CHAPTER II
THE MAKING OF VIJAY TENDULKAR

Modern Marathi drama emerged as part of a cultural change that took place in nineteenth century Maharashtra in the colonial context. This chapter proposes to examine how a new kind of theatre emerged in the nineteenth century Maharashtra providing space for the inception of Modern Marathi drama. It also seeks to make a statement on how the making of this new drama created further space for the development of Vijay Tendulkar as a playwright in the twentieth century. The chapter, therefore, is an attempt to historicize the concept of Marathi drama as a prelude to the emergence of Tendulkar as a dramatist.

Drama is considered as ‘the fifth Veda’ in India. It is a dais where ideas and value systems are disseminated. It is the quintessence of rich cultural heritage, at once the most distinctive, the most elusive and the most enthralling form of literature. Drama underwent various changes in form with the passage of time but retained its spirit. After Sanskrit dramatic tradition receded into silence, drama survived in the form of folk tradition. Jatra and Nautanki in Bengal, Lalita, khele, Tamasha and Dashavtar in Maharashtra, Rasadhari plays in Mathura, Mohiniattam and Kathakali dance dramas in Kerala, Bhand Jashn in Kashmir, Ramlila in northern India, Bhavai in Gujarat, Yakshagana, Attadate, Sonnata etc. in Karnataka bespeak of a broad spectrum of folk forms.

For a long time, multifarious folk forms originated from Kirtan dominated the popular culture in Maharashtra. Bhajans, Lalit, Bharud, Dashavtar, Tamasha, Khele, Vasudev’s hymns, Gondhal primarily belonged to such dramatic archetypes. Tanjore School of drama that championed didactic spirit co-existed with folk Drama. Tanjore plays could not be integrated to the folk form chiefly due to geographical distance between Tanjore in Tamilnadu and Maharashtra, lack of proper transportation and communication and absence of exploration. Mythological plays formed the core of Tanjore drama that spread across two centuries of the Maratha reign from 1676 to 1855.
It was Vishnudas Bhave who spear-headed indigenous drama during the nineteenth century with a performance of *Sitaswayamvar*, a play written by himself in 1843. Bhave’s mythological performance was characterized by the entry of ‘Sutradhara’, musicians and singers on the stage, with invocation to the Gods. His understanding of ‘Yakshagana’ performances from Karnataka facilitated his presentation and techniques. Plays in various other languages also made an impact on Marathi drama from its inception. Significantly Marathi drama thrived under the British rule with the advent of education and the establishment of modern print culture. Upsurge of the educated bourgeoisie led to two major formative influences on Marathi theatre during the colonial period: translating the Western Canon, best represented by Shakespeare and preoccupation with classical Sanskrit plays. Despite most of the translations being ‘bookish plays’, the multifaceted engagement with the West with complex relation to the classical past added to the cultural legacy by providing a fresh impetus to the development of Marathi drama.

Vinayak Janardan Kirtane (1840-1891) was the first eminent playwright to write his first original play in Marathi *Thorale Madhavrao Peshwe Yajwar Natak* (1861). Kirtane’s attempt breathed a new life into Marathi drama. A few years later the public performance of *Shakuntal* on 31st October 1880 created a new history in the tradition of Marathi theatre. If Vishnudas Bhave was the ‘progenitor’ of Marathi theatre, Annasaheb Kirloskar with his musical plays *Shakuntal* (1880) and *Soubhadra* (1882) could be credited as the real creator of modern Marathi drama. Marathi plays gradually traversed from mythological, historical to social themes and context, exemplified by Govind Ballal Deval’s *Sharda* (1899). Kirloskar and Deval’s proximity to theatre contributed to their insights into writing plays and turned them into successful playwrights.

As Marathi plays shifted focus from mythological to social issues, concurrently they moved from entertainment to enlightenment. Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar’s plays were a peculiar admixture of entertainment and enlightenment. His complex romantic plots gained success for a brief period but failed to create a lasting impression. At this juncture Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar added a new dimension to the hitherto mythological and historical subjects by lending political parallels to the situations depicted. His *Kichakvadh* (1907), *Bhaubandki* (1908) and *Swayamvara* (1916)
dexterously imbibed political overtones and set pace for a new epoch in theatre. The successful phase of his career has been aptly characterized as the golden age of Marathi Theatre. Kolhatkar was more inclined towards entertainment, whereas Khadilkar was predisposed towards enlightenment. After 1906, Marathi plays invariably cast themselves into imitation of Khadilkar’s dramatic art.

Khadilkar’s younger contemporary Ram Ganesh Gadkari exhibited a rare craftsmanship in intermingling tragedy and pathos on the one hand and comedy and humour on the other. His *Ekach Pyala* (1919), *Premasanyas* (1913), *Punyaprabhav* (1914) and *Bhavbandhan* (1919) bespeak of his remarkable talent as a dramatist. His plays offered a memorable range of characters from Sindhu to Gokul. V. B. Deshpande opines: “Among Marathi dramatists Gadkari stands foremost as a stylist par excellence. Several passages in his plays with their imaginative heights, flourishes of fancy and cascades of alliteration have now become part of the literary equipment of the lover of literature in Maharashtra” (Deshpande in Banhatti and Joglekar 1998: 121-122).

The period between 1920 and 1950 marked a decline of the popularity of mythological and historical drama and the appeal of *Sangeet Nataka* also gradually faded out. The growing impact of film posed an added threat to the survival of theatre. Mama Varerkar’s significant contribution in this formidable period sustained Marathi theatre. He was instrumental in ushering modernity through the selection of his themes and representation of realism. These efforts towards modernization were reinforced by Natyamanvantar Group established in 1933.

Modernity signified a deliberate disengagement from the past and present traditions in favour of verbal, formal, intellectual and philosophical traits that were recent and new for their time. Ibsen’s thematic concerns and techniques provided a springboard for experimentation and innovation for the next five to ten years. After 1935 Marathi drama underwent significant changes initiated by the trio: Mama Varerkar, P. K. Atre and Motiram Rangnekar. They captured the essence of rapid social change and the emasculating effects of middle class urban life. Atre’s plays exhibited the nuances of comedy, satire, farce, irony and bestowed a new dimension to Marathi drama. The rise of professional theatre witnessed the dramatic talents of V. V. Shirwadkar, Vasant Kanetkar, P. L. Deshpande, Vishram Bedekar, Ratnakar Matkari, Jayawant Dalvi and others.
Majority of these playwrights were concerned with the intersecting structures of home, family, customs positioned in the middle class society of the present or with the configurations of gender, class and its representations in various aspects from the conventions of the past. Marathi theatre in the post-independence period diverged into polemical trends with writers such as V. V. Shirwadkar, Vidyadhar Gokhale seeking to revive the past and writers like Vasant Kanetkar, P. L. Deshpande, Madhav Manohar and Atmaram Bhende experimenting with new forms and techniques. It is at this juncture that Vijay Tendulkar appeared on the literary scene when Marathi drama was under the sway of the unmatched dramatic endeavour of Varerkar, Atre and Ranganekar.

A brief scrutiny of Tendulkar’s contemporaries in Marathi theatre would help us locate the position of Tendulkar in Marathi drama. Suresh Khare’s Kachecha Chandra, Kunitari Ahe Tithe, Anil Barve’s Thank You Mr. Glad, Hamidabaichi Kothi certainly set new paradigms in Marathi drama. Khare, Khandekar and Madhukar Toradmal presented social issues in a new light. If Khare, Toradmal depicted internal conflict, Khandekar could reach the depths of the conflict and enhance the ensuing drama with a flourish of poetic touch. G. P. Deshpande’s plays written during 1974 to 1994 with the glorious success of Uddhwasta Dharmashala are thought provoking plays. His plays are “plays of ideas” or “discussion plays” inspired by Marxism. He incorporated the left wing political mode in urban literary drama. After a disquieting silence from 1975 to 1982 Mahesh Elkunchwar’s two intense but poetic plays revitalized Marathi theatre. Wada Chirebandi and Atmakatha were followed by Party, Vasnakand etc. Kamlesh notes that “Elkunchwar’s characters reflect striking loneliness and isolation” (Kamlesh in Punde and Taware 1995: 242). His plays are defiantly realistic in form; subjects are home, family and the ravages of contemporary life and its inevitable consequences. G. P. Deshpande and Mahesh Elkunchwar regard playwriting as a verbal art and a means of self-expression alienated from the hubbub of performance. Less apprehensive about drama’s dual modes of existence as text and performance, these playwrights insist on preserving the sanctity of the text and assign it an entity independent of theatrical praxis. Elkunchwar insists that whatever he writes must be of literary merit “because I want my works to exist even if they are not staged. They should be available and they should be read as literature. And the contents should be accessible to all” (Elkunchwar 1999: 7-8).
G. P. Deshpande asserts the superiority of word in drama which could help arrest the precipitous deterioration of Indian languages. He anxiously voices his concern, “in our country the text is being denied, the word is being denied” (Deshpande 1995: 7). Another significant dramatist to have carved a niche for himself in the broad spectrum of Marathi drama is Satish Alekar, a biochemist by training who turned to playwriting and criticism.

Tendulkar’s formal and thematic spectrum places him among the leading Indian playwrights like Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Mahesh Dattani who spear-headed the experimental theatre in post-independence period. The heterogeneity of contemporary practices manifests itself in two diverse modes of production. While some major post-independence dramatists created an inventive and synergetic theatre from the resources of Indian folk traditions and history, others turned to Western models of historical, absurdist, allegorical, social-realist drama as suited to their purposes.

While assessing the first five decades of the twentieth century, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has argued in “Drama in Modern India” that the social reform and anti-colonial movements of a whole century and the two world wars shaped the themes of modern drama in the various languages of India (Iyengar in Bhatia 2009: xvii). Partha Chatterjee, commenting on the modernity acquired in Bengali theatre, asserts the paradox in the aesthetic domain of drama: “The literary criteria that would presumably direct the new drama into the privileged domain of a modern national culture was …. clearly set by modular forms provided by Europe because critics schooled in the tradition of European drama did not approve of local conventions” (Chatterjee 1993: 7-8). What Chatterjee speaks about Bengali theatre finds interesting parallels in other indigenous language theatres as well. In the post-war period, many European playwrights such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Brecht, Satre, Ionesco, and Shaw allowed serious theatre groups and dramatists to sustain a repertory. The influence wielded by Western textual models produced a new corpus of new “literary” drama and dramatic theory in several Indian languages and led to large-scale translations and adaptations of European as well as Indian canonical plays and endorsed the cultural importance of national theatre in India.

Vijay Tendulkar, an iconic figure in Indian drama, a prolific writer in Marathi, embarked on his literary career when Marathi drama was undergoing a crucial phase of
transition. The musical drama that had dominated the Marathi stage for more than five decades was losing its hold. In the post-independence period it was replaced by shorter, prose plays without the song component. The fecundity of his writings, traversing through different generic varieties encompasses twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one act plays, eleven children’s plays and a novel in addition to several film scripts. His radicalism and undaunted spirit for thematic and stylistic innovations established him as one of the significant dramatists in indigenous languages and won him national and world-wide acclaim in the post-colonial context. Arundhati Banerjee affirms his reputation by claiming that “Vijay Tendulkar has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for almost forty years” (Banerjee 1992: vii). As a trailblazer of the experimental movement in Marathi, Tendulkar received wide critical acclaim. The renowned critic Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, opines, “Vijay Tendulkar leads the vanguard of the avant-garde theatre that developed as a movement separate from the mainstream. Tendulkar and his colleagues were dissatisfied with the decadent professional theatre that characterized the Thirties and Forties. They wanted to give theatre a new form and therefore experimented with all aspects of it including content, acting, décor and audience communication” (Nadkarni in Pandey and Taraporewala 1990: 9). Chandrashekhar Barve also shares similar views about Tendulkar’s contribution to Marathi theatre: “We can say with certainty that Tendulkar has guided Marathi drama that seemed to have lost its proper track, and has kept leading it for over two decades. His place and importance in this respect shall remain unique in the history of Marathi drama. There may be controversies regarding his greatness but his achievements are beyond questions” (Barve in Pandey and Taraporewala 1990: 25).

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born on January 6, 1928 in a Saraswat Brahmin family in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. His father held a clerical job and managed a small publishing business. The literary environment at home motivated young Vijay to commence writing at a tender age of six. He grew up watching western plays and felt an inclination towards playwriting. He was barely eleven years old when he wrote, directed and acted in his first play. Tendulkar began his career, writing for newspapers as a journalist. His journalistic vocation promoted his linguistic abilities that materialized in his first short story *Amchyavar Kon Prem Karnar?* (Who will love us?) followed by
Grihastha (The Householder) when he was in his early twenties. The failure of Grihastha did not deter Tendulkar from his literary endeavour.

Tendulkar’s Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe won him the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Award in 1970 and Sangeet Natak Akademi’s Award for playwriting in 1971. Interestingly, it was the play rejected earlier by drama critics at the Annual Drama competition. With the BBC broadcast of its English version, Tendulkar gained reputation as one of the eminent dramatists of India. His Ghashiram Kotwal won him international fame with a sterling record of performances. As Arundhati Banerjee comments: “Winner of several national and international awards and fellowships, he is both a venerated and a controversial figure in the country’s theatre scene” (Banerjee 1992: vii). Recipient of many prestigious awards, Tendulkar’s success did not bring laurels alone but also scathing criticism from the readers and audiences.

Tendulkar’s early struggle for livelihood, his acquaintance with urban middle class life, his profession as a journalist brought him into close contact with society at large and conferred a new authenticity to his creative output. His artistic potentialities could not rest content writing editorials from secondary sources. “It started with my journalistic dissatisfaction, but it grew into much bigger proportions in the sense that it became a matter of conscience as a human being. I became restless” (Tendulkar 1983: 5). Exposure to violence, and exploitation in the socio-political world caused discomfort and restlessness in the sensitive writer who voiced his anguish.

With no solace from his journalistic career, the Jawaharlal Nehru fellowship bestowed on him during 1973-75 turned out to be a boon. His extensive travels, visits to prisons, exposure to alienation, violence and deaths further subscribed to the raw-material for his writings. Gouri Ramnarayan aptly figures out: “With his exposure to Marathi theatre from childhood and journalistic background, Vijay Tendulkar turned contemporary socio-political situations into explosive drama” (Ramnarayan 1998: 16).

Arundhati Banerjee observes, “Tendulkar’s first major work that set him apart from previous generation Marathi playwrights was Manus Navache Bet (An Island Called Man 1955), which gave “expression to the fermenting solitude and alienation of the modern individual in an urbane industrialized society” (Banerjee 1992: vii). His dramatic genius was cut out for the newly emerging, experimental Marathi theatre of the time. His
direct association with Rangayan at this point of his career and continuous interaction with such theatre personalities as Vijaya Mehta, Aravind and Sulabha Deshpande, Kamalakar Sarang, Madhav Vatve and Damoo Kenkre provided new impetus for creative faculties. Thus Manus Navache Bet was closely followed by a spate of plays –Madhalya Bhinti (The Walls Between, 1958), Chimnicha Ghar Hota Menacha (Nest of Wax, 1958), Mee Jinklo Mee Harlo (I Won, I Lost, 1963), Kavlyanchi Shala (School for Crows, 1963) and Sari Ga Sari (Drizzle, O Drizzle, 1964) which would chart the course of avant-garde Marathi theatre during the next few years. There seems to be a consistency of theme and treatment in them despite the apparently desperate nature of their subjects. In all these early plays, Tendulkar is concerned with the middle class individual set against the backdrop of a hostile society.

Tendulkar’s plays can be clearly classified into two groups: the plays preceding Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe and the plays following it. The exception to this classification are his plays like Ghashiram Kotwal that explore folk traditions and his last two plays Niyatichya Bailala (To Hell with Destiny) and Safar (The Tour) which employ surrealist techniques.

As a prolific writer Tendulkar’s plays show a kaleidoscopic variety of themes and styles. His literary debut, Grihastha (The Householder, 1955) and subsequently Shrimant (The Rich, 1955) follow conventional dramatic pattern and revolve around the middle class life and sensibilities. Manus Navache Bet (An Island called Man, 1956) and Madhlya Bhinti (The Middle Walls, 1958) examine the intricacies of the middle class mentality and temperament. The works of Satre and Camus had a deepening impact on Marathi writers in the second half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that Camus’ The Outsider influenced the remarkable fictional output of Vasant Kanetkar who wrote novels like Ghar and Poraka. The theme of existential loneliness and estrangement loomed large at the background of great many works. Shrimant dramatizes the conflict between two strong-willed egos pitted against each other, and the consequential alienation of Sridhar who fights his lone battle against the deceptive aristocratic values woven around a sensitive issue of ‘virgin–mother’. It certainly infused a new breath and freshness in the Marathi theatre. Manus Navache Bet shows a marked influence of Satres’
and Camus’ philosophy and embodies the theme of alienation which was unfamiliar and purely authentic to Marathi drama.

Tendulkar’s journalistic career enhanced his insights and supplemented him with a bold, outright manner to express himself, at times shockingly and vehemently, but it needs to be comprehended that perhaps it was the most natural manner for him to communicate. *Madhalya Bhinti* depicts the friction between Parvati and her son Sada, who marries against her wishes. Parvati’s inflated ego does not allow her to grant forgiveness to Sada. The play reveals the psychological conflicts at a deeper level in a subtle manner.

*Chimanicha Ghar Hota Menacha* (1960) is a play in which Govinda and Kama are yearning for companionship. They foster an illusion to face the reality. They try to make life tolerable by deluding themselves into having a child. This play also dramatizes the psychological ordeal faced by the couple and the deliberate refuge they seek in evading the reality.

*Mi Jinklo, Mi Harlo* (1963) portrays the struggle of an artist for self-realization and the resistance he meets from other members of the family including his wife Anu. It is the inner turmoil of Madhav that is delineated by Tendulkar.

*Kavlyanchi Shala* (1963) is based on the earlier play *Grihastha* with a rewriting of second and third acts. After the initial failure of *Grihastha*, Tendulkar pledged he would never write a play again but following elder brother’s advice, he rewrote the play and presented it as *Kavlyanchi Shala* which earned him success. Obviously the ‘Bhishmapratidnya’ was broken and Marathi theatre witnessed a number of great plays by the author. The author himself admits to have shifted from rendering a tragical experience in farcical mode. The play effectively portrays the discord between expectation and reality through the dramatic devices of exaggeration, parody and sarcasm. Balu’s requirement of tranquillity and silence to pursue his goal in studies and career is foiled by various noises of the crow, cuckoo, radio, door-bell that introduce irony and humour in the play.

*Sari ga Sari* (Drizzle O Drizzle, 1964) is another farcical play by Tendulkar which blends the folk form of *Tamasha* and drama and presents a tune of middle class in a coarse manner. The witty repartees alone provide some comfort to the otherwise dull
and monotonous plot. The play affords some amusement through the depiction of Mukunda and his advisor friend Pendya’s plight to put things in order.

*Ek Hatti Mulgi* (An Obstinate Girl, 1967) shows a transformation from light, amusing play to a serious one. The source of action is Tatya’s fraudulent practices for maintenance of the family that are challenged by his daughter-in-law, Mangala who proves to be more than a match to him but fails to provide a remedy. Tendulkar shows the defeat of honesty but does not stress on the ensuing tragedy. His emphasis is on delineating the heartless, practical world outside the intimacies of the family circle.

About his earlier plays G. M. Kulkarni writes: “Why does Tendulkar narrow his dramatic world? Why does he muddle with the same context in same ways? Though this vision of life is close to him as a person, why should he move in the same orbit? Why does his vision float on the surface alone?” (Kulkarni 1993: 148 translated). This mild comment becomes a biting satire in the words of Dinanath Late: “Tendulkar appears to insanely mess up the same, fixed sorrows, agonies and injustice. He doesn’t show interest in any other thing beyond this. He will never go beyond this. It is not his ability to do so” (Late 1970: 9 translated). Certainly Late’s comment shows his shortsightedness because Tendulkar after *Shantata* went far beyond his early plays.

The very fact that Tendulkar’s plays were translated into other indigenous languages and English also testifies to his dramatic achievement and its reception. From Marathi, Vasant Dev has translated Vijay Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal, Pahije Jatiche* as (Jaat hi poochho Sadhu ki), *Giddhade as* (Giddha) *Anji, Baby, Kanyadaan, Mitrachi Goshthha* as (Meeta ki Kahani) and *Kamala*. Sarojini Varma has translated Tendulkar’s *Shantata! Court Chalu ahe* as (Khamosh! Adalat Zari Hai), *Asi Pakhare Yeti* as (Pannchi Aise Ate Hai), *Dambadveepcha Muqabala* and *Sakharam Binder*. Ensuring larger readership and widening the literary horizons, such translations demonstrate the importance of making drama – as – text potentially available to national and international audiences.

Let us examine *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (1968) and the plays that followed as it is in them that we find Tendulkar sharing themes and concerns with Williams.
**Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe:**

The play, *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (Silence! the Court is in Session, 1968) unfolds its peculiarity from its genesis to reception. A mile-stone in Tendulkar’s career, it conferred new dimensions to Marathi theatre. Interestingly, Tendulkar watched a performance of a troupe of dabblers, eavesdropped their rehearsals and conceived the play. The play spun around Leela Benare, a school teacher, brings to forefront vital issues of moral concern. The play employs superbly worked-out technique of the mock-trial within the framework of play within the play. It reveals the intricate conspiracy of the gossip-mongering entourage of actors: Kashikars, Sukhatme, Ponkshe, and Rokde who derive sadistic pleasure by laying charges of infanticide, immorality and incest against Benare.

Sukhatme: Mr. Ponkshe, is she married or unmarried?
Ponkshe: Why don’t you ask the accused?
Sukhatme: But if you were asked, what would you say?
Ponkshe: To the public eye, she is unmarried.
Benare: (interrupting) and to the private eye?
(Tendulkar 2003: 81)

Benare is accused of the most heinous crime, held captive in the claustrophobic atmosphere. She is utterly helpless to defend herself of the ignominious charges and left petrified by the hypocrisies of the patriarchal set-up. Unable to repress her agony, she gives vent to her feelings: “These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces – how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of lovely worn-out phrases! And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires” (Ibid: 117). Arundhati Banerjee precisely fathoms Benare’s victimization by the so-called torch-bearers of the civilization. She observes taking a deferential position:

Leela Benare’s defence of herself against the onslaught of the upholders of social norms in a long soliloquy, has become famous in the history of contemporary Marathi theater. It is important to note here that Tendulkar leaves us in doubt as to whether or not Benare, at all, delivers the soliloquy, thus suggesting that, in all probability, what she has to say for herself is swallowed up by the
silence imposed upon her by the authorities. In fact, during the court proceedings, on several occasions, her objections and protestations are drowned by the judge’s cry of “Silence! And banging of the gravel …” (Banerjee 1992: ix).

However, Sulabha Deshpande, who played the role of Benare in the scintillating performance of *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* refers to Tendulkar’s doubts about the artistic validity of this monologue in her essay on doing Benare. Shanta Gokhale mentions the insistence of Arvind Deshpande, the director of the play and the reluctance of Tendulkar as the playwright to grant Benare, an opportunity to deliver a final verdict in her defence.

Shanta Gokhale defends Tendulkar’s concern over the impact of the soliloquy and states: “Benare, as Tendulkar has drawn her, never speaks directly. She needs so much to hide the pain in her from the crass and insensitive world around her, that practically every remark she makes is tangential, devised to glance off the centre of her pain, to deflect attention from it. She is deliberately jocose, almost frivolous, erratic in her responses, teasing, and mocking her colleagues. However, as the mock-trial proceeds and quite accidentally stumbles on this inner area of profound pain, she is numbed by its viciousness into silence. This is why Tendulkar felt that a long statement at the end would be out of character” (Gokhale in Madge 2007: 52). Tendulkar intended to add a speech, which shaped itself into a dramatic monologue that unveils Benare’s internal turmoil, her rebelliousness, her angst against the heartless, indifferent, hostile world at large.

The performance alarmed the middle class theatre-goers who were unable to come to terms with the outrageous violation of morality and Benare’s appeal for vindication of her guilt in her harangue. It is quite evident that Tendulkar wished that Benare should elicit sympathy and understanding from the readers and audience. Sulabha Deshpande was apprehensive about the precarious position of Benare for her vulnerability to the brutality of the sophisticated and refined colleagues on the one hand and her appeal to mitigate the crime of moral transgression on the other hand. She voices her anxiety as she says, “The play would have collapsed completely if the audience had felt, even for one moment, that the punishment Benare was awarded was justified since she had committed the ‘crimes’ of falling in love with her uncle and attempting suicide at the age of fourteen, conducting an ‘illicit’ relationship with a married man, insisting on
having his illegitimate baby and still asking to be permitted to face her impressionable students at school as if she had done no wrong” (Deshpande in Madge: 54). The play forges social criticism with the tragedy of an individual in the fundamentally orthodox society. It subtly exposes the ordeal of woman exercising ambivalent freedom to challenge patriarchy within the constraints of an urban society.

The play can be compared with Girish Karnad’s *Nagamandala*. The gender-biased conventional setup of the patriarchal society acquits Appanna of his extramarital relation with his concubine but punishes the innocent Rani for her moral excesses. In Tendulkar’s play, Damle’s crime is connived whereas Benare is condemned for violating the social codes. Apparently the play set the tone of violence that would form the core of action in his later plays.

*Dambdwipcha Muqabla*

*Dambdwipcha Muqabla* (Encounter in Umbugland, 1974) is a biting satire on the contemporary political scene. As a play that raises fundamental questions about the political strategies and intrigues, it evidently showcases the corruption and degeneration of power.

The connotative implications of the word *damb* (hypocrite) are meticulously rendered in Priya Adarkar’s use of “Umbugland” with the meaningful ellipsis of ‘H’ from a ‘humbug’. As a political allegory it presents a confrontation between Princess Vijaya and her opportunist, corrupt ministers that had deeper resonances from the contemporary political scenario in the national context. The death of Vichitravirya compels a characteristic shift in investing the power into safe hands. “The king is dead, the land’s undying. After Vichitravirya, who?” (284) This question echoes, “After Nehru, Who?”--an important political issue for the Indians of the time. Vijaya Mardhekar, however has a different outlook: “The power struggle that ensues after the king replicates the tug-of-war, not after Nehru’s, but Shastriji’s death. The choice of Princess Vijaya as the compromise candidate refers to the choice of Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s daughter, by the Congress party bosses popularly known as the Syndicate consisting of such senior politicians like S. K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh and Nijlingappa. Like these bosses, the
Ministers in the play choose the king’s daughter so that they can rule by proxy” (Mardhekar in Madge 2007: 107).

One of the first political plays written by Tendulkar, it is completely different in texture and theme from all other plays. Tendulkar weaves a matrix of intricate conspiracies, plots and counterplots that form the underlying pattern of the filthy game of politics. It becomes virtually a difficult task to strip the masks and reach out the hidden truths. Prannarayan, the eunuch who acts as the confidante and counsel of the Princess speaks of distinctive truths: “I mean, we too have three kinds of truth: conventional truth, diplomatic truth, and the real truth (1). The eunuch playing the mentor serves as a hard hitting comment on the world of politics. The play also lays bare the lust for power and philosophical underpinnings about the diplomacies and gimmicks involved in the political game of authority.

Pishtakeshi remarks – “In politics one should have the hide of rhinoceros, like Bhagadanta here” (273). The Two Pen Bearers serve as the chorus and make various comments and declarations:

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SERIOUS CRISIS! SERIOUS CRISIS! [Turn by Turn]
No decision.
The scales are equal.
Whom to give the power to?
Each one’s a rascal. (291)
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Princess Vijaya’s coronation marks the beginning of a new political era. Her initial hesitations, her rehearsals of the speech, her discomfiture with the obligations of power are soon replaced by a more mature, responsible Queen, a dominant ruler. Without the consent of her ministers, Vijaya unilaterally promulgates a decree to execute her plan for the rehabilitation of Kadambas and infuriates the Minister. Vratyasom disapproves of her decisions: “It doesn’t seem according to our earlier expectation. She isn’t prepared to confine herself prudently to the framework we’ve prepared for her. Let’s put it in unvarnished terms. We placed her on the throne, and now she wants to plant one foot firmly on it and the other on us” (312).

The ministers plan to raise a revolt against Vijaya but she cleverly sabotages their plan and emerges victorious. As M Sarat Babu says, “The play shows how demagogues
manipulate ignorant masses” (Babu 2003: 50). V. B. Deshpande remarks that “*Encounter in Umbugland* was a parody of the prevalent political scenario but Tendulkar has not drawn the reality in his play. After reading the play, it gave a feeling that he could write on that subject also in a more piercing manner” (Deshpande 1992: 130).

**Gidhade:**

In keeping with the tenets of problem-plays is Tendulkar’s *Gidhade* (The Vultures, 1971) which was published fourteen years after being written. The play is a cold-blooded dissection of human nature exhibiting the inherent propensities to violence, avarice, selfishness and potent villainy. Absence of sparkling humour or witty repartees of *Shantata*, it is intensely morbid in the depiction of its characters and action. After the first production of this play, Girish Karnad wrote that “the staging of *Gidhade* could be compared to the blasting of a bomb in an otherwise complacent marketplace” (Karnad in Tendulkar 2003: 575). The play unleashes the force of unmitigated violence and cruelty in the domestic world of Pappa Hari Pitale staying together with his sons and daughter. Family, a vital social construct in the Indian society, gets translated into a space for social conflict that degenerates into personal dilemmas and annihilation. As an experimental dramatist, Tendulkar endeavours to manifest the non-spiritual, avid, sensitivities stemming from the pervasive alienation of the devastated middle class man. Aptly using the hollow of a tree as the stage setting, the play unfolds itself in depicting the monstrosity of the family in trying to grab the wealth. Ramakant and Umakant wish to squeeze out even the last penny from the father and also plan a murderous assault on their uncle. Umakant goes wild, “Ramya, Manik’s right! Let me – hmm! – chop him! And you – dispose of him. One piece here – one piece there …” (220).

Later in the play, they inhumanly attack their father for money who pathetically claims for mercy: “There’s no more, you devils, there isn’t. That’s all there is, really. Please don’t kill me. I am your father, you pimps! your father! (230) Manik, their pregnant sister, is brutally kicked in the belly causing an abortion of the foetus. Pitale’s illegitimate son Rajninath and daughter-in-law Rama, meek and docile as sparrows, serve as a foil to the vultures in the house.
One of the questions often raised is how and why it is that Tendulkar can see only the ‘vulture’ in man and not the ‘eagle!’ His depiction of the ignoble tendencies and negative picturization of humanity often tarnished his literary career. The disquieting effect of outrageous barbarism was admitted by the playwright himself in his interview with Gowri Ramnarayan about the actual staging of the performance:

Gowri: …. it seems Gidhade was terribly overwritten and Dr. Shriram Lagoo edited it ruthlessly for the production.
Tendulkar: That’s right. It was one of my earlier plays. Dr. Lagoo found it had a tremendous impact even the way it was. But that kind of violence cannot be taken by an audience for three hours. I agreed with his cuts, didn’t dispute them at all (Ramnarayan 1998: 15).

However, the noted Marathi critic V. B. Deshpande refutes the charges of unconventional presentation of the diabolic human tendencies as he remarks:

One cannot dictate to a writer as to what he should or he should not write. The question is not of the area of experience a writer chooses to write on but how effectively he has been able to embody his vision or perception. Tendulkar has expressed whatever life’s experience kindled his imagination (Deshpande in Madge 2007: 23).

Sushma Tendulkar, daughter of the playwright, furnishes interesting details about the conception of the play. She confesses that she herself and Priya were nervous on reading the manuscript and adds: “I knew everything about the play, because we lived in one room in ‘Godambe villa’ at Khar. Godambe, the owner, stayed upstairs. Baba (father) had written the play on him. I remember now. I visited their house very often. The atmosphere of Gidhade was not new for me” (Tendulkar Sushma in Lalit 2008: 20).

These factual details certainly endorse Tendulkar’s own comments about the realistic elements in his plays. He has described his plays to be about the reality surrounding him: “I write to let my concerns vis-à-vis my reality – the human condition as I perceive it” (Tendulkar 2006: ix).

His consideration for mass appeal is integral to his candid declaration of liberty:
I am not ready to surrender the freedom of choosing my subjects to my audience nor am I ready to accept the restriction of writing plays according to the audiences’ whims. It’s not just that I want a viewer it is only for him that I write my plays. But this viewer has to be someone who respects my freedom to choose the subject of my drama, possesses a lively imagination, and savours artistic allusion, subtlety and naturalness instead of well spoken inanities and showy plot heists while watching a play. The viewer doesn’t have to be an intellectual. If he can simply be as alert, thoughtful and open-minded in the theatre as his own offspring, that’ll be enough! Is this an illegitimate expectation? (Tendulkar 1997: 232)

Tendulkar’s words here suggest the power of his words as a playwright and also as a theoretician who demanded legitimate freedom of expression.

**Sakharam Binder**

*Sakharam Binder* (1972) is probably the most profoundly naturalistic play penned by Tendulkar. Sakharam, a book binder, characteristically subverts the idealized notions of high-class birth and takes egotistical pride in the manifestation of his eccentricities. His language, mannerisms and aggressive physicality reveal the essential complexity of human nature as also serves to be a scathing attack on hypocrisies of the middle class. His nonconformity to social taboos and his audacity are clearly perceived in the play:

Sakharam: Born in a Brahmin family, but I’m a Mahar, a dirty scavenger. I call that a bloody joke! (127)

Sakharam: It’s good thing I’m not a husband. Things are fine the way they are. You get everything you want and yet you’re not tied down. (129)

Sakharam: If you sin – you must be ready to slap your face and say, “Yes, I sinned”. You must be ready to take the rap. You think one can play hide and seek up there? We’ll have to face Him naked, won’t we? We can do anything we like but nothing that we might feel ashamed of. To feel ashamed – that’s bad – very bad. (130)

V. S. Naipaul comments on Sakharam, “Hinduism has been reduced to a belief in honesty and a rejection of all shaming action” (Naipaul 1980: 50). Sakharam offers cohabitation to deserted, forlorn women and seeks physical gratification in exchange as compensation. The play unravels the intricacies of man-woman relationship in
Sakharam’s alliance with Champa and Laxmi. E Renuka castigates him: “a dehumanized brutal wretch that he is, he tries to expose the hypocrisy of the institution of marriage; he never attempts to elevate the man-woman relationship by projecting on to it higher moral values and tenderness but is prepared to throw out women when “there’s no spark left in them” (Renuka in Pande and Barua 1994: 34). “He brings down the man-woman relationship to the states of a contract – the contract being a link based on need” (Ibid: 34). In the guise of a saviour, Sakharam is a womanizer who appeases his ‘appetite’ divested of all social taboos and decency.

Laxmi and Champa who enter into the contractual relationship with Sakharam represent two disparate human tendencies. As completely opposed to Champa, a rebel, a non-conformist, Laxmi is obstinately conventional, religious in her attitude to life.

The display of gross physicality in the play was considered to bring the institution of marriage into jeopardy. But significantly as V. B. Deshpande argues that influence of literature on society is always minimal as compared to technology, so that any literary work cannot bring about rapid changes to culminate into wrecking the institution of marriage and secondly if such an age-old system can be so easily exposed to external perils it needs a serious reconsideration. Lastly if such charges are made against a versatile dramatist like Tendulkar, it renders an implicit acknowledgement of his greatness as a writer, who contains within himself the power to create or destroy the society (Deshpande in Madge 2007: 24). Sakharam’s frankness and aggressiveness demand a befitting bold idiom to build up the anti-traditional context. As Ashok H. Desai mentions, “his rough idiom seems the right vehicle for the values he has evolved for himself. He tries to work out an independent philosophy of life, with no sense of false obligations (Desai in Madge: 79).

A staunch critic of marriage as an institution and a champion of modern ideology, Sakharam’s demands from his women are self-contradictory as he enlists the duties they are to perform in his household despite his protestations against husbands as oppressors. Highly intriguing is the fact that a writer who exposed the exploitation of women and allotted a public space for new women in his writings adhered to the same male chauvinism in his private sphere. His wife Meena complains about him: “Even when I used to be a working woman, soon after our marriage, he was very possessive and
cautious. He used to keep an eye on who I spoke with, moved about with … it is only now, with age, that he has become more understanding” (Tendulkar Meena in Femina 1984: 36). So, Sakkaram too shows possessiveness as his creator Tendulkar, who according to Nitin Samant is “confused” and “has no scientific method of analysis” (Samant 1983: 67). We can hardly agree with what Samant says because Tendulkar has exercised his artistic talent in exposing the duplicities at the core of man-woman relationships and not exhibited any confusion in his portrayal. Isn’t it significant that Girish Karnad calls Sakkaram Binder the best play written in the last thousand years? (Karnad in Dubey 1983: 55)

**Ghashiram Kotwal**

If *Encounter is Umbagland* shows the transformation of a young, naïve princess into an unscrupulous authoritarian, *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1973) as a play, elaborates the theme of corrupting influences of power with a masterstroke of craftsmanship. It incorporates a major shift from earlier naturalistic plays to the folk traditions of performance and a literary presentation of history. Tendulkar’s art exposes, reflects, and indeed magnifies the decadent, rotten underbelly of a society that has lost its way. Named after the central protagonist, Ghashiram Kotwal, the play is a study in violence and devastating influences of power. Ghashiram Savaldas is a poor, humble Brahman from Kanauj who suffers and is tormented at the hands of Brahmans on a false charge of theft. The unbearable humiliation and oppression offer a cause for retaliation to Ghashiram who pledges to seek revenge.

Ghashiram: But I’ll come back. I’ll come back to Poona. I’ll show my strength. It will cost you. Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahman, but I’ve become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. I’ll be a devil inside. I’ll come back like a boar and I’ll stay as a devil. I’ll make pigs of all of you. I’ll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs (376-77).

Ghashiram assumes the role of avenger and shows no compunction in “admitting” his crime: “Look! I’ve given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale” (381). He surrenders his innocent daughter, to the lascivious Nana Phadnavis in exchange of power. As Bhalla states “The
older injustices and hierarchies in *Ghashiram Kotwal* are class discrimination and subjugation of the weaker gender. Power is linked with decadence and sexuality. And though the ruling Brahmin community is identified with Nana, Ghashiram, also a Brahmin, is excluded, excursed from this coterie because he is an outsider” (Bhalla 2002: 7). With authority in hands Ghashiram rises from disgrace to tyranny. The dynamics of power manipulation demonstrated in his character is clearly parallel to Plato’s description of the rise of despotism.

He (the despot) is totally bound either to be destroyed by his enemies or to change from man to wolf and make himself tyrant. And if he is exiled and there returns in spite of his enemies, he returns a finished tyrant … And if they are unable to banish or kill him, they form a secret conspiracy to assassinate him (Plato 1974: 397).

Blood becomes aphrodisiac to Ghashiram who unleashes a reign of terror in Pune and incites the wrath of the people. Nana outwits Ghashiram: “What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it, our Kotwal pays for it. The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be devoured by Nana” (385). Tendulkar suggests the eroticism in the power play in the euphemism used by Nana. The play exposes the dialectics of power horizontally where the victim becomes the perpetrator but the decadent stranglehold of power leads to his downfall and seals his doom. If Jaisingh in *Kamala* shows a paradoxical juxtaposition of perpetrator and victim, Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar’s powerful protagonist, is also drawn in similar veins. Based on pre-modern historical narrative, the play employs indigenous, anti-realistic styles of presentation incorporating music and dance.

Like Mohan Rakesh’s *Ashadh ka Ek Din* and Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal* recasts narratives inherited from classical, pre-modern and early colonial Indian history. The revival of classical, traditional, folk performance genres accommodates the earlier aesthetic forms to post-modern contexts. Performed especially for middle class urban audiences, these multilayered productions are credited with reorienting folk and intermediary forms and mingling intracultural and intercultural experiments with tradition.
Ghashiram Kotwal has a rich texture replete with Dashavatara, Lavni, music, dance harmoniously intertwined with experimental devices such as the use of “human wall” and also Brecht’s alienation effect. In a 1976 review essay, Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni compares Mehta’s The Good Woman of Setzuan with a production of Vijay Tendulkar’s original play Ghashiram Kotwal and describes both as good examples of the synthesis of “folk” and “bourgeois” forms (Nadkarni 1976). The Maharashtrian folk theatre with its multifarious ingredients was not only used to convey unconventional concepts but also achieve the effect of alienation. Girish Karnad rightly observes:

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head …. The theatrical conventions Brecht was reacting against – characters as a psychological construct providing a focus for emotional identification, the willing suspension of disbelief syndrome, the notion of a unified spectacle were never a part of the traditional Indian theatre. There was therefore no question of arriving at an ‘alienation’ effect by using Brechtian artifice. What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques available in our own theatre” (Karnad in Tendulkar 1994: 15).

Tendulkar does not glamorize his characters; they seem to belong to the gross reality of life. Folk theatre accentuates the effect of ‘alienation’.

The critic C. N. Ramachandran has argued that the structures of sophisticated literature are “analogues to social structures”, while those of “folk literature oppose and reject– symbolically at least – existing social structures” (Ramachandran in Narasimhaiah 1993: 21). Contemplating on similar lines, Mahesh Elkunchwar, the most vocal contemporary realist, expresses his concern over the disintegration of rural culture and dissociates himself from the “natural” forms of folk theatre. “I personally found the “form” of folk theatre unusable, because what I had to say was so harsh and stark that I felt it would drown in the festive atmosphere of song, dance, and colour in folk drama…” (Elkunchwar 1987: 91-92). Therefore Elkunchwar debates the credit of “true experimentalism” and “authentic Indianness” to such plays as Hayavadana and Ghashiram Kotwal, which in his view enforce folk form artificially on mythic and
historical material. Contrarily, however it can be observed that plays such as Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Habib Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor* establish radically new relations between the textual and performative, the traditional and the contemporary. The use of folk forms in complex vehicles of this kind is not a fetishist call for a “close, non-negotiable particularity or for some mystical, unsoiled pristinism”; rather, as Wole Soyinka notes, it is a “reinstatement of values authentic to … society, modified only by the demands of a contemporary world” (Olaniyan 1992: 487). Reviving the ritualistic conventional forms, the plays by Karnad, Tendulkar develop a serious psychological or socio-political thematic pattern in contemporary relevance.

Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal* is not merely an experimental form of drama but a comment on the tendencies of individuals and crude potentialities of power-play involving them in the current socio-political context. His play is a reflection on the class-structure and demoralization of the upper class society. Consequently, the play provoked severe criticism and censure for distorting history and offending the sentiments of Brahmin society. P. S. Kasture says that “Vijay Tendulkar’s delineation of Nana is excessively lop-sided. Tendulkar highlights only one aspect of Nana’s personality- his licentious indulgence in sex” (Kasture in Sharma 2001: 153). Tendulkar himself makes his statement: “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 forms which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram” (Tendulkar 2003: 586). Clearly, Tendulkar did not make any claims to historical authenticity.

The story of controversy surrounding the performances of the play was a traumatic experience for the playwright who mentions: “At times I feel I should not have written *Ghashiram Kotwal*, as not only has it been the cause of personal turmoil, but it has also been the cause of many of my other plays being sidelined” (Tendulkar in *Times of India*: 2000)

Yet, in all fairness, the prominence and greatness of *Ghashiram Kotwal* transcends the various controversies engirding the play:
The play seamlessly blending sophistication of form with universality of content, not only represents the high-point of Tendulkar’s career as a playwright, but also makes the farthest point to which any Indian play has pushed the frontiers of theatrical art. Fusing folk music traditions with those of *sangeet natak* and modern theatre techniques including an innovative use of choreography, *Ghashiram Kotwal* traces the depths of immorality to which a sexual predator can descend and the extent to which the larger good of the people can be consequently compromised (Hattangadi 2008: 6-7).

Ghashiram Kotwal undoubtedly proved to be the pinnacle of Tendulkar’s literary career.

*Baby*

*Baby* (1975) another memorable play by Tendulkar, portrays the predicament of Baby and the pathetic compromise she makes for survival. It is a saga of suffering. Augusto Boal, the originator of the Theatre of the Oppressed, says: “Sometimes you can oppress by giving, you can oppress through tenderness, you can oppress through suffering” (Boal in Katyal 1994: 8). Baby’s, pitiful obedience to Shivapa, the goon, who sexually exploits her, gestures like a bitch, going on all fours, licking his feet, bearing the physical torture bespeaks of the dehumanization and oppression to which she has to reconcile for her survival. Raghav her brother has been sent to jail on false accusations by Shivapa and suffers a mental breakdown. It is Baby’s flights of fancy through the novels of Phaterphekar and her romantic advances towards Karve that bring some relief in her otherwise gloomy life. Yeshwant Patne observes that ‘faith’ and ‘devotion’ the conventional values cherished by middle class are the common traits in Tendulkar’s women characters (Patne 2009: 282 translated). He further adds that these values are adhered to by characters from Leela Benare to Baby. Baby’s remarkable quality is her unflinching love for life. Although she lacks the strength to change her destiny, she shows the courage to speak her mind to Shivapa at the end and face the consequences. She almost enacts the existential credo: “Man can be destroyed but not defeated.” Baby deterministically declares to Raghav: “Why should one groan and moan under a burden all one’s life? Even a slave wants to be independent at some point. I am free” (208). It is
her illusions that complement her indomitable will to face the odds: “Nobody is alone in this world. What we need to do is to look for others like us. One must know how to look. Phatarphekar says, ‘Look with the divine eyes of love…’” (209).

Mukund Tanksale voices his displeasure when he finds that it is the plays such as Ghashiram Kotwal and Sakharam Binder by Tendulkar that received the critical attention, whereas a play like Baby is not discussed in equal measure. He claims that “Baby is the most favourite play for me… the pathos in the play makes the mind restless” (Tanksale in Lalit 2008: 92-3). The noted director Satyadev Dubbe also corroborates the same opinion: “It is not the plays Ghashiram or Sakharam that will move on to future generations but Baby will surely do so” (Dubey in Lalit 2008: 93).

Mitrachi Goshta

Mitrachi Goshta (A Friend’s Story, 1982) is a play that boldly dares to bring the tabooed issue of lesbianism to the forefront. Again it is a play that was stimulated by real life incident. Mitra, the central character, realizes that she is different in nature from those surrounding her, accepts the difference and then lets herself go. The play delineates her tragic journey from her initial stubbornness, social conflict and then her rebellion which costs her life. There is only a single person whom she trusts and who is as faithful as a shadow, Bapu. Despite differences of opinion, Bapu is a never-failing confidante of Mitra.

Sumitra: There was a girl. She liked to play with boys more than with other girls. And only boys’ games. She never felt shy or embarrassed if the boys handled her roughly as they played together (431).

Later in the play Mitra confesses to Bapu, “Bapu, I’ve fallen in love…. With a girl. Bapu: what? (440). Nama’s reactions to Mitra’s feelings are ambivalent and confused. She is fond of Mitra but unable to cope with the burden of stigma that would accompany the relationship. Pande, who falls head over heels in love with Mitra, is left soul-shattered and the bitter pangs of unrequited love force him to join the army. Mitra tries to break away from the traumatizing experiences, completely dejected by the
realization of her abnormality by going to Calcutta but her efforts are in vain. Unable to bear the humiliation and the loathsome reality of life she inevitably meets her end.

The origin of the play in real life events is narrated by Vijay Tendulkar in the preface. He mentions the girl called Mitra, whose splendid performance as an old man in the 1940s bewitched him. Tendulkar learnt through an actor friend of his about Mitra’s unnatural craving for another girl and the major crisis which led to her suicide. The shocking experience lingered on in Tendulkar’s mind years later, to be materialized as a play: “Out of some compulsion which had no logic, it grew in spite of the near impossibility of a play on a lesbian being staged, let alone seen by traditional Marathi audiences. The play got written in spite of me” (Tendulkar 2001: ix).

Rohini Hattangady enacted the role of Mitra in the play directed by Vinay Apte. She was keen to play the role as “Nothing like this had been tackled before in India, on stage or the screen, way back in 1980” (Hattangdi in Tendulkar 2003: 596). She compliments the playwright for the contemporariness of the play and the boldness to handle an inflammable issue. “While reading Mitrachi Goshta again today, 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” (Ibid: 596). Despite the play’s inability to beckon critical attention, it remains an unforgettable work and reflects Tendulkar’s radicalism.

**Kamala**

*Kamala* (1982) written in the naturalistic mode, was inspired by a true, sensational occurrence—*The Indian Express* expose by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and exhibited her at a press conference. Tendulkar deftly manipulated the event as a springboard for activating certain responses to moral, political, social issues unearthed by the flesh trade. The human bargain had toppled the prevalent value system. The play is replete with various motifs—hectic phone calls, manoeuvres, tactics that are the sensational ingredients. Jaisingh Jadhav’s callow careerism as a journalist, his sense of proprietorship that converts his upper-class wife, Sarita into a similar commodified object as Kamala, the tribal woman are indeed venomous qualities. The linguistic devices of irony and barbed satire lend a piercing sharpness to
the dialogues and grants opportunity to Tendulkar for the critique of journalism in addition to social issues of vital significance.

Kakasaheb: How far has your conspiracy got?
Jaisingh: Conspiracy?
Kakasaheb: Your bloodthirsty professional plot.
Jaisingh: Oh ….oh. Well, it’s getting along. (22)

Later Jaisingh sourly remarks, “You’re trying to say that what we’re doing is just another form of mercenary journalism” (23). The play reflects the true colors of professionalism which harbors disinterestednes and indifference to the extent of cruel manoeuvring. Blindfolded by ambition and success Jaisingh is deliberately negligent to Kamala’s emotional exploitation.

The character of Jaisingh seems to overshadow that of Kamala and Sarita. Kamala virtually does not find enough scope to develop and neither does Sarita’s sudden transformation from a meek, docile woman to a revolutionary wife seem to be convincing.

Kamala: How much did he buy you for?
[Sarita is confused at first]
Sarita: What?
Kamala: I said, how much did he buy you for?
Sarita: Me? Look here, Kamala …. For seven hundred. (34).

Sarita suddenly feels repulsed at the feeling of being a slave in her marital life. The new awareness shows her emerging as an emancipated woman towards the end of the play. Ashwini Dhongade, who finds this change improbable, observes, “Sarita, Jaisingh Jadhav’s wife, after a single dialogue with Kamala and a single day in her company, as though she has a magic lamp becomes like Nora and begins discussing women’s liberation. It is surprising that she never realizes the slavery in her ten years companionship with Jaisingh” (Dhongade 2007: 91). Sarita cherishes the illusion of freedom and liberalism, but unlike Ibsen’s Nora, her western counterpart, her position is ambivalent; she intends to transcend the traditional threshold but is willing to wait for the right moment.
Sarita: But a day will come, Kakasaheb, 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 one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I’ll pay whatever price I have to pay for it. (52)

Vikram Gokhale is also intrigued by some of the unanswered questions that stem from the play but lack satisfactory answers. He says “While doing these shows, I undoubtedly got the satisfaction of doing something innovative. But unfortunately we could not strike a chord with the writer of Kamala…. I had, and still have some serious objections to Tendulkar’s treatment of characters in Kamala” (Gokhale in Madge 2007: 151). He later adds, “Sometimes I wonder whether this sensitive dramatist, one of my favourites, was becoming an escapist in the writing of Kamala” (Ibid: 151). Certainly the end seems to be too abrupt to be credible.

Characters like Sakharam, Jaisingh seem to be a reincarnation of Simone de Beauvoir’s view about modern men: “The men of today show a certain duplicity of attitude which is painfully lacerating to women; they are willing on the whole to accept woman as a fellow being, an equal; but they require her to remain the inessential” (Beauvoir 1972: 291).

However a close analysis of the play reveals that if women are exploited and oppressed at home, so are the men victimized at the work places. Irrespective of the gender they turn out to be pawns, highly vulnerable to the atrocious systems. Manchi Sarat Babu reiterates the same views when he finds that “Though all the plays of Tendulkar are concerned with gender deformity, his Kamala treats this cultural malady more elaborately” (Babu 1997: 30). Kamala emerges as a powerful symbol of being oppressed and victimized and concurrently triggers the consciousness in Sarita. The drama illustrates Jaisingh’s position also. Speaking to Sunil Shanbag, Tendulkar observes: “Kamala after a time becomes a symbol. The wife of the journalist becomes “Kamala”, and ultimately even he [the journalist] becomes “Kamala” (Tendulkar in The Sunday Observer, Oct 1982). Nevertheless, these divergent thematic interests seem to steal away the intensity and appeal that could have otherwise been achieved through a more focused perspective.
Kanyadaan

Kanyadaan (1983) is one more creation of Tendulkar’s realistic mode of writing that evokes realistic set-up. The play shows a superb intersection of the ritualistic, familial and social codes in collision with the dominant contemporary social ethos that adumbrates patriarchal command, subjects gender roles and caste divisions to thorough investigation. Nath, a staunch socialist, enthusiastically supports his daughter Jyoti’s decision to marry Arun, a Dalit writer. Seva, his wife, a social worker and Jayprakash, his son find the decision impractical and hasty.

Seva: My anxiety is not over his being a dalit. You know very well that Nath and I have been fighting untouchability tooth and nail, God knows since when. So that’s not the issue. 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.

Jyoti: I will manage, mother!

Seva: Saying something is easy, but doing is very difficult… And later there is no chance for a woman to hide or to run away (509).

Nath’s conviction that Jyoti can make the marriage work although Arun’s offensive language repels is clearly manifested: “Look, Seva, society cannot be transformed through words alone. We have to act as catalysts in this transformation.” Seva retorts to this, “Does it mean that my daughter’s life is to be used for an experiment?” (524). The marriage turns out to be a living hell for Jyoti who is shocked to realize the split in Arun, his propensity for violence, his self-abasement, and his manoeuvres. Arun audaciously asserts, “What am I but the son of scavengers. We don’t know the non-violent ways of Brahmin like you. We drink and beat our wives …. We make love to them …. But the beating is what gets publicized”. Later he adds, “I am a barbarian, a barbarian by birth. When have I claimed any white collar culture?” (540)

Tendulkar’s criterion for selecting a highly delicate issue of ‘caste’ seems to be deliberate and strategic. The representation of Arun connects the play to the Dalit community and correspondingly the presence of Nath, belonging to Brahmin, the upper caste community. The conflict between individuals attains socio-political dimensions as it becomes a battle of ideologies. Tendulkar makes a deft use of the photographs of Jotirao
Phule and Sane Guruji, the great social reformers as mute spectators of the crudity and bestiality unleashed by a great writer Arun. Tendulkar’s intervention in the socio-political debate left the play open-ended and led to controversial reactions, eliciting praise and blame in equal measure. As in print, the performance was misinterpreted as an alarming illustration of the apparent failure of intercaste marriages, which cannot reorient the social fabric of the nation, and the message sent was that such a hegemonic reversal in the caste-structure could result in disastrous consequences.

The play’s literary reputation reached its zenith in March 1994 when it received the K. K. Birla Foundation’s third Saraswati Samman, one of India’s highest literary honours, for its “effective representation of the complexity of human relationship … [and] the emotional connection and conflicts between the downtrodden and elite segments of society” (Kanyadaan, xv). In his acceptance speech for the award, Tendulkar spoke in a tone of self-deprecating humour:

I have written about my own experiences and about what I have seen in others around me. I have been true to all this and have not cheated my generation. I did not attempt to simplify matters and issues for the audience when presenting my plays, though that would have been the easier option. Sometimes my plays jolted society out of its stupor and I was punished. I faced this without regrets. It is an old habit with me to do what I am told not to do. My plays could not have been anything else. They contain my perception of society and its values and I cannot write what I do not perceive.
You are honoring 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 (Ibid: xi).

Aparna Dharwadkar has an enlightening comment on the issue of antithetical responses:

The apparent contradiction between the literary strengths and theatrical weaknesses of Kanyadaan can be reconciled if we approach it not as a topical vehicle about the politics of “untouchability” or the formation of a young Dalit writer, but as a “play of ideas” about the relation of the political to the personal and of the public to the private. Tendulkar deliberately translates an inflammatory socio-political issue into intimate familial terms.
and makes home the battleground of a reverse generational conflict. The incompatibility of Brahman and Dalit ceases to be an abstract principle and manifests itself as the friction between parent and child, sister and brother, husband and wife” (Dharwadkar 2006: 291).

“Kanyadaan”, giving away one’s daughter in marriage, an emotionally charged, culture-specific gesture turns out to be a nightmarish reality which instigates doubly painful experience for Nath. Giving away Jyoti to Arun, Nath is bereft of his daughter as she severs her ties with Deolalikar family and is left crippled on confrontation with the hollowness of his socio-political ideologies, an altar at which Jyoti is sacrificed.

Tendulkar was certainly a visionary writer ahead of his times who handled various significant issues of social and moral concerns by shaking the popular beliefs. Cast in entirely variegated thematic and stylistic pattern are Tendulkar’s last two plays Safar and His Fifth Woman.

**Safar:**

*Safar* (The Cyclist, 1992) is free from elements of violence, cruelty or issues of physicality that became the integral part of Tendulkar’s artistic world. Intended to be the last play it highlights the dramatist’s attempts to capture the essence and complexity of life in a work that has a circular plot. As a multi-faceted dramatic feat, *The Cyclist* can offer different interpretations. Like a picaresque novel, the protagonist, ‘the main character’ undertakes a journey to explore the world. The geographical mapping of distances coincides with the details of the development of ‘cycle’ as a symbol of progress that are furnished with historical precision. Employing surrealist techniques and symbolism the play meticulously records the human and natural difficulties encountered in the course of journey. The slapstick situations show witty exchanges between the protagonist and a group of hoodlums, the warring elements--Lords of Sun and Earth, the sage and the mermaid. Although written in a simple, lucid style, the language elevates itself to metaphysical concerns and philosophical questions. The main character says: “But I have to choose – I want only one road” (12). Later he finds himself at the same position: “No! How can this be? Why should this road which is going out of the city,
again go back into the city. Am I back where I started from?” (14). The play almost becomes a dark comedy that plunges deeper into existential problems.

The main character is lost and bemused, “Where did I come from?” Such questions deliberated in the meandering travel implicitly connotate that the journey is metaphysical rather than real. The apprehensions and anxieties lurking in the mind of the cyclist become actual manifestations, worked out by expressionistic means. Tendulkar refers to the pointless search of meaning in the play: “it is a jungle in which you can always enter, but has no way out” (xi). It is a hard-hitting play by Tendulkar that deftly unveils the complex and defiant attitudes that seep into our middle-class society. As Shukla appropriately remarks, the play generates a train of events manifested on stage through a series of slapstick situations (Shukla in Prasad and Barbuddhe 2008: 165). Apparently adapting the Beckettsian structure, the playwright is neither pessimistic nor nihilistic in his approach; it is an honest quest to unfathom the mystery named life. Pa, the protagonist’s father expresses the epiphany of complete stasis: “Do nothing, sometimes that’s all you need to do” (p. xi). Paradoxically framework of the play reverts to uneasy scepticism.

Tendulkar’s remark is quite illuminating. He compared the situation in India in 1999 to the play: “Life here is as The Cyclist. It will never change. Each day we ride our old, dilapidated wheelless cycle and go places. Breathtaking static activity (Tendulkar in 2006: xii). Balwant Bhaneja in his introduction to the play appraises Tendulkar’s contribution: “As the founding artistic director of experimental group Avishkar (Innovation), Tendulkar has been at the vanguard of bringing new themes and forms to modern Indian theatre. Through The Cyclist, he has gone one step further in creating a distinctive work that connects with performers and viewers globally, his special contribution to world drama” (Bhaneja in Tendulkar 2006: xii). The nameless protagonist attributes a distinct quality of universality to the play. The play seems to operate on a completely different praxis. Being sceptical about change it seems to reaffirm its faith in pre-destined fate that leaves no scope for mutability. The rotating wheels of the cycle that reach nowhere symbolize the monotony and dullness of the modern life. Safar is a piercing comment on the futility of ambitions and aspirations and epitomizes complete alienation of the modern man in an estranged world.
His Fifth Woman

His Fifth Woman (2004) is a sequel to Tendulkar’s 1972 play, Sakharam Binder. Sakharam’s reluctant struggle over his dead mate’s soul, Dawood’s insistence for an appropriate ritualistic Hindu burial, the shrewd crows who enjoy the prevailing chaos are delivered with amazing immediacy. The play presents a peculiar picture of death and afterlife that carries shades of irony and humour. All the last rites are performed bribing the Brahmin to make haste and avoiding any complications. The groups act as chorus gathered at the burning ghats and discuss personal matters which add a serio-comic tone to the event. The naturalistic dialogue focuses on the complex human conditions without passing any moral judgments on Sakharam’s actions. However the language used becomes lewd and obscene and shows a marked deterioration in the artistic talent of Tendulkar. The earlier world of the cyclist replete with bizarre and grotesque happenings becomes unnecessarily crammed with direct references to physicality and sexual overtures which seem to be uncalled for. Ramu Ramanathan directly expresses his discontent: “Less said the better about Tendulkar’s last three plays; His Fifth Woman written in English should be hidden from the world and kept away” (Ramanathan in Lalit 2008: 75). However, obliterating the linguistic boldness, the play can be viewed on different plane as an enigmatic performance related to after life.

Sturgis Warner, the play’s New York director in an introduction to His Fifth Woman, writes that Mr. Tendulkar remarked that he could never have written this play in 1972, it just wasn’t in him. There is a season for everything. Warner adds: “As absurd as it is, Ten’s version of the afterlife does give one pause. Why shouldn’t the next world be exactly as he draws it? It contains no less logic than the popular beliefs presently on the table” (Warner in Tendulkar 2006: xiii). Tendulkar’s dramatic world assuredly contributed entirely new perspective and fresh outlook to postcolonial Indian drama.

After a detailed analysis of Tendulkar’s artistic contribution, a glance at his contemporary regional playwrights would help in identifying the various prevalent trends in drama. The novel modes of authorship and their alliance with theory had created a new body of postcolonial drama that enabled theatre to become an embodiment of the contemporary life of the nation. In the world of Theatre, the new forms that emerged
were left-oriented political theatre of Utpal Dutt and G.P. Deshpande modeled on George Bernard Shaw, Maxim Gorky, Bertolt Brecht and others. The existentialist–absurdist theatre of early Sircar, Mohit Chattopadhyay, C. T. Khanolkar and Satish Alekar draws on Antonin Artaud, Jean Paul Satre, Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett. Badal Sircar’s reactionary “Third Theatre” is also derived from Grotowski and Scherhner. This clearly shows the western influences on Indian theatre.

Playwrights such as Tendulkar, Elkunchwar and Dattani selected realist representations of contemporary urban social experience as the appropriate subject of drama. These realist playwrights invoked the dominant legacy of realism and naturalism in modern western theatre and powerful traditions of social realism in India from the early 19th Century to the present. These realist dramatists claim that the contemporary experience with its emphasis on city, family or home is “authentic” and “Indian”. They question the genuineness of the traditional forms that reflect on the disintegration of rural life.

This contradictory neo-traditionalism and realism is pre-dominant in Tendulkar who created radically modern perspectives on caste, class, sexuality, gender, family ties, home and nation. Critics and scholars made unsuccessful attempts to label his drama, fix it into the frame of ‘isms’ to encapsulate the depiction of his philosophy and attitude to life in his works. The noted dramatists and theoretician Madhav Manohar and G. M. Kulkarni find echoes of Ibsenism in Tendulkar’s plays. Manohar asserts, “There is only one Marathi playwright available now who has inwardly accepted Ibsenism and his name is Vijay Tendulkar” (Manohar 1960: 15 translated). Manohar makes his claim in consideration of a single play Madhalya Bhinti. However G. M. Kulkarni makes his observation based on major works by Tendulkar, “Tendulkar has adopted Ibsen’s techniques and his plays of recent past showed the same framework” (Kulkarni 1993: 120 translated).

Tendulkar himself refuted the claims of any influences of the ‘isms’ that were in vogue during the period. In an interview given to Vishwanath More, he clearly mentions, “I do not belong to any ism. My writings have not been followed in accord with Ibsenism. I have not scientifically studied it. Primarily, the Films of ‘Prabhat’ and ‘Hans’
film companies closely resemble my dramatic output” (Tendulkar, 1969: 6). The authenticity of this claim could be investigated further.

George Bernard Shaw in his famous essay “Before and After Ibsen” notes some significant features of Ibsen’s plays: “First, the introduction of the discussion and its development until it so overspreads and interpenetrates the action that it finally assimilates it, making play and discussion practically identical, and second, as a consequence of making the spectators themselves the persons of the drama, and the incidents of their own lives its incidents, the disuse of the old stage tricks” (Shaw in Hinchcliffe 1979: 71). N. Banhatti discusses the characteristics of Ibsen adapted to suit Marathi theatre: “Ibsen’s plays depicted the contemporary social condition and offered a heart-rending picture of the hypocrisies of the middle class. Mostly women are suppressed under the wrong notions of sanctimoniousness and honour. Ibsen portrayed the agony of mental harassment. His primary aim was to present the interrelationships of individuals in the society. Naturalism formed the basis of his composition; and the third salient feature was alienation. His plays introduce us to the problems of human life but do not narrate any doctrine as such. He is the founder of problem plays” (N. Banhatti 1959: 186-7 translated).

Major works of Tendulkar delineate social conditions. Shrimant, Ek Hatti Mulgi, Shantata!..., Giddhade, Ghashiram expose the deception and hypocrisies of contemporary society. Women’s exploitation is clearly central to Shrimant, Manus Navache Bet, Madhlaya Bhinti, Mi Jinklo, Mi Harlo, Ek Hatti Mulgi, Shantata..., Ashi Pakhare Yeti, Giddhade, Sakharam Binder, Baby, Pahije Jatiche, Kamala, Mitrachi Goshta, Kanyadaan, and Chiranjeev Soubhagyakankshini. These plays show the ‘imprisoned soul’ struggling to get free. Yet Tendulkar does not remain tied to the representation of the seasoned truths but moves on to the eternal truths. Though he follows Ibsen’s thematic pattern, it is not a servile imitation, it may in some cases be a unintended similarity. Yet to label Tendulkar’s plays with Ibsenism is to deprive them of originality and artistic talent. Chandrashekhar Barve rightly opines “Although certain doubts remain, the semblance between Tendulkar’s and Ibsen’s plays cannot be denied. But this similarity has not been derived from imitation. It is therefore not necessary to label Tendulkar as Ibsenian playwright” (Barve 1985: 80). Assuredly Tendulkar’s plays defy
constraints of any single school of thought or isms but his art seems to be curious blend of various modes of representation that projects a complexity as well as authenticity to his drama.

In an excerpt taken from Sri Ram Memorial lecture – ‘The Play is the Thing’ (Lecture II, 1997), Tendulkar mentions at the outset: “A playwright must possess two skills. One: the skill of characterization. The other one: the sense of structure.” He mentions in the introduction to his plays that “As a playwright my characters were the backbone of my plays and they were never cardboard cut-outs but living human beings who had their own separate life and expression” (Tendulkar 2003: x). Noted writers and critics like Chandrashekhar Barve and Shanta Gokhale agree that Tendulkar’s primary compulsion is and has always been humanistic. One of the keys to delve the aesthetic world of Tendulkar is through his characters.

Tendulkar’s portrayal of women is most endearing and convincing in the realm of Indian theatre. They are not idealized, glamorized or mere puppets at the hands of the creator. They are not stereotypical but full-blooded, authentic, realistic figures that encompass vulnerable to shrewd, flexible to headstrong, conservative to rebellious from self-sacrificing to exacting women.

More often there are contrasting pairs of women in the plays. Leela Benare and Mrs. Kashikar in Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe are juxtaposed to each other. Benare is agile, full of pride and laughter and skilled in exposing the deceptive facades. Although Benare cannot be acquitted of her physical transgression, she wins the sympathy and steals the show when she makes futile attempts to safeguard her position as a teacher and wishes to give her baby, a father’s name. Mrs. Kashikar is ridiculous and subservient to her husband who commands her all the time.

Manik and Rama in Gidhade are painted in shades more livid and bold. As in the earlier play, being with or without child becomes an identifying metaphor for understanding the psychological make-up of these women. Manik, like Benare carries an illegitimate child but is brutally forced for abortion. Rama’s infertility is a symbol of the lust and evil infested in her husband Ramakant and his family. If Manik is one of the vultures, Rama is a meek, timid sparrow. Rama too is unconventional in her own way, as
she seeks a solution to bear a child by developing intimacy with her brother-in-law Rajaninath. Finally both Manik and Rama are stripped off their hopes and dreams.

Laxmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder* are diagonally opposed to each other. Laxmi is conventional but exercises her own haughtiness in reforming Sakharam from an atheist to a worshipper of God. Champa is the emblem of sexuality, a bold seductress who suffers but has the strength to rebel against her capricious husband and tyrannies of Sakharam and seek physical gratification from Dawood.

In *Kamala* the cultured, well-educated Sarita is poised against the illiterate, tribal Kamala but underneath the superficial differences lies the concealed similarity that both are victimized by the same patriarchal man-made world. Kamala shows a readiness to share even a husband and her willingness to compromise. Once again the issue of having a child comes to the forefront and Kamala in all her innocence is willing to undertake the responsibility of motherhood. Sarita’s newly begotten sense of self-realization makes her react to Jaisingh’s demands but she lacks the courage and mettle to cross the thresholds like her other counterparts and the play ends on an ambivalent note with the issue of Sarita’s emancipation unresolved.

Almost all the female characters of Tendulkar are granted exceptional liberty to exercise their free will and assert themselves at one point or other. Although they may not be successful in cutting across the powerful male-chauvinist system, the violation of code by Leela Benare, Rama, Champa, Laxmi, Baby or even Anjali who catches moments of pleasure even in molestation, Sumitra in her affirmation of lesbianism exemplify a freedom of moral choice and essentially erase the nihilistic tendencies.

N. S. Dharan observes: “The roles Tendulkar’s female protagonists play eclipse those played by the men figuring in them” (Dharan 1999: 28). Shanta Gokhale adds a different perspective, “Tendulkar has created memorable male and female characters, but it is his women on account of their unique position in society, who help to reveal his social conscience, and it is they who emerge as the columns and beams on which he builds his structures” (Gokhale in Madge 2007: 32). A close look at Tendulkar’s male characters suffices to show that his plays are not merely gyno-centric but his theatrical world is also inhabited by unforgettable and unique male figures. Yet, it may be safely argued that his unconventional, “new woman” carves a niche for herself. These women
characters are more endearing and memorable, they cast a lingering impact. It is the spark in them that enhances a dynamism and radicalism at once asserting their presence anew in the modern period.

Jaisingh Jadhav, the flamboyant investigative journalist reaps the success and glory of the extraordinary feat he has performed by exposing the flesh-trade and giving sensational news to rock the world but is made to pay an exorbitant price by getting sacked from the job. It is the psychological and emotional set-up that determines the women’s world whereas the males have their world overpowered by social barricades. It is the ‘work’ that defines their existence. Vasant and Kashinath from *Manus Navache Bet* are desperately trying to cling to life, precariously striving to sustain themselves by undertaking respectable white-collar jobs but their efforts are thwarted and what they receive offers temporary solace. Mahipati Porparnekar also has to struggle for success. He cannot choose to be ambitious; with his meagre demands from the world outside, he intends to get a secure job, tries the strangest kind of remedies but is ultimately the loser. These men belong to a ‘class’, a ‘group’ without much of individuality, aspirations, talent, wrestling to create a foothold within the system.

Even the men who torture fall into a specific category like Ramakant, Umakant and Papa Pitale who are evil incarnate and the men in *Shantata!* who derive a sadistic pleasure in hunting down Benare and pouncing on her for violating the moral codes—Kashikar, Rokde, Sukhatme, Ponkshe try to conceal their moral bankruptcy.

It is in *Shrimant* that Tendulkar depicts the power struggle between individuals who are keen to wreck the hegemonic class-structure. Sridhar’s mission to humiliate Dadasaheb is painted almost in melodramatic manner where Sridhar is an unblemished, spotless character whitewashed against the diabolic presence of Dabasaheb who is painted in dark shades. Similar is the character of Sakharam, who is bereft of a single redeeming feature, completely displaced and alienated from the society that he inhabits. Although an egoist and narcissist, Sakharam shows a remarkable change. With Laxmi’s entry in his life, he becomes more devoted, sober and humane and in his own way he too tries to “belong” to the system that he so vehemently detests.

Ghashiram and Nanasaheb Phadnavis are the most striking characters ever created in the history of Marathi Drama. Surrounded by ever lasting debates, these characters are
manifestations of the “paradoxes” that define mankind. Neither of them is adulated or condemned by Tendulkar. It is Tendulkar’s aloofness, his aesthetic stance to decline any comment within the play that provides free space for every character to originate, develop and relate itself within the auspices of the dramatic action. Ghashiram’s revolt, his impinging angst expresses itself in the most barbaric and inhuman ways. His lust for power is nurtured by Nanasaheb’s equal covetousness for amorous adventure. The degeneration and moral decrepitude is equally caricatured in other characters like Vratyasom, Pishtakeshi, Karkashirsha, Bhagdanta, from *Encounter in Umbagland*, the portrayal of Chief Minister in *Bhau Murarao* and *Niyatchya Bailala*. Arun in *Kanyadaan* exhibits the bestiality that lies concealed beneath the veneer of sophistication. His perversity echoes that of his predecessors like Ramakant, Umakant, Papa Pitale and Sakharam. The main character in *The Cyclist* is a departure from the earlier gallery of characters created by Tendulkar. He grapples for the answer to the great existential questions “Where did I come from? Where will I go?” The foregoing discussion clearly establishes Tendulkar’s mastery in the art of characterization which does not fall into convenient delineation of stereotypical characters but draws its potential energy from a streamlined rendering of experiences and a depth of observation.

Tendulkar’s three plays *Gidhade*, *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghashiram Kotwal* can be considered a trilogy for their thematic parallelisms, their corresponding preoccupation with sexual issues and delineations of violence. All the three plays evoked hostile responses and censorship for performances on account of their ostensible obscenity, iconoclasm and outbursts of brutality and Tendulkar along with the performing crew had to fight the battles for the continuation of the stage shows. Aparna Dharwadkar notes, “Tendulkar’s mission from the beginning has been to challenge the complacency of a middle-class urban Marathi audience whose desire for “brisk, light and mindless entertainment” he blames for the ascent of the medium of film and the decline of serious drama” (Dharwadkar 2006: 113). She further claims that “Vijay Tendulkar is perhaps the only literary playwright who has defined his art in relation to his “public” because he views theatre as essentially a spectator-driven form” (Ibid: 113).

There are certain related issues that can be addressed after an analysis of Tendulkar’s artistic accomplishment in portraying various shades of human nature. Can
his plays presenting the gloomy, bleak vision of life be termed as tragedies? What is Tendulkar trying to represent through his literary output? These issues can be handled one by one to interpret his plays more elaborately.

In 1949 Arthur Miller delivered a manifesto on “Tragedy and the Common Man”, in defence of the possibility of tragedy in a modern world in which we all seem more or less “common”.

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the scepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very high placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied. I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. (Miller in Bushnell 2008: 101).

Miller thus called for a refashioning of the “tragedy of the common man”. Certainly the concept of Greek tragedies or Shakespearian tragedies cannot be a yardstick for judging the post-modern writings. One needs to speculate on Tendulkar’s works with the parameters provided by modern dramatists such as Miller. G. M. Kulkarni poses the question about Tendulkar’s handling the form of tragedy and then he himself furnishes an answer: “From the beginning, ‘Pathos’ is the permanent expression in Tendulkar’s writings…., but it does not usually achieve the rank of a tragedy” (Kulkarni 1971: 110). Originally G. M. Kulkarni recorded his statement in his article written in 1971 but did not change it in the supplement to the article written in 1975, where he states - “…. Pathetic or obscene expressions seldom transform into the rank of tragedy” (Kulkarni 1975: 177).

If tragedy implies the destruction of common man, or something related to him then the devastating effects are clearly evident in most of the plays of Tendulkar. In Manus Navache Bet, the dreams of Malu and Kashinath perish away; similar is the end of Govinda and Kama’s desires in Chimnicha Ghar. Madhav’s dreams of artistic career in Mi Jinklo Mi Harlo are ruined; Mangala’s ambitions reach their end in Ek Hatti Mulgi. Benare’s yearning desires in Shantata! Arun and Saru’s aspiring love in Ashi Pakhare
meet a tragic end. *Gidhade* depicts the destruction of all the characters and also shatters the emotional world of Rama and Rajanninath to pieces. Sakharam loses his power and Laxmi is also defeated at the end in *Sakharam*. Ghashiram’s tragic doom seals the end of his innocence and life. Baby is left crestfallen with her beautiful dreams crushed to pieces. Mahipati and Nalini witness their aspirations turn to nothingness in *Pahije Jatiche*. *Bhau Murarrao* and *Niyatchiya Bailala* render the defeated aspirations of the political bigwigs. *Safar* incorporates the frustrations of the main character in the realization of his goal. Tendulkar’s plays clearly epitomize the tragedy of the common man as redefined by Arthur miller in the post-war era. The degree of annihilation may vary from one play to another but its cognizable presence is unquestionable. Tragic sense is not peripheral to Tendulkar’s plays but central to his theatrical representation and artistic concerns.

Vinod Bala Sharma adds another dimension to Tendulkar’s plays in the context of Indian drama:

Though rich in tragedy, the Indian mind does not assess the tragic situation in the manner of the west. Except for Vijay Tendulkar we find none of the nihilism and neuro-psychological problems that the western plays are ridden with. Even Badal Sircar who comes closest to the absurdist drama does not denounce life as such. The meaning of life can evade an Indian mind, but his unbound capacity to reconcile paradoxes saves him from the path of absolute degeneration. Badal Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* may find it difficult to solve riddles and Karnad’s characters may face the dilemma of the final truth, yet they don’t venture into the moral decrepitude and vacuum of Strindberg or Jean Genet. The nearest they come is to Harold Pinter’s or John Osborne’s characters.

Of all our playwrights Tendulkar comes nearest to the ‘Mega Death’ of moral values. While Bhasa and T. P. Kailsham associated mega deaths with too strict a code of morality; Tendulkar’s version is just the opposite.

(Sharma in Tandon 2006: 25-26)

Chandrashekhar Barve defends the art of Tendulkar in the context of contemporary Marathi theatre: “A comprehensive view of his plays reveals that primarily Tendulkar is inclined to show various human relationships, complexities of mind and their results. While depicting them, he uses ‘pathos’; sometimes he employs grotesque
forms, sometimes intermingling of the two neither too pathetic, nor too awful, but yet in serious manner. But does that mean that applying the parameters of traditional tragedies to his art be correct?” (Barve 1985: 75 translated)

Certainly Tendulkar’s own stance could illuminate the issue of pessimism in his plays:

My experience of my times, my life has shown me that the individual is largely disempowered, made object, reduced to the role of spectator by the logic of certain events and social groupings…. The history of human culture has taken very complex twists and turns. Yet, even today, my inspirational strength lies in the hope with which I look forward to tomorrow. I have consistently depicted the indomitable and the grit of the human spirit in my writings. But I have never allowed that to lead me into drawing unreal, comforting conclusions.
(Tendulkar 1997: 188)

It is essential to review Tendulkar’s works to examine the contrary opinions and observations made. His drama undeniably exhibits the darker facets of human life but conversely it is the unflinching faith in the beauty of life and the insatiable urge to move on that makes his characters unique in their own way.

Malu: If man keeps trying, he gets the fruits some time or the other.
(Manus Navache Bet)
Nana: I will not speak, but whatever is bound to happen, will happen
(Madhlya Bhinti).
Govind: God’s kingdom is beautiful (Chimnicha Ghar Hota menacha).
Leela Benare: Life is not meant for anyone else. It’s your own life. It must be. It’s a very, very important thing. Every moment, every bit of it is precious. (Shantata!..)
Arun: This was predestined to happen (Ashi Pakhare Yeti)
Baby: I have faith that God will be kind to me. Since I have never wished anybody ill (Baby).
Baby: Suicide is cowardly. No matter how difficult, we mustn’t give up hope; we must keep making the effort. Life is a battle, Raghav! (Baby)
Main character: Man can’t be destroyed. No one can destroy my will to complete my journey! Nature must submit (Safar)
Evidently Tendulkar’s characters comment on the need for battling with the odds but resist being drifted towards nihilism. Grey shades may be predominant but the picture is not completely black, for the characters are given the freedom of choice which is another tenet that marks the transience in their worldview. Similar perception is echoed in Shanta Gokhale’s remark: “For Tendulkar the primary compulsion is and has always been humanistic. Man’s fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert or overt violence in human beings, these are his abiding concerns” (Gokhale in Madge 2007: 31-32). A writer with deeply humanistic, aesthetic considerations needs to be exonerated from allegations of nihilism or absence of philosophical outlook.

One more charge made by G. M. Kulkarni against Tendulkar’s writing is: “Actually philosophization is not the nature of Tendulkar” (Kulkarni 1993: 121). But this seems to be a sweeping generalization. Other critics like P. S. Nerurkar, Dr. D. B. Kulkarni also share similar views about a few plays. But Prof. D. T. Bhosale, Prof. Sudhir Rasal, D. V. Deshpande, Prof. M. V. Dhond hold favourable opinion about Tendulkar’s contemplation of life.

Such observations can be investigated from textual dialogues that demonstrate Tendulkar’s vision of life and his theoretical speculation.

Keshav: … no need of degrees, wisdom is required, humanity is essential. (*Shrimant*)
Kashinath: …. No one belongs to any one else in this world. (*Manus Navache Bet*)
Sadashiv: … all relationships are false. Finally there is only one relation, to the ‘self’. (*Madhlya Bhinti*)
Mavshi: … life is finally a circus. Three Ring Circus. Happiness is one ring; sorrow in the other and third is the circle of death. To move from one to another sportively is our only job. (*Chinnicha Ghar*)
Madhav: … suffering is very beautiful. I want my suffering. My ‘self’ hood also is needed. (*Mi Jinklo*)
Benare: Throw your life away–and you realize the luck of having it. Grant it dearer than life – and it only seems fit to throw away’. (*Shantata…*)
Benare: Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself …. Life is a very dreadful thing. Life must be hanged. Na jeevan jeevanamarhati. ‘Life is not worthy of life’ (*Shantata…*)
Rajaninath: … Point out to them. The burning ground and its ghat, where the sinful soul, burns off its being, takes its first free breath …. And yet, perhaps there is no escape for them. No… there is none. For there is no escape for them…. Or for anyone…. (Gidhadhe)
Laxmi: Night is when God rules everywhere. In the day man reigns. And men are sinful. (Sakharam Binder)
Papa: In this life, the worst possible tragedies happen – individually, nationally, and globally–these occur, and their solution: DO NOTHING. Every problem ultimately resolves itself. (Safar)

Such propositions corroborate the fact that Tendulkar’s writings explore the socio-psychological realities, the interrelationships, the complexities and futilities of such ties, consequential alienation, man’s individuality pitted against social political forces, etc. Chandrashekhar Barve claims, “The depiction of life in Tendulkar’s plays has an invisible but solid foundation in his philosophy of life” (Barve in Pandey and Taraporewala 1990: 25). Even an overtly cynical character like Sakharam has his own philosophy, it is indomitable will and their faith that enables the characters to derive meanings of the events in life. Futility of escape is pathetic but such characters sustain their faith in life through their efforts.

Tendulkar’s experimentalism has been discerned in his thematic concerns and endearing pen-portraits, but it is also his stylistic innovations that propelled the tenets of modernism in his plays. As a playwright well acquainted with the matrices of theatre, his dynamism manifests itself in elaborate stage directions. Several directors and actors have acquiesced that theatrical craftsmanship is harmonized so well within Tendulkar’s works that merely complying with the stage directions can assure success of the performance. Vikram Gokhale, the noted Marathi actor, claims that, “There’s an invisible director in Tendulkar who keeps making a variety of suggestions to the adventurous playwright in him from time to time… It is my belief that even a moderately intelligent director or actor would do a good job of a Tendulkar play. The more gifted of course would reap immense success” (Gokhale in Mulye 1992: 95).

As far as his technical innovations are concerned, he made an elaborate use of ‘sound’ in Kavlyanchi Shala. The technique of play within a play in Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe added a new dimension to the performance with an apt use of songs that are
integrated to the theme. The pen-bearers making announcements create sensational overtones and the rhythmic language enhances the irony and satire of the situation in Damdwipcha Mukabala. Arun Saranik in Ashi Pakhare Yeti and Rajaninath in Vultures are the participant narrators of the play who simultaneously are involved in the sphere of action and also isolate themselves as narrators to comment on the turn of the events. This offers a vantage point to give a comprehensive, multi-layered perspective on the plot dynamics. The use of human wall in Ghashiram Kotwal and the superbly knit synthesis of various folk forms not only enriched the repertoire of Marathi drama but also won global acclaim for its rich texture and ushered a revolution in the trajectory of performance. A rare combination of fable and history, the play occupies a unique position in the Marathi Theatre. In Mitrachi Goshta Bapu becomes the participant narrator. He furnishes interesting insights to the happenings.

Tendulkar’s works encompass a wide range from naturalistic plays written in the style of Ibsen to farcical plays. From social to psychological, from folk drama to surrealistic plays, he exploits the variegated avenues available to him, not remaining content with one form or other for realizing his creative enterprise. Tendulkar’s familiarity with Beckett, Brecht, Ionesco, Tennessee Williams, is vividly realized in the dramatic effects and selection of themes in his plays. The gory scenes of Vultures echo the theatre of cruelty by Antonin Artaud. Williams’ indulgence in depiction of sexuality finds its parallels in Sakharam Binder, Mitrachi Goshta, and other plays.

This peculiar fusion of the western dramatic material with indigenous forms was ill-received by some of the critics who accused Tendulkar of plagiarism. The critic Madhav Manohar vehemently criticized Tendulkar for his play Shrimant which, he claims, has been derived from Luigi Pirandello’s Pleasure of Honesty: “The charge is not of plagiarism only but of murdering the original play. It is not about the theft, but the perversity of the original act” (Manohar 1969: 2-3). Manohar concludes that “To conclude, Tendulkar has adopted the skeleton of Pirandello’s original play but has lost the essence to bring it to life. So I say that it is not mere plagiarism but the murder of literature” (Ibid 15). The central issue of a virgin mother is common to both the plays, where both Agata and Mathura are compelled to hire a husband, for escaping the social
stigma, but it is certainly an overriding generalization to neglect the originality of Tendulkar’s writing.

Madhav Manohar has accused Tendulkar of adapting Friedrich Durrenmatt’s play *Dangerous Game* as a source for *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (Manohar 1968: 7). Prof. P. N. Paranjpe has mentioned earlier that there is a shadow of *Dangerous Game* on Tendulkar’s play (Paranjpe 1969: 10). Prof. Paranjpe has quoted Tendulkar’s own explanation: “Durrenmatt has emphasized the moral aspect, my emphasis is on the social aspect” (Ibid: 10). Earlier, Mr. Prakash Gupte had written an article ‘Shantata! Tendulkar Chalu Ahet!’ (Silence! Tendulkar is cunning) where he traced the affinities between *Shantata!* and *Dangerous Game* (Gupte 1968: 3). However Tendulkar acknowledged the technical similarities but refuted the charges of Gupte as ‘logical’ but ‘false’ (Tendulkar 1968: 3). Tendulkar’s *Ashi Pakhare Yeti* also raised pens and eye-brows for literary indebtedness to critical censure, for drawing the source material from *The Rainmaker of Romance*, a play by N. Richard Nash. But a close scrutiny of the play reveals that despite minor semblances, Tendulkar’s play is completely authentic and original. Dr. Chandrashekhar Barve and Dr V. B. Deshpande are among the stalwarts who defend the artistic authenticity of Tendulkar.

Significantly Tendulkar who found himself surrounded by storms of controversies and debates, never let himself be deterred by it and continued his literary pursuits till the end of his days. His indefatigable spirit testifies itself in his own theoretical stance: “I take support of native as well as foreign sources for my plays, and I say what I want, in the method I want. According to me, the importance lies in what I say. Not to the label ‘Swatantra’. There cannot be a completely independent subject or form today. Whether a play belongs to Indian soil should be decided, not by searching its supports, but by proper investigation of the people who inhabit it and their lives” (Tendulkar 1973: 75). “If someone says my plays are not original it does not hurt me, but if someone says they are translations, it hurts (because, I feel it is an insult to the depicted people)” (Tendulkar 1976: 19).

Adil Jussawalla, the editor of the first major post-independence anthology of new Indian writing, considers the issues of origins and influences more or less irrelevant to literary production.
It is true that certain literary forms like “free verse” and such literary concepts as “realism”, “naturalism”, and “stream of consciousness” originated in the West. But such forms and concepts have now spread all over the world and it would only be fair to call their use in India “parasitic” if all international cross influences and borrowings went by that name. A fairer way of judging a country’s literature is to see the way its writers use certain international forms, to try to appreciate changes they make along or against their particular literary traditions, sometimes with the help of these forms, sometimes not, and most important of all, to try to understand the effect of their writing on their people. (Jussawalla 1976: 18).

These views complement the undying voice of the iconoclastic writer, Vijay Tendulkar. He introduced meaningful pauses, ellipses into drama which was marred by verbosity, thematic and stylistic nuances to a theatre which was monotonously reined by musical plays, the only prevalent form, surpassed the barriers of regional and reached the zenith of global fame and glory. He exposed us to the disturbing realities, took us closer to ‘individual’ in his primeval nature, stripped off civilized masks of sophistication and revealed shocking, infernal truths. Tendulkar was certainly a man who dared to think, to see in a stunningly different way, to shake the complacency of the Marathi stage into a new awareness and triggered the movement towards global realization and appeal.

By expunging melodrama, spectacle, and sentimentality from the forms of realism bequeathed from the pre-independence period, a playwright like Vijay Tendulkar fashioned serious, new vehicles for the stage. His innovative attempts not only designed a new means of presentation for his artistic endeavour but also exerted profound influence on the other theatre in Marathi and in various other Indian languages as well, during the formative decades. Mahesh Elkunchwar has been greatly influenced by Tendulkar and so does Mahesh Dattani acknowledge Tendulkar’s impact on his works. Incidentally, in Bombay, the hub of theatre “realism… carried not voice from the neglected margins of society, but from the mainstream, the educated middle-class, the upholders of norms, and also these who carefully defied them, in whom was invested the responsibility for creating a modern society in their newly independent country” (Gokhale 2000: 116).

The budding Marathi playwrights were not angry young men accosting the establishment, but socially conscious writers who desired to comprehend their situations
so as to precipitate change. This new generation of Marathi playwrights led by Tendulkar therefore epitomizes the standpoint that realism is the indispensable modern tool for understanding, contending with and denoting the post–independence present.

It is the need of the hour to judge the worth of a Marathi writer like Tendulkar’s artistic talent in a larger context, overcoming the mediocrity of narrow–mindedness and literary myopia. A versatile author of Tendulkar’s stature who led the Marathi experimental theatre and created new horizons for literature by his unusual amalgamation and symbiosis of western art forms and indigenous cultural elements needs to be studied more carefully and more systematically. A modest attempt to do so has been done in Chapter IV. But prior to that, in Chapter III, let us examine the making of Tennessee Williams, the American dramatist, whose play *The Street Car Named Desire* was translated by Tendulkar as *Vasanachakra* thus marking the proximity between his theatrical art and that of Williams.