journalist Jaisingh treats Kamala cruelly for his selfish motives. However it was in the portrayal of women such as Benare, Anji, Laxmi, Champa, Manik, Rama, and Kamala that Tendulkar revealed his unsurpassed talent to explore the psychology of women.

Both Williams and Tendulkar have depicted women and justified their actions in a more considerate manner. Memorable characters such as Laura and Amanda, Blanche and Stella, Serafina and Rose, Lady and Carol, Alexandra and Heavenly, Hannah and Maxine dominate the literary scenario of Williams’s plays. Tendulkar’s artistic world is also configured by contrasting pairs like Benare and Mrs. Kashikar, Rama and Manik, Kamala and Sarita, Laxmi and Champa. This technique of revealing the feminine psychology through contrasting pairs is characteristically employed by both the dramatists.

Both expose the repercussions of physical and carnal immoderation but each renders it in a different way. Lasting relationships within the family structure have a hold on his plays. Family as a significant social construct gains extraordinary importance in the Indian patriarchal set-up. Even the most unconventional Sakharam is diverted to traditional ways of thinking. Jyoti, compromises with her husband’s bestiality, Sarita, in spite of her awareness of bondage, Benare, despite her humiliation, wish to be a part of the family. Family offers a distinct social identity and the women even though they transgress the ethical codes prefer to find security within the thresholds of the family. The need for belongingness is much greater than the desire for freedom. Even Rama adjusts herself to the whims of her wicked husband. On the other hand Williams’s heroines are almost like seductresses or sexual objects. Their physicality reigns over emotional and social worlds. Serafina, Blanche, Maxine, Lady all tempt the men to inveigle them. In none of Williams’s plays discussed the family as an institution has any worth. IF
Tendulkar’s heroines are compelled by circumstances to deviate from the ethical norms, Williams’s heroines consciously violate the moral codes. With the exception of Serafina none amongst them is gifted with the refuge of a family or enduring relationships.

Androgynous relationship formed one of the core elements of Williams’s drama as he himself acknowledged it, as integral to his life. He presented it before the world and appealed for acceptance. From Streetcar to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, he desperately tried to create space for his homosexual relationship and voice his sentiments. However, Tendulkar, who was not a homosexual, dealt with the theme of homosexuality, perhaps for the first time on the Marathi stage, through his play, Mitrachi Goshta. He was completely disengaged and aloof in his artistic revolution. In fact, he claimed in the introduction of the play that the play was not about Mitra but about Bapu, an adolescent who selflessly helps her to overcome her troubles.

Violence is portrayed in myriad forms in the plays of both the dramatists. Physical violence is manifested in Tendulkar’s Vultures, Kanyadaan, Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder etc. Similarly physical aggression is enacted in Gnadiges Fraulien, Camino Real, Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth. Sexual violence is clearly at the core of Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder, Chiranjeev Soubhagyakankshini as in Williams’s Streetcar named Desire and The Night of Iguana. Gluttony and bloodshed on the stage, though loathsome, is integral to Williams’s Gnadiges and Tendulkar’s Vultures. However Camino Real and Ghashiram deliver a mimetic representation of killing and again ascertain the artistic kinship of Williams and Tendulkar. Both the dramatists offered unblinckered perceptions of the world’s inherent cruelty. Like Artaud they proposed to attack by means of cruelty and shocking representation of violence. This idiom of cruelty operated through shock tactics that assaulted the eye and the ear. Their plays manifested a synthesis of the theatrical impulses of Artaud with the crudest and subtlest forms of violence.

Sex has been delineated in variegated forms by both these literary icons. If it is characterised by Shannon’s spook and Sakharam’s itch, it is unabashedly painted in Champa, Benare, Maxine and Alexandra Del Lago. Indulgence in carnal desires is an indication of non-conformism and violation. Although the lasciviousness is not outrightly condemned it is neither applauded. In fact moral transgression leads to guilt and
penitence. Benare, Blanche, Alma, Champa, Rama or Anjali may be sympathized yet their adultery does not go unpunished. Their survival in the hostile, callous world itself becomes a self-inflicted, inescapable punishment. Lust is undeniably a social offence and stigma, so that Champa is murdered, Benare is deserted, Lady is shot down, Chance is castrated, Val is lynched, Blanche is raped, Shannon and Sakharam are compelled to compromise with Maxine and Laxmi respectively. Both Tendulkar and Williams have implicated the heavy price their characters have to pay for their adultery.

A significant pattern of nostalgic longing which is visible in Williams’s plays seems to be entirely missing in Tendulkar’s plays. Almost every play of Williams shows the consciousness of Time and its inevitable march to the future. Characters like Amanda, Blanche, Tom, and Chance desperately allow their memories to linger into the past that holds fascination for them whereas the present seems to be unbearable. They are eager to evade the present and move down the lanes of memory for seeking happiness. Such nostalgic yearning for the past is absolutely absent in Tendulkar’s plays that seem to move on with a steady flow. Even Ghashiram who bears unforgettable relationship with the happenings of the past remembers it with repentance. Williams’s characters are fugitive types, escapers who wish to turn their back on reality. Contrarily, Tendulkar’s characters display greater fortitude in confronting the truth rather than dodging it.

There seems to be curious parallelism in the portrayal of Blanche and Benare, Shannon and Sakharam. Consummation as an act of fulfilment in the form of motherhood is desired by Maggie, Lady, Benare and Rama. They harbor no regrets for their sexual excesses for achieving the joy of motherhood. The precarious moral outrage results in wrath and murder. Maggie alone anticipates success but Lady loses her life. Rama loses her child and Benare is left forlorn awaiting justice. The dynamic configuration of forbidden and tabooed subjects landed both the litterateurs into trouble, yet they uncompromisingly persisted in their creative work.

Williams and Tendulkar always exercised their authorities as writers and had been vocal about the plays and their reception. If Williams expressed his views in his Memoirs, and Where I Live, Tendulkar voiced his aesthetic concerns in his Natak and Mi. They both incorporated elements of Artaud’s theatre of cruelty and Ibsen’s realism. Yet none was derivative or imitative; each had his own distinct mark as a canonical dramatist.
They remained unrelayed by success and undismayed by failure. They penetrated the superficialities, seldom paraded their thoughts but never masqued their disbelief in the prevalent social system and ethical norms. Though words of counsel are profoundly missing from their intellectual endeavours they were all set to rouse the world from its perilous slumber and own its vulgarities and ugliness that lay beneath. It was not a mere display of scholastic aptitude to record the evil and decadence at the root of the society or mere sensationalization but also a sincere attempt to draw attention of the otherwise insensitive world to its moral depravity and a crucial step towards moral awakening. Like a clever teacher who leaves the story open ended for the child to decipher the meaning and reach a moral analysis, Williams and Tendulkar captured the attention of the people, instantaneously shattered the glossy surface of decorum and callous indifference and thrust them to the essence of hard hitting realities. More often than not, these truths caused excruciating pain and had a disquieting effect, yet the stunning response resembled the result of administering a bitter potion by a medico to heal an illness. Similar remedial action was caused by giving a safe outlet to the hidden drives. Both Williams and Tendulkar employed audacious language and lurid expressions in their art that alarmed the bland tastes of the public; nonetheless it spurred contemplation on vital issues of social relevance such as man-woman relationship, chastity, fecundity, violation—all significant topics that claimed social assessment and serious contemplation but remained strictly encoded within the precincts of social taboos. Undoubtedly reading a play by Williams or Tendulkar is not a soothing experience that carries message of peace and harmony; conversely it is a discomforting yet much required encounter with the stinging realities and bitter truths that disentangle the cobwebs of illusions and coerce the readers to accept the facts.

It has been an interesting endeavour to examine the proximity between the two playwrights whose phenomenal concentration on violence and sex as thematic motifs granted them a rebellious freedom from orthodox ethical norms and equally diverted the emphasis from the melodramatic milieu to psychosocial concerns, urban angst triggered by industrialization and women’s issues spun around violence and morality.
It is worth re-emphasizing in the finale that Marathi drama is no longer peripheral in Indian literature and Tendulkar’s plays are being awarded due recognition in India. Such an understanding ensures a paradigmatic shift in interpreting Tendulkar’s plays, that may be appreciated or detested but certainly cannot be ignored. The foregoing discussion of Tendulkar as a dynamic Marathi dramatist has testified to his potentials and dramatic achievements.