CHAPTER THREE
TENDULKAR’S VISION OF SOCIETY

This chapter makes a thematic study of Vijay Tendulkar’s eight plays translated into English, viz. *Silence! The Court is in Session, The Vultures, Encounter in Umbugland, Sakharam Binder, Ghashiram Kotwal, A Friend’s Story, Kamala*, and *Kanyadaan* in order to bring out his vision of society and human life. It attempts to project the playwright as a social critic who offers a rare and powerful insight into the contemporary society.

**Literature and Society:**

The relation of literature and society is inseparable. Literature is a study of life and expresses the changing conditions of the society. According to W.H. Hudson, we have to investigate the literature of any given moment in connection with the then existing society. It is because the writer is not an isolated fact but the product of the age in which he lives and works. The political, social, religious, scientific, and economic conditions of a particular period affect its literature. The thoughts and feelings, interests and ideas of an age enter into the making of its literature. Just as the writer is influenced by society, similarly he also influences it. The element of individuality in a writer’s work stamps its impress upon his age. This is how a writer succeeds in giving an abiding and universal appeal to his creation.

Everything that is created in the society satisfies one or the other of its needs. The creation of literature is meant to satisfy the cultural needs of the society. Naturally society’s condition affects it. In addition to providing entertainment and
edification, society expects literature to strengthen its value system. Society looks at literature as an ornament that highlights its culture. The writer inherits the customs, traditions, and beliefs of the society in which he is born. He communicates his experiences of life through literature. The writer who revolts against the society does not want to destroy it. He only wishes to bring about certain changes in it. Thus the writer is a wise and impartial person and a benefactor to the society.

Society is a group of persons who co-operate for certain common purposes. The desires of an individual and the common purposes of society are often opposed to each other and give rise to a conflict between them. The conflict between human beings and the society they live in has been going on since time immemorial. An individual’s wishes and desires, his search for happiness, often leads him towards doing things that are not sanctioned by society. The society tries to impose its rules in the form of taboos and traditions on the individual. The individual, on the other hand, is always trying to break free from such dominance. When an individual breaks the norms of society, he becomes the victim of its oppression. Literature faithfully reflects this eternal phenomenon.

The Indian Society:

The Indian society was based on the caste or Varna system in ancient times. The society was divided into four categories, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The Shudras were not permitted to hear or study the Vedic hymns as their study was reserved for the people of higher classes. According to J.T.F. Jordens, the original Vedic varna system had divided society into four classes according to the deeds and qualities of each individual person and women had equal
rights with men. The utter degeneration of the system led to the practice of determining the caste on the basis of birth.² There also existed a fifth category in the form of the Untouchables. Stanley Wolpert observes: “As more and different tribal people were absorbed within the spreading boundaries of Aryan society, it soon became necessary to add still a lower class, one whose occupations were so unclean that Shudras did not wish to touch them. This led to the emergence of the class of Untouchables also called panchamas.”³

All these groups had been assigned specific duties and responsibilities. The Brahmins were concerned with learning and scholarly pursuits. The Kshatriyas were the warriors whereas the Vaishyas were the businessmen. The Shudras were the labourers. The untouchables were assigned all the menial jobs in the society. The caste system was further complicated by its division into innumerable sub-castes. The status of an individual depended upon the caste in which he was born and not on his learning or skill.

The rigidity of the caste system caused social inequality. As this system was beneficial for the higher caste people, they made every effort to justify the social hierarchy and always strongly opposed its violation. Dr. Ambedkar comments:

“Caste system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour – it is an hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one about the other.”⁴ Such gradation resulted in persons of some castes being easily exploited, as there could be no unity amongst them. Thus exploitation and oppression has existed in our society since time immemorial. M. Sarat Babu aptly remarks that the divisions of men and women into various castes and classes and their hierarchy
results in the people of higher rungs exploiting and oppressing those of lower rungs in our society suffering from social inequality and the boundaries of caste are strongly guarded to sustain it.⁵

In our society, individual rights were subordinated to social role expectations. A person’s individual self had very little recognition in this societal framework. Another aspect of the social inequality in our society is the gender discrimination. The division of society on the basis of gender was further strengthened by the roles that men and women were entrusted to play in the making of family. The chief function of man was to earn the livelihood of the family. Men were given the power of governing and controlling all the affairs of family. The patriarchal society thrust the household responsibilities specially those of giving birth to children and rearing them up and cooking food, on the women. According to Claude M. Steiner, as men and women, human beings are socialised to develop certain parts of their personalities while suppressing the development of other parts.⁶ The socio-cultural programming of sex roles results in men developing the faculties of controlling and rationality whereas women developing those of nurturing and intuition. The society trains men to suppress the faculties of nurturing and intuition. Women are taught to suppress their faculties of controlling and rationality. Such socio-cultural programming of sex roles does not allow human beings to live happily. Thus an exploitative and oppressive society of men in relation to the exploited and oppressed society of women came into existence. The glorification of sex roles led to men and women imbibing the exploitative culture and perpetuating it.
The later Vedic times saw the crystallisation of the classes of society. According to Romila Thapar, there was a fairly rigid ordering of society in the post-Vedic period in which the Brahmins had a pre-eminent status as the advancement of knowledge lay in their hands. Their superiority was also sustained by the maintainance of caste-system in India. The position of the untouchables had declined considerably. They lived on the outskirts of towns and villages and engaged themselves in lowlier occupations such as scavenging, keeping the cremation grounds clean and making leather goods. In the Vedic period, women had occupied an honourable position in our society. They had a right to education and freedom in the choice of their husbands. They were married at a mature age. There was monogamy.

In the post-Vedic period, the status of women began to decline. According to Masood A. Khan, the levity of women started in the later Vedic period with the increasing lofty pretensions of the higher caste people. The Indo-Aryans were seized with an inordinate passion for preserving the purity of caste by ensuring the loyalty of women and tightened the ties of matrimony as far as women were concerned. Though society allowed a man to marry below his caste if he so wished, a woman was never permitted to do this, as pollution of caste was believed to be caused by the vagaries of women. Denial to education resulted in the confinement of women at homes. The practice of early marriage became widespread. The custom of polygamy and the prohibition of widow-remarriage came into existence. The widows were forced to shave off their heads. The plight of women reached its zenith with the appearance of the custom of Sati or self-immolation. A woman was conditioned to look upon her husband as God and worship him. The custom of veiling (Purdah) also came into
existence. Infanticide became prevalent in some parts of India. Sri Aurobindo aptly remarks that the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of the common life and culture to the women and the Shudras resulted in the decline of our society.  

The condition of the women in our society was really pathetic. A woman was considered as an object of enjoyment and as a slave. The wife was regarded as a non-entity, her sole duty being serving the husband and his family. The daughter was regarded as a burden. The condition of the widows was even more pathetic. They were forced to lead an ascetic life. Their re-marriage was not allowed. Our society expected women to emulate the mythological characters such as Sita, Savitri, and Shakuntala. The classical Sanskrit literature abounds in idealized portraits of such women characters. The prominent qualities that these women displayed were self-effacement, an unquestioning endurance of suffering and the worship of husband as God. An ideal woman was expected to display these qualities. Ironically, the men were not expected to emulate Rama, the embodiment of a virtuous man. The society used to measure the worth of a woman against these yardsticks. This situation had slowly begun to change in the latter half of the nineteenth century due to the efforts of the social reformers and writers. The Marathi drama of the period shows the transformation of idealised women characters into assertive and self-willed women searching to discover their true self.

The advent of the British rule in the 19th century caused certain changes in the Indian society. The Christian missionaries began campaigning against the social evils in Indian society with a view to convert the native people to Christianity. As a result, the British government was compelled to make laws against the inhuman practices in
our society. The British government introduced English education in order to create a class of educated natives to assist them in the administration. Having imbibed the ideas of humanism and liberalism, the newly educated class perceived the ills in the society and began to fight against them. This led to the reformatory movements in India. The social reformers like Mahatma Phule, G.G. Agarkar, Lokahitawadi, R.R. Roy, and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar etc. devoted their lifetime for the struggle to liberate the Indian society from the clutches of unjust bondages and cruel conventions and to improve the condition of women. J.T.F. Jordens observes that we find in Maharashtra ample evidence of a growing awareness about social and religious reform. Many local reform groups and societies were started. Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias Lokahitawadi and Jotiba Phule did pioneering work in this field. They bitterly attacked the social iniquities of traditional society, the caste system and the abject condition of women in their writings.10

With the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian women were encouraged to participate in the freedom struggle. Gandhi was against any kind of discrimination. He regarded the Untouchables and women as victims of social inequality and made genuine efforts to improve their lot. Violating the then prevailing social norms, many women collaborated with men on an equal footing in the struggle for independence.

In the post-Independence period, the nation made rapid strides with the aid of industrialisation and development programmes. The traditional Indian society was exposed to modernisation and western culture. Vijayalakshmi Seshadri observes that the spread of education and caste-free employment led to the emergence of a new urban middle class where caste affiliations had ceased to matter.11 The new urban
middle class does not confer status and pre-eminence on anybody merely on the basis of caste but takes into account the education, performance and accomplishments of an individual. Realising the advantages of education, more and more people began claiming their share of it. Women stepped out of domesticity into the public life. They started becoming self-reliant through education and employment. Their outlook towards marriage and their status in the family began to change gradually. The joint family system slowly started breaking up.

**Picture of Society in Marathi Drama:**

As the literature and the society are inter-related, we find that the changing social conditions have been reflected in the literature of the various eras. The Marathi drama, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the movements for social reforms are closely related. They have collaborated with each other in bringing about changes in society. The Marathi drama has been pro-society right from its beginning. The Marathi drama can boast of its visionary playwrights who could look beyond their times while interpreting the contemporary reality. They dealt with the then social, political, religious and economic conditions and the problems created because of them in their plays. The reformist thoughts such as the insistence upon the equality of men and women, the protest against child-marriages, the struggle for remarriages of widows etc. found place in their plays. The family system that had a great importance in those days has been depicted in many plays of this period. Having come into contact with the English education, the society realized the importance of individualism and belief in logic. The changes that occurred in the life of the
individual, the family as well as in the social mentality are constantly reflected in the Marathi plays.

G.B. Deval’s *Sharada* (1899) may be said to have laid the foundation of the modern social realistic play in Marathi. The protagonist, Sharada, is a fourteen years old girl. Kanchanbhat, her father, fixes Sharada’s marriage with Bhujanganath, an old man, out of his greed for money. The play shows the pathetic condition of women in our patriarchal society that has no objection to such an alliance. Such imbalanced marriages often resulted in the woman becoming a widow at an early age. This could lead to other problems such as illicit physical relations, abortion, infanticide and birth of diseased children. But Sharada and her mother try to oppose this marriage which shows that women had begun to protest against the tyranny imposed on them.

Kolhatkar also wrote a few plays with a view to bring about changes in the miserable condition of women. He tried to remove the misconception that women would be spoiled due to education in his play *Guptamanjush*. He had hailed widow-remarriage in *Mativikar*. He also depicts how it is unjust to marry a girl against her will to a person of older age.

Khadilkar’s *Keechak Wadh* is an apt example of the way the playwrights tried to guide the common people to fight against the foreign rule by providing some hidden messages through their plays. Lord Curzon’s unjust regime was satirised in this powerful allegorical play. Thus Khadilkar used the play as an ally in the nationalist movement. He criticised the increasing addiction to liquor in society in his play *Vidyaharan*. The newly educated Indian young men had taken to liquor in their blind imitation of the western ways. The social reformers as well as writers realised
the urgent need of arresting the increasing addiction to liquor as it could destroy families. Khadilkar’s *Vidyaharan* and Gadkari’s *Ekach Pyala* were the results of such thinking.

Gadkari also played his part in the ongoing social as well as nationalist movement through his plays. In *Premsanyas*, he dealt with remarriage and the marriage between persons in whose ages there is a lot of difference. In *Ekach Pyala*, Gadkari depicted how alcoholism of a man, Sudhakar, leads to the destruction of his family. The tragic fate of Sindhu, Sudhakar’s wife, who worships her husband as a God, leads us to question the blind devotion that society expects from a wife to her husband. Sindhu is doomed, as her husband has fallen to the level of a beast because of his excessive drinking.

While dealing with the contemporary political, economic and social conditions, Warerkar depicted the problems and sufferings of the lower-middle class people in his plays. He portrayed the day-to-day life of the Maharashtrian people, their sufferings, hardships and frustrations in an authentic manner. His *Haach Mulacha Baap* satirised the evils of the rampant dowry system. He shed light on the problem of enforced conversion of natives to Christianity in his play *Sanyashacha Sansar*. He brought out the conflict between the capitalist and the labour class in *Sonyacha Kalas*.

P.K. Atre’s *Gharabaher* (1935) proved to be an important milestone in advocating the cause of women. Nirmala, the heroine of the play, gives up the Mangal Sutra, the sacred thread that symbolizes the marriage, on finding her husband powerless to protect her from false accusations and disgrace. The changing nuances
of man-woman relationship have been ably portrayed by the playwright in this play. The society that is always evaluating the woman against the touchstone of age-old traditions and customs but connives at the weaknesses of man is shown the mirror in the play. In *Udyacha Sansar*, Atre portrayed the disintegration of a family due to the irresponsible behaviour of its members and also pointed out the drawbacks of the institution of marriage. The play shows how too much of personal freedom and neglect of one’s duties towards the other family members can shake the foundations of the family system. In *To Mee Navhech*, Atre sheds light on the problem of women who cannot get married at the right age and how certain evil-minded and opportunist elements in the society take advantage of the desparation of the family members of such women and ruin them. The system of arranged marriages in our society is such that the parents of the bride have to compromise in many respects. The villain in the play takes advantage of such social mentality and marries several women under various disguises and runs away with the dowry. It is the fact of women being looked at as a burden that facilitates such crimes.

M.G. Rangnekar also presented various aspects of our society in his plays. His play *Ashirvad* presents a thought-provoking picture of how education, which is considered as a blessing for woman, can create obstacles in the path of her happiness. Sumittra, the heroine of the play, decides to remain unmarried, as she is the sole breadwinner in her poor family, which has managed to give her higher education by the skin of their teeth. The effects of the Women’s Liberation Movement, which had begun in the West to destroy unjust male-domination, were felt in India too. Rangnekar’s play *Kulavadhu* bears testimony to the fact that the women’s question
was getting importance in the society day-by-day. Bhanumati, the heroine of this play, leaves her husband’s house due to the unjust and cruel treatment given to her by him. The playwright, however, could not avoid the influence of tradition in totality when it comes to the outlook towards women. So Bhanumati leaves her husband’s house and goes to stay with her father-in-law. It seems that Rangnekar became soft due to the general social thinking and could not do full justice to Bhanumati’s rebellion.

The Marathi drama, thus, acted as an ally to the movements for social reform and political freedom going on in the society during the latter half of 19th and the first half of 20th century. The Marathi playwrights used the drama not merely as a source of entertainment but as a vehicle of instruction and illumination. The theatre became a powerful weapon against social evils in the hands of the playwrights. Vijay Tendulkar and his contemporaries continued this tradition in the latter half of the twentieth century. An analysis of Tendulkar’s plays is presented here to give us an insight into Tendulkar’s themes and his exposure of the double standards practiced in the Indian society.

**A Critical Study of Vijay Tendulkar’s Eight Plays Translated into English:**

A critical study of Tendulkar’s plays brings to light the fact that an accurate and sensitive portrayal of the socio-political issues of the time is the main concern of the playwright. He expresses a strong dissatisfaction with the existing conditions of life. In pre-independence period, the Marathi playwrights like G.B. Deval, K.P. Khadilkar and R.G. Gadkari had dealt with contemporary social issues in a realistic manner in some of their works. With the exception of Mama Varerkar and M.G.
Rangnekar, the other playwrights in the post-independence era were mostly producing farces and melodramas in order to entertain the audience. Tendulkar added to the seriousness of the Marathi drama that was preoccupied with sentimental love scenes and amusing situations. He revolutionised the Marathi drama, which had been trapped in a melodramatic, nostalgic mode. Through his plays, Tendulkar made the reader-audience face the brutal realities of life through his portrayal of society and human life with all its ugliness andcrudity. With his socially and politically significant plays, the Marathi stage learnt to face the naked realities of whatever was happening around. An analysis of Tendulkar’s plays brings to our notice his intense awareness about the various domestic social and political problems and the hypocrisies prevailing in people’s mind. He has the courage to expose the orthodox society by attacking its various evils such as hypocrisy, violence, promiscuity and greed. While tracing the anatomy of society, his plays hold a mirror to the desires, dreams and despairs of the ordinary people engaged in their day-to-day struggle of life. He delves deep into the human psyche to find out the causes of their misery and suffering. His plays depict human lives stagnating in the mire of lust, greed and violence. The following study of Tendulkar’s plays will help us to understand his vision of society and human life.

_Silence! The Court is in Session:_

‘Silence! The Court is in Session’ is the English translation by Priya Adarkar of Vijay Tendulkar’s play ‘Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe’. It was performed on the stage in 1967 and published in 1968. It was based on Friedrich Durrenmatt’s story ‘Die Panne’ (Traps). It received a lukewarm response initially. In 1970, it won the
prestigious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award for the best play of the year. Then the play became an instant hit all over the country and Tendulkar came into the literary limelight. His earlier plays had been much admired and had earned him encouraging reviews. But all this was happening within a small group of friends and well-wishers. ‘Silence! The Court is in Session’ brought him recognition on the national scale.

While handling the social problem of unwed pregnancy, the playwright portrays the plight of a helpless woman at the hands of a pretentious and hypocritical society. The playwright has effectively delineated the conflict between an individual and society in this play. He shows society’s hostile attitude towards an individual who refuses to follow its norms. He also exposes the human weaknesses such as lust, jealousy and vengefulness in this play.

Ms. Leela Benare, a spinster in her early thirties, is the protagonist. She is a schoolteacher and a member of The Sonar Moti Tenement (Bombay) Progressive Association that gives performances of the mock law court with the objective of spreading enlightenment in society. Mr. Kashikar is the chairman of the association. The other members include Mrs. Kashikar, a housewife, Mr. Sukhatme, a lawyer, Ponkshe, an inter-science failed clerk, Karnik, an actor, Balu Rokde, a student and Professor Damle.

The play opens with the arrival of Ms. Benare at the village hall where a mock law court is to be held in the evening. She is accompanied by Raghunath Samant, an innocent and well-meaning villager. At Benare’s suggestion they have reached to the hall before others. Benare flirts with Samant but he does not respond at all as he is completely unaware of Benare’s moves. She tells him point blank that she likes him
and is enjoying his company. She repeatedly goes near him on flimsy pretexts. It is
difficult to agree with Satish Barbuddhe who attributes Benare’s liking Samant to the
fact that she finds Samant to be innocent, simple and straight-forward just like her.\textsuperscript{12}
However, her love of life and playfulness are praiseworthy.

During her conversation with Samant, Benare reveals that the management of
the school where she works is holding an inquiry against her. She attributes it to
people’s jealousy and a bit of slander. She feels that she is perfect in her job. She
should not be punished for certain happenings in her personal life. Her unconscious
touching of the stomach while saying all this is suggestive. Benare strongly protests
against society’s inhuman oppression. The following words of Benare show her
rebellious attitude: “I haven’t hurt anyone. Anyone at all! If I’ve hurt anybody, it’s
been myself…Who are these people to say what I can or can’t do? My life is my own
- …My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those - no one!” (Act
I. p. 58) Thus she wants to live her life in her own way.

After the arrival of the remaining members, the group starts preparations for
their evening performance. Two of the members, Prof. Damle and Mr. Rawte are
absent. At the mention of Prof. Damle’s name Benare suddenly becomes silent and
motionless. It is decided that Samant will play the role of the fourth witness. Benare
goes out to wash her face. Sukhatme suggests the game of bringing an imaginary case
against someone to pass their time. All the members agree that Benare should be
made the accused.

While Benare is out of the room, the discussion as to who should be made the
accused takes place. The decision to make Benare the accused is unanimous. It is not
by chance that the others gang up against Benare. She has been making fun of all of them. M. Sarat Babu rightly observes that the other actors of the troupe, being victims of her ridicule, plan to take it out on her and expose her private life and humiliate her in the name of a mock-trial. Her sarcastic remarks, though made innocently, infuriate them. She is quite successful in her career. On the other hand, men like Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik are failures in their respective professions. The Kashikars resent Benare’s remarks regarding their remaining childless. They have given shelter to Balu Rokde and taken care of his education, at the same time making slave of him. Mrs. Kashikar, being an uneducated housewife, is jealous of the freedom that a career woman like Benare enjoys. Benare has unconsciously hurt the feelings of all these people at some time or the other. They are just looking for an opportunity to settle their score with her. That’s why she is victimised.

When Benare returns, she is told that she has been arrested on suspicion and accused of the crime of infanticide, (actually, foeticide). Benare who had been very lively and jovial till now appears totally stunned. On finding Benare tense after hearing the charge against her, Sukhatme tells her not to be very serious as it is just a game. His intention is to secure her co-operation in the proceedings of the trial. Mr. Kashikar defends the mock trial saying that the question of infanticide is of great social significance. Mr. Kashikar pompously exclaims that the problem of infanticide is important from the social point of view and the group has selected this topic for the mock trial in the best interests of the society. All the members pose as if they are the upholders of the interests of society. At the beginning of the trial the atmosphere is jovial. Eating and spitting of pans and parody of the court procedures creates some
fun. Ponkshe, the first witness, casts shadows of doubt over the moral conduct of Benare saying that ‘she runs after men too much’. He also thinks that her behaviour is unlike that of a normal unmarried woman. The next witness Karnik invents a lie that Balu Rokde has seen Benare in a compromising situation once. On being called to the witness box, Balu is very nervous. Benare makes fun of him. To get even with her, Balu alleges that he had spotted Benare in Prof. Damle’s room in the college hostel one night. Benare gets angry and asks not to bring her personal life into the mock trial. She protests: “There’s no need at all to drag my private life into this. I can visit whom I like.” (Act II. p. 87) Her colleagues who are enjoying her humiliation do not pay any heed to her protest.

Mr. Samant is asked to be the next witness on the assumption that he had been to Damle’s room half an hour after Balu’s visit. He is asked to say what he heard. In his enthusiasm to take part in the mock trial, Samant starts reading from a novel that he has with him. He says that he heard the woman telling the man that she was going to be the mother of his child but the man refused to take its responsibility. All this becomes too much for Benare who shouts at him to stop. She denies the occurrence of any such incident and alleges that all her fellow-artists have plotted against her. She says: “You’ve all deliberately ganged up on me! You’ve plotted against me!” (Act II. p. 93) She leaves the room in great agitation and with tears in her eyes. Samant feels sympathy for her. All the others, however, are exited that they have hit upon something about Benare’s personal life. Kashikar comments that the whole fabric of society is getting soiled these days. Sukhatme suggests that thoughtful people like them must deal with such matters seriously and responsibly. Thus they try to
legitimise their persecution of Ms. Benare. Her reaction to Samant’s speech has convinced them that there is something fishy in her life. They correctly guess about Benare’s illicit relationship with Damle. While they are giving expression to their suspicions, Benare returns and hears everything. She decides to leave the room at once. Unfortunately, the door has got locked from outside. Her fellow artists realise that she is trapped. They are overjoyed because they will be able to continue the trial against Benare. Benare knows that it is not a mock trial any more. She can’t, however, say so openly. Getting great sadistic pleasure from her plight, the other members force her to enter the witness-box. Thus what began as a mock trial turns into a real trial at the end of the second act.

In the third act, Benare has lost her earlier light heartedness and joviality. At the beginning of the third act, she is a horrified creature. Noone except Samant feels any sympathy for her mental agony. Mrs. Kashikar, the only other female character in the play, actually takes lead in Benare’s humiliation. She forces Benare to go to the witness-box. Her malice and treachery is evident from her words: “But my dear Benare, as your conscience is clear, why are you flying into such a violent rage?” (Act II. p. 93) Sukhatme goes through his worship ritual before the beginning of any new enterprise. It is clear that all her fellow artists are getting a perverse excitement anticipating her trial. Mrs. Kashikar is called in the witness-box. Sukhatme asks her whether she can shed any light on the fact that Benare has remained unmarried though she is almost thirty-four years old. Mrs. Kashikar suggests that Benare must have been getting everything that one can get after marrying so she has remained unmarried by her own choice. Mrs. Kashikar goes to
the extent of blaming the working women for spreading promiscuity in the society. On being asked to provide a proof of Benare’s loose behaviour, Mrs. Kashikar replies that Benare always insists on Damle escorting her to home at night after their shows. She also says that Balu had told her that Benare had once made advances towards him.

Balu Rokde is summoned as the next witness. He alleges that Benare held his hand one night after their show. On being objected by Balu for such behaviour of hers, she threatened him with dire consequences if he told anyone about it. Ponkshe who is eager to testify against Benare requests Sukhatme to call him to the witness-box so that he can tell as to how he was invited by Benare in a restaurant. She had asked him about his marriage plans. Then she had suggested that a friend of hers was going through a rough period because of a disappointment in love. She was also carrying the fruit of that love in her womb. She asked Ponkshe whether he would like to marry that girl. Ponkshe, of course, refused. Now he tells the court that he is certain that Benare was talking of herself under the pretext of helping her friend. At this time Benare who has been silent since a long time exhorts Ponkshe not to reveal the name of the person in her life. Ponkshe concludes by identifying that person as Damle.

The next witness is Karnik. He modifies Balu Rokde’s account of his meeting with Benare a little. Karnik says that he had overheard the conversation between Benare and Rokde. Benare had asked Rokde to marry her and give his name to her child. In return she was ready to support Rokde all life and thus free him from his bondage to the Kashikars. Rokde, however, had refused her proposal. Karnik discloses another bit of information about Benare’s past. He had accidentally come
across a cousin of Benare. The cousin told him that Benare had made an unsuccessful attempt of committing suicide at the age of fifteen. Benare had fallen in love with her maternal uncle and had been disappointed in that affair.

Mr. Kashikar, the judge, also has something to say about Benare. He had overheard a conversation between Nanasaheb Shinde, the Chairman of an Education Society and a lady teacher working in the High School run by that society. The teacher was pleading with Mr. Shinde to drop an enquiry against her. Mr. Kashikar has now realised that it was Benare’s voice. He has also heard Mr. Shinde ordering Benare’s dismissal from her job because of her sinful pregnancy in an unmarried state. In addition to the mental torture that she is suffering due to her cross-examination by her fellow artists, Benare now realises that she is going to lose her job too. Her attempt to drink poison is thwarted by Karnik. Mr. Kashikar calmly takes the bottle of poison in his custody and orders Sukhatme to continue the trial. Sukhatme demands the severest punishment that is possible for Benare who has broken social and moral values. Finally, the Judge gives Benare ten seconds to defend herself. The playwright has used the technique of freezing the action while Benare gives a long reply. She accepts that she had sinned by falling in love with her maternal uncle and later on, by having an illicit relationship with a married man. She holds her body responsible for her actions. Her self justification—“This body is a traitor! I despise this body- and I love it!” (Act III. p. 118) is unsatisfactory. She insists that she took care of not letting the shadow of her sins fall on the minds of the young children in her charge. She justifies her desperate attempts to get married after becoming pregnant on the ground that she wanted to give a proper life to her child. All the
characters remain frozen during her soliloquy, which implies that her pleas fall on deaf ears. Finally, the Judge holds her guilty for breaking social customs and traditions. The hypocrisy and double standards of our male dominated society become evident from the fact that no mention of Damle is made who is equally guilty in the crime for which Benare is being punished. Her punishment is the destruction of the child in her womb. N.S. Dharan rightly comments that Tendulkar exposes the hypocrisy, selfishness, sham moral standards and the sadism latent in Benare’s colleagues.14 Benare falls on the ground in a heart-broken state. Having enjoyed her humiliation thoroughly, now Benare’s fellow-artists pretend to be very loving and considerate towards her. She is told that it was just a mock trial and she should not mind it too much.

Thus the play shows how society victimises the individual who defies its customs and traditions. Ms. Benare is the individual who tries to throw off the yoke of social sanctions against individual freedom, and is, therefore, victimised. A close look at the characters like the Kashikars, Sukhatme, Ponkshe and Karnik, shows how ill the society is. The inhuman oppression that Benare suffers is the result of her disregard to the way society expects an unmarried woman to behave. There is no doubt about the fact that Benare has done certain wrong things. But the persons who undertake the task of judging her and pronouncing the punishment themselves are full of faults. Their hypocrisy clearly comes out when the foetus in Benare’s womb is ordered to be destroyed in the final judgement. Their concern for moral and human values is revealed to be hollow by this judgement. According to N.S. Dharan, “they (Benare’s colleagues) preach the sanctity of motherhood, but show absolutely no
compunctions in asking Benare to destroy the foetus in her womb.” All these characters are outwardly cultured and sophisticated. One is appalled to see the extent of violence and cruelty they are capable of. Once they have discovered Benare’s guilt and realise Benare’s inability to escape due to the faulty door, they start behaving like predators hunting their prey. The playwright also brings out the double standards of society, which punishes Benare for her unmarried motherhood but does not say a word about Damle who is responsible for that. Arundhati Banerjee writes: “Professor Damle is significantly absent at the trial, denoting his total withdrawal of responsibility, either social or moral, for the whole situation into which he has landed Miss Benare.” As individuals, her colleagues are inferior to Benare. As a group trying to safeguard society’s interests, they establish their power over Benare. Benare’s unconventional way of living, her teasing and bossing over others, discomforts the society. Benare’s transgression of moral code gives them an opportunity to dominate, discipline and control her.

Tendulkar believes that man, being a descendent of the animal kingdom, has certain animalistic qualities like violence, ferocity and cruelty ingrained in his nature. That’s why human beings behave like wild animals with their brethren at times. The immense mental cruelty a human being is capable of inflicting upon others, is shown in Benare’s trial and humiliation. Vijay Kumar Sinha writes: “She (Benare) stands isolated and alienated by the society and is hailed as a slur on the face of the society.” Tendulkar brings out the morbid mentality of these so called cultured people. The mock trial in Silence! The Court is in Session, which transforms into an actual trial, is actually a conflict between an individual and the society in which
society tries to mould the behavior of a rebellious person as per its norms. An individual, who pursues his own wishes even if they go against the dictums of society, is a rebel. Rewarding conformity and punishing non-conformity is society’s means of controlling the individual’s behaviour.

The great mental torture that Benare suffers at the hands of her colleagues makes us sympathetic towards her. However, Benare herself is not free from faults. According to K.V. Surandran, “Benare who claims to be doing everything to mould her children is far from being a good model. She runs after men and wastes no opportunity of engaging in sexual relationships.” She engages in her first love affair at the tender age of fifteen. Her maternal uncle encouraged her in the initial phase of the affair but turned the tail when the affair became known to her family members and she expressed the desire to marry him. One may give her the benefit of doubt by considering this as a case of an adolescent girl getting exploited by a mature adult.

Her affair with Prof. Damle, however, raises many questions. As a high-school teacher, she has a respectable place in the society. She has crossed the age of thirty. She knows that Damle is a married man with kids. Still she enters into a sexual alliance with him. It suggests that she expects Damle to give up his family and marry her. It shows her utter disregard towards the act of breaking a family. She knows that if Damle does not marry her, she will have to face the consequences of an unwed pregnancy. She is not a true rebel who does not care for the society and its norms and prefers to live in her own style. Instead, she goes on asking men such as Ponkshe and Rokde who are inferior to her, to marry her and rescue her from the socially unacceptable position of an unwed mother. Thus she is neither totally unconventional
nor completely traditional. She appears to be a confused character who does not know what to do with her life. It is in such state of mind that she is subjected to a mock-trial by her colleagues. No wonder, she completely breaks down at its end.

The picture of our society that the play projects is not pretty. Society demands that an individual should lead the life according to the rules led down by it. A conflict ensues when an individual refuses to obey these rules. Tendulkar draws our attention towards the gender discrimination, which punishes a woman but allows the man to go scot-free for committing the same crime. Benare is punished for the sin of unwed pregnancy but no one says a word about Damle who is her partner in the crime. Similarly, Benare is criticised for having an affair with her maternal uncle. No one bothers to blame the guy in this regard. One wonders whether the responsibility of maintaining morality has to be shouldered by women alone. Vijay Kumar Sinha rightly infers, “What is wrong, immoral for a woman is not so for a man.” Thus the play satirises our male-dominated society and its farcical moral code.

**Encounter in Umbugland:**

*Encounter In Umbugland* (originally ‘Dambadwipacha Mukabala’) is translated into English by Priya Adarkar. It was presented on the stage in 1969. It sheds light on the state of politics in India in the late sixties and the early seventies. Tendulkar has exposed the hypocrisy and treachery of the political leaders and the sordidness and futility of the power game in this play. It deals with the various evils of politics such as intrigues, treachery and corruption. It is about the conflict between Queen Vijaya, the newly coronated ruler of Umbugland and her cabinet comprising of seasoned politicians like Pishtakeshi, Karkashirsha, Vratyasom, Aranyaketu and
Bhagadanta. After the death of Vichitravirya, the King of Umbugland, a struggle ensues among these statesmen for the control of the island. They make a compromise by agreeing to make Vijaya, the young and inexperienced princess the next ruler. They think that Vijaya, being completely unaware of politics, will remain a titular head and they will use the power on her behalf. The chorus repeatedly raises the question- “After Vichitravirya, who?” (Act I. p. 284) It reminds us of a widely debated issue in Indian politics in the 1960s- “After Nehru, who?” Thus the allegorical nature of the play becomes clear to us. According to M. Sarat Babu: “Princess Vijaya stands for the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi…The play draws parallels between the rule of Vijaya and that of Indira.”

After the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, a tug-of-war had ensued in Indian politics. The senior leaders of the Congress Party had finally chosen Indira, the daughter of Pandit Nehru, as the compromise candidate. They had expected that Indira Gandhi being inexperienced in politics, would be no more than their rubber-stamp. Things, however, did not happen as they had wished and Indira Gandhi gradually developed into an astute statesman and established her control over the cabinet.

At the beginning of the oath-taking ceremony we get an inkling of the things to come. Vijaya insists on cutting the legs of the royal throne in order to make it convenient for her. Vijaya has a friend, philosopher and guide in Prannarayan, the chamberlain of the Queen’s apartment. With the help of Prannarayan’s teachings and her own interest in the welfare of her state, an inexperienced and young Princess Vijaya evolves into Queen Vijaya, a cunning and resolute politician. From hereon the play deals with the struggle for political supremacy between the Queen and her
cabinet. The different plans and strategies they indulge in to gain an upper hand over each other clearly brings out the dirty nature of politics and power games the politicians play.

The play begins with the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of King Vichitravirya’s coronation. From Vijaya’s conversation with Prannarayan, a eunuch attendant, we come to know of the lack of warmth in her heart towards her father. Prannarayan has taken care of her since she was a child. Naturally, she trusts him more and there is a lot of mutual affection and regard between them. Prannayan convinces her to greet her father ceremoniously on the anniversary of his coronation. Vijaya is an innocent girl who loves youthful games like hopscotch. Vijaya’s freedom-loving nature and her lack of interest in the life of the palace comes out in the following words: “If I had wings, I would have left them (the place precincts) ages ago - gone so far away, I wouldn’t know how to return!” (Act I. p. 271) Thus Vijaya is an innocent and unambitious girl in her pre-coronation days.

The playwright introduces us to the five members of the cabinet. They praise the King out of all proportions while he is present but denounce him in his absence. They seem to be the sort of politicians who think one thing, say the other thing and do something even more different. Vratyasom openly declares that observing principles and honesty in politics is as inappropriate and stupid as celibacy after marriage. Aranyaketu projects himself as an honest social worker and always sits on the fence. Bhagadanta has the hide of a rhinoceros. These unprincipled and characterless politicians are just awaiting the King’s death so that they can take the power in their hands. There is no unity amongst them. They are in the habit of exposing each other’s
acts of dishonesty privately to the King. Karkashirsha argues that politics is a sacred ritual for him. N.S. Dharan writes, “Karkashirsha’s admission that he does not know the common people even of his own region is a telling proof of the attitude of present day politicians to those who vote them to power.”

The sudden demise of Vichitravirya and the cabinet’s inability to come to a unanimous decision regarding their leader results in their bringing Vijaya to the throne. They have high hopes that they will be able to do whatever they want with Vijaya as a puppet ruler. Vratyasom says – “She (Vijaya)’ll be the rule, we’ll be the rulers! An excellent plan till we agree on a firm decision!” (Act I. p. 293) However, the cabinet is in for a surprise. Under the tutelage of Prannarayan, Vijaya begins to learn the ways of diplomacy. When they wish to meet the Queen, she makes them wait a little. When they try to treat her like a child as they had been used to earlier, Vijaya is quick to remind them of the protocol of court of bowing to the queen. She expresses her displeasure as the Cabinet Ministers have failed to observe the protocol. She signs on the decrees that they wish to be passed only after formal observance of the court etiquettes. She has learnt not to be led by the sweet words and tender looks of her Ministers, as they are not what they pose to be. It is clear to the cabinet that Queen Vijaya will not be spoon fed by them in any of the matters.

Vijaya does not enjoy her royal duties. She longs for the carefree life of the past. She misses playing her favourite games. She complains to Prannarayan about having lost her joy and freedom after becoming the queen. She finds it difficult in the beginning to live as per the new role, which is expected from her. With the patient counselling of Prannarayan, she soon starts adapting herself. Prannarayan has a deep
understanding of the affairs of the world. He attributes his wisdom to his belonging to the third sex. He says – “Being different gives one understanding. I am different… I am not an actor. I am purely a spectator, an onlooker. I am just a bird on a boat of life. I am on the boat, but not of it.” (Act II. Scene I. p. 306) The unending conflict with the cabinet makes Vijaya feel uneasy. Prannarayan is her only support.

Vijaya begins visiting different parts of the state. Her popularity begins to increase because of her habit of mingling with the poor and the downtrodden people and listening to their problems. The ministers conceive her growing popularity as a threat to their position. They realise their miserable failure in making Vijaya a puppet. Vijaya starts taking her own decisions without consulting them. They are furious but helpless.

After the successful completion of her first year at the helm, Queen Vijaya faces the first big challenge in her political career. She has prepared a plan for the upliftment of the Kadamba tribe, the oldest but poorest inhabitants of Umbugland. A chance encounter with some people of the Kadamba tribe has opened Vijaya’s eyes to their misery. During the reign of Vichitravirya, the ministers had totally neglected the Kadamba tribe. The tribe’s discontent had taken the form of an intense agitation. It was termed as an act of treason against Umbugland and had been mercilessly crushed. Vijaya prepares a plan for the upliftment of these people. While confiding to Prannarayan, she says: “This plan will raise my stature on the island. I will get the credit for achieving what has never been achieved before. This plan will make everyone understand that I am not just my father’s daughter, nor a puppet ruler.” (Act II. Scene V. p. 317)
Thus there is no doubt about the queen’s genuine concern for the welfare of the Kadamba tribe. However, she wants to use this plan also for proving a point or two about her political stature. The crafty and calculative side of Queen Vijaya’s nature becomes evident here. Pranarayan clearly realises this fact. He is presented as a neutral commentator of the ugly game of power that takes place in the play. He plainly tells the Queen that the motive of improving her own position on the island is hidden behind her doing justice to the poor people. M. Sarat Babu aptly comments, “Queen Vijaya introduces welfare schemes to strengthen her power. So there is more advertisement about the schemes than it is necessary.”

The Kadamba upliftment plan reminds us of Indira Gandhi’s twenty-point economic programme and her famous slogan ‘Garibi Hatao!’ (Eradicate Poverty!). It represents the radical policies of Mrs. Gandhi, which helped her to come to power in the General Elections of 1972.

The cabinet is furious because the Queen has not given her consent to some of the legislations they wished to be made. They are searching for an opportunity to settle their score with the Queen. When they realise that Queen is eager for their consent to the Kadamba plan, they veto it. The cabinet realises that the plan is beneficial for the Kadamba people. Their opposition is not because of any fault in the plan. They have their own axes to grind in opposing the queen’s intention. The playwright clearly brings out how the welfare of the people is not on the minds of politicians who engage in politics for their personal benefit. According to Shailaja Wadikar: “The incident of the encounter in the play is reminiiscent of the one in Indira Gandhi’s regime in 1971 and the characters resemble those who have been the ministers in Indira Gandhi’s cabinet.”

Indira Gandhi wished to get V.V. Giri elected
as the President of India. Some senior ministers of her cabinet, however, had proposed the candidature of Nilam Sanjeev Reddi for the Presidential election as a part of their strategy to oppose the Prime Minister. Vijaya’s victory in the political crisis echoes the victory of Indira Gandhi in the political crisis as she had succeeded in getting V.V. Giri elected as the President of India.

The tussle for political supremacy becomes more hectic with Queen Vijaya going ahead with the plan on her own authority. She declares emergency and takes the power in her own hands. The chorus of the pen-bearers announces:

“GRAVE EMERGENCY!
SERIOUS PREDICAMENT!
ENCOUNTER NOW BEGINS BETWEEN
HER MAJESTY AND THE CABINET!” (Act III. Scene I. p. 327)

The cabinet is aghast. They begin devising a counter strategy. Vratyasom says: “We must cut short our lamentation and get ready for battle, Aranyaketu…. That little brat has given us blow after blow. Now the only answer is a still stronger blow.” (Act III. Scene II. p. 333) The cabinet decides to incite people against the queen. They are going to arrange for a hired infuriated mob and let it loose upon the queen. They feel no pricks of conscience due to the fact that some innocent people will lose their lives because of their selfish plan. N.S. Dharan rightly comments: “By means of the Ministers’ conspiracy against Queen Vijaya, Tendulkar offers us an insight into the dirty games that politicians play to capture power.”

Queen Vijaya’s secret service is quite efficient. She comes to know of the cabinet’s plan beforehand. She manages to make Bhagadanta, a Kadamba, defect to
her side. Then she plans a smart counter attack. She orders Prannarayan to keep armed guards ready in a secret part of the palace. The angry mob gathers in front of the palace on the appointed day and turns violent against the Queen and her guards. The cabinet eagerly looks forward to the queen’s death at the hands of the angry crowd. However the Queen turns the tables on her cabinet. She courageously faces the mob and pacifies them by making certain promises. She starts scolding the mob uttering some nonsense. She announces the abolition of some taxes. She cleverly manipulates the mob’s sentiments and makes them turn against the Ministers themselves. It is an apt example of the manipulation of the ignorant masses by clever demagogues. When the mob demands the scrapping of the Kadamba plan, she accepts it at once and cleverly puts forward the view that it was the cabinet, which had prepared the plan. The mob asks for the cabinet’s head. When the cabinet comes to know this, they surrender to the Queen who thus comes out victorious. At the end of the play, Vijaya establishes an undisputable supremacy over the cabinet as well as the masses. It is just like Mrs. Gandhi’s dominating position in the Parliament after the Indo-Pak War of 1971. It is interesting to note that Queen Vijaya has no definite strategy in her mind to pacify the mob when she ventures to address them. She just speaks whatever comes to her mind but the mob is convinced. M. Sarat Babu rightly observes: “The play thus shows how leaders make people mindless and how mindless people allow their leaders to be hypocritical.”

The cabinet members had expected to exploit Vijaya when they made her Umbugland’s ruler with a view of turning her into a puppet ruler. But Queen Vijaya ends up exploiting the Kadamba people to fulfil her ambition of becoming the
supreme ruler of the state. Prannarayan brings to Vijaya’s notice the fact that her plan of upliftment of the Kadamba people has only increased problems for them. The Queen’s strict insistence on the plan has made other sections of society angry. This has caused rioting and attacks against the Kadambas. To this the Queen replies that she will be able to think about this problem only after the full implementation of the plan. It is clear that Queen Vijaya’s ambition of establishing her supremacy over her cabinet has become more important to her than the safety of the Kadamba people. The playwright succeeds in thoroughly exposing the hypocrisy and treachery of the political leaders and the sordidness of the power game. M. Sarat Babu writes, “All the people in the play tell lies to one another. And the falsehood is translated into their behaviour, resulting in hypocrisy. They allow themselves to be dehumanized in order to enjoy power. In their scramble for power, they lose peace and happiness.”

In order to attain positions of authority, the politicians do not hesitate to indulge in hateful intrigues. They subordinate duty and selfless service to power and selfish designs. They are always searching for ways and means to get to the top. Shailaja Wadikar rightly observes that ‘Encounter in Umbugland’ projects how falsehood has become an inevitable part of the politician’s life, the ultimate result of which is hypocritical behaviour.

Prannarayan teaches Vijaya that appearances are deceptive and one should not get misled by them. With his help, Vijaya learns how to be diplomatic in her relations with the ministers. She realises that she cannot succeed in politics by being truthful and transparent as one should not be true to oneself in politics. In order to be victorious, a ruler should be prepared to resort to treacherous ways and means.
Shailaja Wadikar aptly comments that the development of Vijaya from a headstrong, inexperienced princess to a prudent and intelligent ruler proves that a ruler learns all those tricks of the trade in the course of time. Thus Tendulkar makes the reader-audience conscious of the various evils such as sordidness, corruption and treachery in politics and makes them introspect.

Tendulkar has used the chorus of two masked men who bear very large pens in their hands and wield them like sceptres suggesting the great influence of media in politics. They keep appearing time and again and report and comment on the various incidents taking place in the state. The playwright satirises the misleading of the people by journalists through the comments of the two pen-bearers. On one hand, they are lavish in their elaborate praise of the officials acting as an advertisement agency for the government, on the other hand, they propogate news in a sensational manner so as to boost their paper’s circulation. Their observations echo the peculiar tone of the headlines in the newspapers. Their meaningless statements only serve to aggravate the existing problems. Tendulkar uses this interesting device as a jibe against the media.

*Encounter in Umbugland* may be termed as a record of the various stages of Vijaya’s education in the game of politics and her coming of age. She is thrown into the world of politics at a tender age. It is a land of humbugs, full of hypocrisy and treachery. While encountering and contending with these evils, she learns the ways of the world. Prannarayan’s guidance proves to be of immense help to her while coping with the falsity and sycophancy of the ministers. Once she plainly tells Prannarayan
that she finds him more manly than the false men she has come across in the field of politics. It is a telling comment on politicians and the world of politics.

The earlier Vijaya, who is innocent, playful and mischievous though somewhat whimsical and self-willed, gets transformed into an ambitious and cunning politician through her encounter with the sordid world of politics. Arundhati Banerjee rightly comments that the play *Encounter in Umbreland* unveils the essential nature of the game of politics as also the basic craving for power in human nature.\(^{29}\)

*The Vultures:*

*The Vultures* (originally ‘Gidhade’ in Marathi) is translated into English by Priya Adarkar. It was first staged at Tejpal Theatre, Bombay on May 29\(^{th}\), 1970. It is a brutal portrayal of the dark side of human nature and depicts its inborn evil tendencies like greed, selfishness, wickedness and violence. It is the most violent of all the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar. He lays bare the intricate nature of human relationships in it. In the words of Prof. Avinash Kolhe - “Gidhade, which has a ruthless dissection of human nature, revealing violence, avarice lying beneath the put up personality, was a fascinating expose of social reality.”\(^{30}\) Conservative sections of society did not approve of the blunt depiction of illicit sexual relations and scenes of violence in it. As a result, it attracted a lot of opposition. Tendulkar expresses the degeneration of the modern society through the portrayal of the baser aspects of human nature in the Pitale family.

The title *The Vultures* signifies the abundance of baser instincts. The vulture is a ferocious and ruthless bird that eats the flesh of animals that are already dead. A person who hopes to gain from the troubles or sufferings of other people can be
termed as a vulture figuratively. The play tells the story of the Pitale family: Mr Hari Pitale (Pappa), his two sons, Ramakant and Umakant, daughter Manik, and Ramakant’s wife, Rama. Another member of the family is Rajaninath, the illegitimate son of Pappa. We find the cruelty, greed and cunningness of the vultures in all the members of Mr. Pitale’s family except Rama and Rajaninath. The fact that the lives of Rama and Rajaninath are bound with vulture-like men unfolds a conflict of great dramatic significance. Pappa, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik display the savagery of a vulture through their words as well as actions. All their strength is spent in searching tricks to cheat others. The play, as a contrast to beastiality, also presents a tender human relationship between Rama and Rajaninath.

Rajaninath, Mr. Pitale’s illegitimate son, has a dual role in the play. Apart from being one of the principal characters, he also acts as the chorus. The three poems recited by Rajaninath tell us about the past and the present of the Pitale family. The long song that he sings at the opening of the play makes it clear that the incidents narrated in the play occurred during a time span of twenty-two years. The sight of Ramakant and Rama running away from the house in order to escape from the creditors brings back all these memories to him. He feels sorry for the plight of Rama and remembers the past. The opening reminds us of Tennessee Williams’s ‘The Glass Menagerie’ - a Memory Play which begins with Tom Wingfield’s soliloquy and his memories.

The high-flying vulture is a scavenger. The human vultures in the play, with the exception of Pappa, want to gobble up their ancestral property. Pappa is living on his past glory. His habit of working his toothless mouth is suggestive of his helpless
condition. He made the transition from working class to upper middle class by dint of his own hard work and cunning. Now he thinks that the working class people like the family gardener need a “kick as they rise, and a curse as they sit.”(Act I, Scene II, 208.) His motto is to get what he wants by hook or crook. He has no moral scruples in cheating his own brother, Sakharam, and capturing his share of business. Moreover, he is a man of loose character as he has a bastard son, Rajaninath. He accuses the family members of neglecting him and fears that his corpse will lie rotting up for days, as no one will notice his departure. He feels that the business set up by him with so much difficulty has been ruined by Ramakant’s crooked deals. He had handed over his business and property to his children to enjoy a peaceful old age. He often complains that his children don’t treat him properly though he has shared all his wealth with them. His life has become hell due to their ill-treatment and indifference. He rants and raves: “If I die, I’ll become a Ghost. I’ll sit on your chest! I won’t let you enjoy a rupee of it. I earned it all. Now, these wolves, these bullies!…” (Act I. Scene II, 209) Only his fit of coughing puts an end to his tirade. His final effort of recapturing his wealth through a lawsuit also fails. In spite of all his cunningness, he has nothing but stress, insults and misery to face in the old age.

Ramakant shows the stuff he is made of by abusing and beating the poor gardener who comes to ask for his rightful money. There is no trace of civility or decency in Ramakant. Prone to indulging in dishonest practices, he has ruined the family business. He does not feel any gratitude towards Pappa though the old man has gifted him a well-established business. He openly declares that he is waiting for Pappa’s death. For him, his father is a “confounded nuisance” and “A bloody burden
to the earth!” All his intelligence and energy are directed towards making money in every way including gambling. Excessive drinking has made him impotent. When self-interest is concerned, he follows no moral or legal restrictions. When Pappa denounces him, he retorts, “As the seed, so the tree! Did we ever ask to be produced?” (Act I, Scene II, 211). He also ends up as a failure in life despite all his wickedness and violence.

Umakant is a bachelor with loose morals. While Pappa was distributing the property, he had grabbed the landed property at Lonavala. It is standing him in good stead. There is no brotherly feeling in him for Ramakant. His retort upon being taunted about his unmarried status by Ramakant is: “Shut up! Don’t bring my personal life into this, Ramya. If you open your trap again, I’ll smash it open for you!” (Act I, Scene II, 213) He habitually abuses his sister, Manik and mocks at her promiscuity. He accuses that Manik “goes and rolls all over town and then sits scrubbing herself.” (Act I, Scene II, 212). He even hits her on the buttocks. As for Pappa, he says - “A mangy dog would have made a better father!” (Act I, Scene II, 212). He proves himself to be superior to Pappa and Ramakant in financial matters. Finally, Ramakant drives him out of the house.

Tendulkar portrays Manik as selfish and assertive as against Rama who is sensitive and kind hearted. In her thirties, she appears to be a hysterical type. She accuses her brothers of plotting to eliminate her from her share of the ancestral property: “When I had typhoid last year, far from looking after me, you’d all plotted to put poison in my medicine!” (Act I, Scene II, 208). Her suspicion is not without cause. While playing a game of cards, an angry Umakant grabs her neck and starts
twisting it. Manik starts shouting for help. Ramakant says: “Don’t bloody let her go, Umya. Drag the bloody money out! Look, how she is wriggling! Squash her bloody neck! Twist it” (Act II, Scene I, 235). Manik doesn’t suffer from any pricks of conscience, however, when she assists her brothers in trying to extract money from Pappa. Thus, Manik is not in any way behind her brothers in wickedness. All these characters are ready to go to any extent to satisfy their avarice. They are the embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery.

Rama, in the words of Rajaninath, was just like an innocent doe who, after marriage, had come to a place where “vultures lived in the shapes of men.” (Act I, Scene I, 204). She undergoes great suffering due to the cruel and greedy nature of her family members. She does all her work dutifully and still everybody is critical of her. She is always being scolded for one reason or another. She is the only person in Pitale family who sympathises with Rajaninath. She often provides him with food and tea in spite of her husband’s opposition. She is submissive and does not utter even a word against her husband’s tyranny. Her burning desire of becoming a mother remains unfulfilled. She holds her husband’s excessive drinking responsible for this. Driven to desperate measures, she fulfils her only desire through her brother-in-law, Rajaninath. It is not morally correct but her instincts prompted her to take this course of action. This act of momentary courage, however, leads her nowhere. Ramakant and Manik abort her and leave her “empty of pain and empty of desires.” (Act I, Scene I, 206).

Rajaninath is a much neglected, much hated and lonely being. His fury at his illegitimacy and hatred for his parents who are responsible for it comes out frequently. He has nothing but hatred for his father and siblings whom he views as demons. Even
Rama does not escape his anger as he considers her departure with her husband just like the “true companionship to a leper of a mangy dog”. (Act I, Scene I, 202). He is an inactive character. Though fully conscious of Rama’s suffering, he doesn’t do anything to help her. He has a poetic nature and still he is unconscious of the sin he commits in having an illicit relationship with Rama.

An analysis of the play brings out a very dark picture of human vices. Prof. N.S. Dharan opines that *The Vultures* is a naturalistic “Drama of Domestic Violence” and it shows “the unmitigated violence arising from drunkenness, greed, and immorality.”31 Ramakant, Umakant and Manik get a clue of Pappa’s hidden bank account. They pretend to be affectionate towards Pappa and get him dead drunk. Ramakant and Umakant feign a fight with Pappa in the middle and all three fall to the ground. Terribly frightened, Pappa shouts - “You’re devils you pimps! You’re going to kill me! You’re going to murder me…murder! I don’t want to die! Don’t want to!” (Act I, Scene V, 229). He gets a respite only after giving up the secret bank account.

When Manik is having an affair with the Raja of Hondur, Ramakant and Umakant pounce on this opportunity of making some money. Ramakant suggests Umakant : “Why shouldn’t we blackmail that Hondur chap? Ourselves?” (Act II, Scene I, 236). Together they embark on an unscrupulous enterprise of detaining Manik in the house and extracting money from the prince by threatening to make his relationship with Manik public. Armed with a broken bottle and the tin-opener, the brothers fracture their sister’s leg. Their violent plan, however, fizzles out as the prince dies of a heart-attack before they have a chance of getting money from him. Their rage knows no bounds and they take it out on the foetus in Manik’s womb.
Ramakant says- “The Raja’s alive. In little Manik’s belly.” Umakant replies: “Let’s knock him out! The Raja in little Manik’s belly. One kick - that’s enough!” (Act II, Scene III, 247). And Ramakant delivers the fatal kick. One is left spellbound by such savage cruelty. Ramakant and Umakant do not care about the family prestige when they are trying to profit from their sister’s illicit relationship. They worry about the blow to their family honour due to Manik’s unwed pregnancy only when the opportunity to make money is no more present. K.V. Surendran rightly states: “…Tendulkar frowns at the society around him which is known for its hypocrisy, lack of sincerity, promiscuity, dishonesty and a host of other ills. Tendulkar’s world is one where sex and violence have an upperhand.”

Manik takes her revenge by trying to abort her sister-in-law’s child. She joyously declares: “I’ve done it…I’ve done it as I planned….I cut lemon… I rubbed the ash. Seven times on my loins and stomach! It’s going to abort - sister-in-law’s baby’s going to abort - Ramya’s brat’s going to abort - it won’t live. It won’t live!” (Act II, Scene VI, 260). Rama had conceived the child from her illicit relationship with Rajaninath. Umakant, angry with Ramakant for not sharing mother’s jewels with him, discloses this fact to him. Ramakant himself decides to perform the heinous deed contemplated by Manik. The behaviour and actions of Rama and Rajaninath are in sharp contrast to those of the other members of Pitale family. Arundhati Bannerjee comments: “Her (Rama’s) illicit relationship with her half-brother-in-law, Rajaninath, who is a bastard and an outcast from the family, may raise a few conservative eyebrows and evoke questions of morality, but one has to admit that it is the single genuine and humane relationship in the context of the whole play.”
Rama’s situation in the Pitale household gets worse day by day. Her inability to be a mother keeps tormenting her. Ramakant keeps taking her to swamis and sadhus in the hope of having a child with their blessings. Rama is fed up with all this. The dramatist gives Rama an opportunity to express her agony and frustration in a long and moving speech. It recalls to our minds a similar speech given by Leela Benare in the concluding part of Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session*. The dramatist gives an opportunity to his women characters, who are victims of oppression, of expressing their sufferings through such speeches. Rama feels that her womb is sound and healthy as is evident from following lines: “It’s not even my fault! This womb’s healthy and sound, I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil’s rich, it’s hungry. But the seed won’t take root. If the seed’s soaked in poison, if it’s weak, feeble, lifeless, devoid of virtue - then why blame the soil? (Act II, Scene II, 241).

Pappa and his offspring are, all the time, upto inhuman tricks to exploit others. Though unable to get on with each other, they assist each other whenever there is an opportunity to make money. Through these characters, Tendulkar takes a dig at those people in the society who are ready to go to any extent to satisfy their avarice for money. The characters like Pappa, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik who are ready to sacrifice human values to get worldly pleasures are representatives of the modern materialistic culture. Arundhati Bannerjee writes: “Tendulkar presents modern man in all his complexities. He portrays life as it is from different angles, without trying to moralize or philosophize in any way.”

34
Pappa, Manik and Umakant, one by one, are turned out of the house. Ramakant becomes a pauper in the end. Pappa wants to make one final effort to regain his wealth. He had never accepted the responsibility of Rajaninath all his life but now shamelessly approaches him for help so that he can prove in a court of law that Ramakant and Umakant had forced the will upon him. Rajaninath, however, refuses to have anything to do with this plan and so it fails. Thus all their wickedness and violence leads Ramakant, Umakant and Pappa nowhere. Darshana Trivedi rightly observes: “The play poses three important questions without suggesting any solutions (i) Is there any escape from this death in life situation? (ii) Do we have any hope for bright future of the human race? (iii) Is violence the only way of our life?”

Rajaninath feels that his family members are “…men accursed. Or else… Vultures cursed to live their lives as men’ (Act II, Scene VIII, 265). He calls for mercy on these people. Kumud Mehta rightly says: “In his earlier works he (Vijay Tendulkar) has dwelt on the woes of the middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment.” But these are not men accursed. They are living a sinful life of their own choice. Hence the plea for mercy appears out of place. Unlike the Vultures, which feed only on the dead, these human vultures inflict sufferings on people who are alive.

Thus the play brings out the moral degradation of the Pitale family. There is a horrifying depiction of the evil consequences of man’s avarice. The incidents like the cruel manhandling of the father by his own children and the ruthless abortion of their sister’s child by the brothers show the extent to which men can go to satisfy their
greed. Tendulkar probes deep into the recesses of human nature to lay bare all the baser instincts lurking in man.

*The Vultures* was written in 1961 but it was presented on the stage in 1970. The play evoked quite mixed reactions. It turned out to be a hit with the masses. The conservative sections of the society demanded innumerable cuts in it. The angry condemnation of the play was due to the breaking of many shams of middle-class life. The blunt exposure of the ravaging beast that lays hidden in every human being, the violent actions and obscene dialogues combined with the presentation of an explicit passion between men and women on the stage had not been done in any Marathi play before *The Vultures*. The society was not ready to accept its true image presented in this play. The people protested against the play, as it had offended their sense of propriety. They questioned Tendulkar’s motives in writing such a play and accused him of deliberately composing such a play to create sensation and gain commercial success. The Marathi plays until now used to cater to the tastes and sensibilities of the educated middle class and acknowledged their value system. Being staunch advocates of the principle of ‘simple living and high thinking’, these people prided themselves on not coveting material goods. The play challenged the values that this class had cherished.

If we try to understand the circumstances in which the play was written, we come to the conclusion that Tendulkar was not trying to hurt the middle class people deliberately. The playwright had been in a depressed mood because of certain happenings in his personal life. Raghunath, Tendulkar’s elder brother, had become an alcoholic. He had to bring Raghunath back from the liquor dens. Tendulkar was
suddenly exposed to the very dregs of society in such places and became aware of the violence and the vices inherent in man. His changed perception now began to realise the same things in the people around him whom he had not suspected before. Then there was some office politics in which a close colleague of Tendulkar plotted to oust him from his job, though unsuccessfully. The playwright’s agitation and inner disturbance at having encountered such things, which he had never expected, found expression in this play. According to Shanta Gokhale, the characters in *The Vultures* can be dismissed as aberrations of humanity and Tendulkar was only passing on to his audience the shock that he himself had experienced at the life he saw outside the confines of the middle-class world.\(^{37}\) The fact, however, remains that there are such human beings in our society, and we cannot shut our eyes to their existence. Unlike *The Vultures*, Tendulkar’s next play ‘*Sakharam Binder*’, however, consciously challenged the institution of marriage, which is the very foundation of middle-class society.

**Sakharam Binder:**

Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Sakharam Binder* is translated into English by Kumud Mehta and Shanta Gokhale. There is an extraordinary portrayal of the immense capacity of lust and violence inherent in human beings through the character of Sakharam. Sakharam, a binder by profession, is a self made man who lives life according to his own beliefs. Born in a Brahmin family, he had run away from his home due to the constant beatings that he used to get from his father. He does not believe in the institution of marriage. He has discovered an economical method of satisfying his sexual needs as well as managing his home. He gives shelter to women
who have been deserted by their husbands. Such woman has to perform all the wifely duties in his house. The play opens with Sakharam bringing his seventh woman, Lakshmi, in the house and explaining to her his system of contractual co-habitation. Lakshmi was deserted by her husband, as she could not bear a child to him. Lakshmi appears to be just like an average Indian woman who is religious and dutiful. She is quite simple and meek and appears completely in awe of Sakharam. However, she can be quite obstinate when it comes to her beliefs and convictions. She is in the habit of conversing with ants and crows. Her religious rituals seem to give her the strength to face the hardships of life.

Sakharam’s habit of referring to himself in the third person indicates his exalted opinion of himself. He is a middle-aged and rugged but impressive looking person. He makes all the facts regarding himself and his house clear at the beginning and warns Lakshmi not to make any complaints later. The traditional element hidden beneath the outward unconventional personality of Sakharam comes out through the following instructions he gives to Lakshmi: “If someone calls, you’re not supposed to look up and talk. If it’s a stranger, you’ll have to cover your head and answer him briefly” (Act I. Scene I. p.126) Thus it is clear that he expects Lakshmi to behave like a typical traditional Indian housewife though it is only a contractual co-habitation. The hypocritical nature of Sakharam becomes evident through the tirades that he launches against the people in society. His favourite spare time activity appears to be lashing out at people for ill-treating their wives and making an outward show of being pious. He likes to flaunt his virility. While asking Lakshmi to be prepared to satisfy his physical needs, he brags: “Mine is no ordinary appetite. And I won’t hear any
complaints later.” (Act I. Scene II. p.135) There is a sadistic vein in his nature. He
does not mind beating Lakshmi if she refuses to satisfy him. He forces himself on her
when Lakshmi complains that her body is throbbing with pain. Sakharam condemns
those who believe in the institution of marriage in the following words: “Beat her,
kick her every single minute of the day. They’re an impotent lot! For them the
woman’s just dirt, that’s all.”(Act I. Scene I. p. 129) It is ironical that his behaviour
with Lakshmi turns out to be no different.

When Sakharam decides to bring Lord Ganapati to his house, his friend
Dawood assists him. Lakshmi objects to Dawood’s presence in the worship and is
beaten severely by Sakharam in consequence. Both Sakharam and Lakshmi start
losing their patience with each other. Lakshmi complains that she is fed up with the
hard physical labour that she is subjected to in the house. Moreover, Sakharam is
always beating and cursing her. Sakharam defends himself saying that he has tried to
change himself according to Lakshmi’s wishes. He has reduced his intake of opium
and liquor a little. He even performs prayer daily nowadays. He gets rid of Lakshmi
by sending her to her nephew.

Champa is the next woman in Sakharam’s life. She has left her husband
Fauzdar Shinde because of his impotency. He is a drunkard and has been sacked from
the job. Sakharam comes under the spell of her physical charms and is unable to
dominate her. It is clear that Sakharam is unable, as is his usual way, to dominate
Champa right from the beginning of their relationship. While Sakharam is explaining
to her the rules of their co-habitation, she goes on breaking them one by one. She
shows total indifference to Sakharam’s threats. While he tells her that she will have to
look after the kitchen, she asks him to give her something to eat, as she is hungry. She openly shows her admiration for Dawood neglecting Sakharam’s instruction about how to confront the outsiders. So great is Sakharam’s infatuation with her that he tolerates all this. At first she repulses his sexual advances. Sakharam reminds her that she will find it extremely difficult in the world outside if he turns her out. Champa finally agrees to his wish on the condition that he will get her dead drunk every time. Their drunken lovemaking continues even on the day of Dassera. Sakharam flies into a rage on seeing Champa drinking on the day of Dassera. He says: “On a holy day the woman of the house should look all clean and tidy. What will people say? … Damn her. Not right for a woman to behave like this.” (Act I. Scene VIII. p.174) One fails to understand why a person like Sakharam who is a non-conformist in all other matters wants his mistress to follow the conventions of a traditional festival. He appears to be a hypocrite who poses as a conformist or a non-conformist as per his own needs depending upon the situation. Arundhati Banerjee is full of praise for Sakharam who exposes the hypocrisy of the middle class through his honesty and frankness. According to her, Sakharam ridicules the double standards of the society. But it appears that Sakharam is not free from the defects for which he rails at the society. Sakharam gets a glimpse of Champa’s gross and brazen nature when her husband Fauzdar Shinde visits them. Shinde claims to have visited only to know about the well-being of Champa who is not at home at that time. Sakharam’s abusing and threatening cannot drive him out. As soon as Champa sees him, her fury knows no bounds. She starts raining blows and kicks on him. Shinde threatens that he will commit suicide. Champa dares him to do so. Finally, Sakharam and Dawood have to
hold her back forcibly in order to save Shinde from serious physical injury. Dawood warns Sakharam that Champa is totally different from the other women whom he has given shelter in the past. Sakharam, however, does not pay any heed to this sane advice.

Completely struck by Champa’s charm, Sakharam begins neglecting his work and sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of lust. Dawood tries to warn him by telling how he has become the topic of discussion for people. Sakharam expresses his contempt for society in the following words: “People! What do I owe them or their bloody fathers. Did they feed me when I went hungry? …Every single one of those damned fellows is soiled, filthy. Trying to look clean outside. Stuffed with dirt inside.” (Act I. Scene VII. p.173) Little does Sakharam realise that he himself is no different. V.M. Madge aptly comments that the very words in which he condemns people’s hypocrisy strongly apply to him also.39

One day Lakshmi comes back to Sakharam’s house. She has been thrown out of the house by her nephew and his wife on the charge of stealing. Lakshmi thinks that she has no other place to go. After her husband had left her she had accepted Sakharam as her husband. Though Sakharam had driven her out of his house she had not forgotten him. Sakharam, on the other hand, does not see any place for her in his life. He allows Lakshmi to stay because of Champa’s insistence. Arundhati Banerjee observes that Champa shows kindness and generosity when she convinces Sakharam to give shelter to Lakshmi, a potential rival.40 But this does not seem to be the truth. When Lakshmi asks for Champa’s permission to live with Sakharam, she expresses her readiness for hardwork. Champa replies: “Stay. You look after the house, I’ll look
after him. Anyway, I can’t cope with both. You stay alive, and I’ll stay alive, too”.

(Act III. Scene I. p.181) Thus it is clear that Champa has her own vested interest in letting Lakshmi stay in the house. She watches calmly while Sakharam is beating Lakshmi. She interferes only when she feels that Sakharam may kill Lakshmi. She is worried about her own prospects in that case. Champa has a selfish motive in letting Lakshmi stay. She plainly tells Sakharam that doing all the household work during the day and then satisfying his physical appetite during the night makes her terribly tired. If Lakshmi is allowed to stay in the house, she will look after the household work. Sakharam agrees to this proposal.

Lakshmi notices that Champa goes out somewhere every afternoon without telling her anything. She becomes suspicious and follows her one-day. To her shock she finds out that Champa is having an affair with Dawood. Instead of telling this to Sakharam she only harbours a secret hatred for Champa. She becomes friendly with Shinde, Champa’s husband who keeps visiting Champa and gets beaten by her every time. Lakshmi finds this highly objectionable. Once Champa resists the physical advances of Sakharam and tells him that he has become impotent since Lakshmi’s arrival in the house. This gives him an inferiority complex. He is furious and orders Lakshmi to leave his house at once. Lakshmi realises that she can restart her life with Sakharam if she discloses the fact of Champa’s infidelity to him. On hearing about it Sakharam kills Champa in a rage as his ego is immensely hurt. Once his anger cools and he realises what he has done, he becomes miserable. He loses his self-balance and his cowardly self comes out. At this juncture Lakshmi offers him emotional support. She tells Sakharam that Champa deserved to die, as she was a sinner. She asks
Sakharam to dig a hole in the kitchen to bury Champa’s corpse so that he can escape from punishment at the hands of the law. Seeing that Sakharam is unable even to move, she begins digging the hole herself. Terribly scared, Sakharam stands aghast and speechless.

Thus the play penetratingly brings out the baser aspects of human nature. Tendulkar portrays the immense capacity of lust and violence in human beings through the character of Sakharam. Through Lakshmi’s character he brings out the hypocrisy and selfishness in human nature. Both Sakharam and Lakshmi are not what they project themselves to be. Lakshmi brings out the religious side of Sakharam’s personality whereas Champa transforms him into a sensuous and lewd drunkard. Their simultaneous presence in his house probably results in Sakharam’s impotency.

There is a touch of abnormality in all the three central characters. Sakharam takes liquor and opium and wallows in lust and violence. Lakshmi’s religious obstinacy leads her to hypocrisy and inhuman behaviour. Champa’s seeking physical pleasure with Dawood after Sakharam’s becoming impotent is a proof of her promiscuity. Sakharam is in a constant conflict with the society due to his complete disregard for social customs and traditions. Sakharam has had a horrendous childhood full of beatings and scoldings, which has made him rebellious in nature. He is a hypocrite. He is highly critical of the inhuman treatment given to the wives by their husbands. However, he acts in a most cruel and inhuman manner with the women whom he gives shelter. He even criticizes Champa for beating her husband. He mocks at women for showing devotion to their cruel and uncaring husbands. As for himself he expects complete loyalty from his women and kills Champa for her disloyalty
towards him. He is a masochist who takes delight in torturing his partners. He is totally oblivious to his partner’s pain and pleasure.

According to M. Sarat Babu, Lakshmi who shows a great compassion while dealing with birds and insects fails to communicate with human beings properly. She wastes no time in denouncing Champa for her affair with Dawood but shows no consideration for the fact that it was Champa who had helped her in living in Sakharam’s house against his wish. She ruthlessly advises Sakharam to bury Champa’s corpse secretly. She wants to spend the rest of her life with Sakharam. So his crime of killing Champa is acceptable to her. She sees it as an opportunity to live securely with Sakharam, as she has no other place to go. It is interesting to note that she discloses the fact of Champa’s disloyalty to Sakharam only when her own existence in his house is threatened. In spite of Champa’s kindness towards her, she looks upon Champa as her rival and seizes the opportunity to defame her. Herself a victim of Sakharam’s cruel treatment, she becomes a persecutor of Champa. According to Arundhati Banerjee, Lakshmi who appears to be god-fearing and tenderhearted turns out to be wily and vicious when her survival is threatened by the presence of Champa. She shows great ruthlessness and presence of mind in hiding Champa’s murder. Though Lakshmi finds nothing wrong about her own association with Shinde, her moral sense is outraged by Champa’s affair with Dawood and she uses this opportunity to malign her rival. This brings out the latent hatred in Lakshmi for Champa. Our society looks down upon women who have been deserted by their husbands. That’s why Lakshmi has suffered a lot in her life. While persecuting Champa, she becomes a representative of the same society, which had ill-treated her.
M. Sarat Babu rightly observes that Lakshmi “believes that the patriarchal tradition which has been in vogue for ages is right and sacred though it has caused immense suffering to all the women since its emergence.”

Champa is an unfortunate victim of her husband Fauzdar Shinde’s sadism. He had forcibly married her at a young age. Due to his sexual tortures she has become frigid. She prefers mechanical sex with Sakharam under the influence of liquor rather than becoming a prostitute, which will be the only alternative left to her if Sakharam leaves her. Her practical approach towards life and her selfishness become evident when she persuades Sakharam to let Lakshmi stay in the house. She is shrewd enough to realize that Lakshmi will be quite helpful in the domestic chores. Her relationship with Sakharam cures her frigidity. When Sakharam grows impotent after Lakshmi’s arrival in the house, she ends up having a physical relationship with Dawood. It results in her becoming a victim of Sakharam’s rage.

Arundhati Banerjee has stated that Tendulkar, in his play *Sakharam Binder*, has demonstrated the basic and essential complexity of human nature, which is neither black nor white, but varying shades of grey. She praises Sakharam who exposes the hypocrisy of the middle class through his honesty and frankness. According to her, Sakharam ridicules the double standards of the society. But this same man is capable of shocking cruelty towards his women. *Sakharam Binder* is an intensely naturalistic play which contains a bold presentation of sexual perversion. Sakharam is in the habit of talking and acting in a very aggressive manner all the time. In addition to smoking and drinking liquor, he is always on the look-out for poor and helpless women to satisfy his inordinate list. Instead of settling down with a
single partner, he keeps changing his women as and when the opportunities present themselves. Such behaviour is indeed unconventional and Sakharam takes pride in his unconventionality. The source of his crude and violent nature can be traced back to his childhood. The cruel treatment that he got from his own father in the childhood seems to have left permanent scars on his psyche. He had to run away from home in order to escape from his father’s beating and has been behaving rebelliously in every aspect of his life since then.

Sakharam’s character is full of contradictions. He denounces his father for having thrashed him in an inhuman manner in the childhood. He himself regularly beats the life out of Lakshmi. He is always letting out a tirade against the people who follow the customs and traditions related to the institution of marriage. In his contractual cohabitation with Lakshmi and Champa, he behaves exactly like a possessive and egoistical husband. He makes fun of the loyalty women display towards their inhuman husbands. But he expects complete loyalty to him from his partner and Champa’s affair with Dawood leads to his strangling her to death. Thus there is a big schism between his words and deeds.

When Sakharam demands physical pleasure from Champa, she resists his attempts at first. She plainly tells him that she detests sex. The reasons of her refusal lie in her past experiences with her husband Shinde. Champa used to sell liquor and tobacco in her mother’s company. During a police raid, Shinde had spotted her. After forcing her to marry him, he had tortured her like hell. Fed up with his behaviour, she had left him. Sakharam keeps pestering her and seeing no other alternative she finally yields to him. Sakharam does not mind her drinking as long as his lust is satisfied. He
can think of nothing beyond his sexual enjoyment. He sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of lust in Champa’s company. According to N.S. Dharan: “Sakharam falls because of his ‘appetite’, to satisfy which he goes to any extreme. His ill treatment of Laxmi, and his helpless slavery to Champa are proofs of this fact. Inwardly, he is a coward.”

**Ghashiram Kotwal:**

Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is translated into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Tendulkar exposes the reality of the contemporary society with the help of an episode taken from history. Tendulkar shows how political leaders nurture anti-social elements in order to fulfil their own selfish ends and then destroy them when they are of no use to them anymore. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is based on an episode taken from history. However, Tendulkar does not intend to dramatise history. He wants to shed light on certain power-games in contemporary politics. Tendulkar came across such incidents in contemporary politics and found its parallel in the Nana Fadnawis- Ghashiram episode in history. He used it in the writing of this play.

*Ghashiram Kotwal* deals with Ghashiram, a north Indian Brahmin’s arrival in Poona searching for a fortune, his humiliation and suffering due to the Poona Brahmin community’s unjust treatment to him and his transformation into a cruel, vengeful dictator. The play begins with twelve men standing in a line making a human wall, singing and dancing. They introduce themselves as the Poona Brahmins. Next the Sutradhar (narrator) appears on the stage. His conversation with the Brahmins and his witty and pungent remarks bring out the moral degeneration that has set in among them. The Brahmins pose to be scholars and religious minded
persons. However, they are in the habit of visiting Bavannakhani, the red-light area, every night to enjoy the erotic songs and dances of the prostitutes. The way these Brahmins insult and abuse the Sutradhar also throws light on their unbrahminical ways. While Gulabi, the prostitute, is dancing, the Brahmins go ecstatic and compare her Kotha (hall) with Lord Krishna’s Mathura. Through the depiction of the decadence of the 18th century Poona Brahmins, the playwright appears to be satirising the corrupted priests of the contemporary society who make an outward show of piety but secretly wallow in lust. The fact that some of the Brahmin women carry on their affairs with Maratha landowners while their husbands are busy at Bavannakhani further darkens the picture of the moral decadence in society.

Ghashiram, though a Brahmin, begins working as a servant in Gulabi’s Kotha (hall). Nana Fadnavis, the chief minister of the Peshwa, visits Gulabi. Ghashiram wins Nana’s favour by offering him his back to rest his foot on as Nana twists his ankle while dancing with Gulabi. Nana rewards him with his pearl necklace. Gulabi snatches the necklace from him. When Ghashiram objects to it, her servants give him a good thrashing. This is the first serious humiliation of Ghashiram in Poona. Next, Ghashiram decides to try his luck at the Dakshina ceremony in which Brahmins get gifts from the Peshwa. Here once again Ghashiram becomes the victim of the cruel and unjust behaviour of the Poonaites. A Brahmin’s pocket is picked and Ghashiram is arrested on suspicion. All his pleas of innocence fall on deaf ears. After being severely beaten, he is driven out of Poona. The fact that the Brahmin whose pocket has been picked, even after getting informed by an Englishman about Ghashiram not being the culprit, does not bother to save Ghashiram, shows the viciousness of the
Poona Brahmins. Being an outsider, Ghashiram excites only their jealousy and not sympathy. Mad with rage and grief, Ghashiram vows to take revenge on the Poona society. Shilpi Rishi Srivastava and Sarika Srivastava comment that taking revenge whenever a person is hurted by another person or institution is human nature and this unpleasant reality of human nature has been presented by Tendulkar through Ghashirams’s vow of revenge.46

Ghashiram needs power to carry out his plan of vengeance. He is now ready to go to any extent for that purpose. He had already seen Nana Fadnavis’s weakness for women in their previous meeting. Ghashiram does not hesitate to sacrifice his daughter Gauri’s chastity in order to take his revenge on the Poona Brahmins. Once Nana comes across Gauri during a Kirtan. Her beauty and youth awaken Nana’s lust. Ghashiram watches this incident in the guise of a servant. He decides to win Poona’s Kotwalship from Nana by offering his daughter to him. After putting his plan into action, he viciously exclaims: “Oh, you people. Look! I have given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. … Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I’ll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs.” (Act I. p. 381) Thus it is clear that Ghashiram is aware of his wickedness in seeking revenge at the cost of the chastity of his daughter. The desire for revenge, however, overpowers his paternal feelings. Ashok Kumar Sharma rightly comments: “The play shows that the desire for power and the desire to settle score with one’s opponents are so strong that one can touch the bottom in the realization of any of the two or both.”47 The strong urge for vengeance makes Ghashiram inhuman and kills his conscience.
Ghashiram shows his manipulative talent by refusing to send Gauri to Nana for a second time. Nana pleads with him: “Just one more time, you bastard.” (Act I. p. 382) Ghashiram refuses to oblige him on the pretext of his possible disgrace in society. Like a clever opportunist he then suggests: “All right, Sir, to shut people’s mouths, make me the Kotwal of Poona.” (Act I. p. 383) Nana, at once, signs an order making Ghashiram the Kotwal of Poona. Thus Ghashiram seems to be taking advantage of Nana’s lechery. He does not realise that Nana is going to use him as a pawn in the game of power. The craftiness and cunningness of Nana, an astute politician, comes out from his following words: “Go, Ghashya, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don’t know the ways of this Nana. … I have put you on Poona’s back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. … What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our Kotwal pays for it.” (Act I. p. 384, 385) The playwright here makes a telling comment on the selfish and ruthless politicians who give power to their subordinates only to use it themselves in their name. This is an issue, which is faced by all societies in all times. This is how the play becomes universal in nature though it is set in the eighteenth century Poona society.

The second Act begins with the human wall’s announcement of Ghashiram’s reign as the Kotwal of Poona. Ghashiram lays stress on a strict implementation of all the rules and regulations. Under the garb of maintaining law and order he starts persecuting the Poona Brahmins. Thus he transforms into the role of an exploiter from his earlier role of an exploited. He does not realise that Nana is going to use him as a pawn in the game of power. He induces a reign of terror in Poona. People are
forced to take a permit to do anything out of the daily routine. Ghashiram begins taking rounds of the city at night and questions and beats people on mere suspicion. He refuses to acknowledge even the real permits and throws people in the prison. Along with the sinners, he torments even the virtuous people. His persecution of the Poonaites becomes absurd at times. He punishes a person for being found on the street at midnight. He does not pay any heed to the person’s explanation that he was going out to bring a midwife as his wife was having labour pains. When people complain to Nana about Ghashiram’s tyranny, he does not take any action. After arresting a Brahmin on the suspicion of theft, Ghashiram forces him to accept his guilt by inflicting great physical injuries on him. According to Neeti M. Sadarangani, through the depiction of Ghashiram’s tyranny, the playwright shows how the people in positions of power perpetrate rage and violence upon the poor and the innocent.\(^{48}\)

There are complaints of Ghashiram’s tyranny to the higher authorities. Once Nana is busy with the celebration of Rangapanchami. A woman complains that her husband and his brothers have been arrested by the Kotwal’s soldiers, for not having the permit to cremate their dead father. Nana gets angry for this interruption in his merry making and directs the woman back to Ghashiram. The playwright appears to be satirising the selfish politicians who disregard public interest for their personal enjoyment through this incident. According to V.B. Deshpande, “It is possible to look at the play as an allegory of the struggle between the individual and society, between power and exploitation.”\(^{49}\) When Ghashiram was an innocent, powerless newcomer in Poona, the society had enjoyed his humiliation. Now he has the power to dominate the society and feels extremely satisfied in exercising his power. He thinks of freeing
Gauri from the clutches of Nana. He wants to get Gauri married in a respectable family by using his power. Here things start going wrong for Ghashiram. His daughter is reported as missing. Ghashiram confronts Nana who has just got married to his seventh wife. Nana’s acts though known to everybody do not cause any repulsion in the society. According to Shailaja Wadikar, it is a satire on a society, which shields the powerful, and the corrupt and punishes the helpless and the innocent. Nana directs him to Chandra, the midwife. She tells Ghashiram that Gauri has died during childbirth. Ghashiram murders her in rage.

When Ghashiram meets Nana during his marriage celebration, he is extremely frightened to see Ghashiram’s fury. However, he arranges for adequate security and goes to Ghashiram to show him his place. He reminds Ghashiram of his power and position in Poona. In other words, he makes Ghashiram understand that he will lose the Kotwalship of Poona if he disobeys Nana. Interestingly, Ghashiram who was crying for Nana’s blood after the death of his daughter tamely surrenders in the face of Nana’s authoritarian talk. He has nothing to gain except safeguarding his Kotwalship by maintaining cordial relations with Nana. It is clear that he has become intoxicated by power. M. Sarat Babu aptly comments: “Ghashiram once sold his daughter for power and now he accepts her death only to continue exercising his power.”

Ghashiram blames Nana for his daughter’s death but finds himself helpless, as Nana is the most powerful person in Poona. His guilty conscience makes Ghashiram commit even greater tortures on the Poonaites. He begins persecuting them even more. Once a group of Brahmins from another state visit Poona. They eat mangoes
from Ghashiram’s garden without taking prior permission. Ghashiram orders them to be imprisoned. The Poona prisons are full of criminals. These Brahmins are forcibly put in a small cell, which results in twenty-two men dying of suffocation. This matter comes to the notice of Sardar Phakade who is Ghashiram’s enemy. He reports the matter to the Peshwa. The fact is Ghashiram had only ordered for the imprisonment of the Brahmins. He didn’t know anything about the forcible stuffing of those unfortunate people in a narrow cell. This lessens the intensity of his crime a little.

The Peshwa sends a message to Nana asking him to appear before him at once. Nana does not go to him immediately and in the meanwhile, the news of the terrible death of the Brahmins spreads through Poona. An angry mob gathers in front of Nana’s mansion. Nana becomes terrified at the prospect of facing an angry mob. It shows that even the most powerful persons have to respect the fury of the mob. However, when Nana is told that the mob is asking for death punishment to Ghashiram Kotwal, he feels relieved. After Gauri’s death, pacifying Ghashiram had been quite difficult for him. He was looking for an opportunity to get rid of Ghashiram and the angry mob presents that opportunity to him. He gives the mob an order to kill Ghashiram and thus comes out as a saviour of the people. The mob surrounds Ghashiram. He faces them with his usual arrogance and courage but is no match for their brutal collective strength. The angry Brahmins start inflicting all kinds of tortures on him. In his dying moments, Ghashiram does not feel any regret for his cruelty against the Poonaites, but he blames himself for the death of his daughter and accepts the suffering as a punishment of that crime. Nana declares a three-day celebration to mark the happy occasion. His hypocrisy becomes evident in his taking
the credit for Ghashiram’s destruction and the safeguarding of public interest though he himself was the creator of Ghashiram. According to M.H. Siddiqui, the fact that Nana Fadnavis does not get punished for his sins brings to light the playwright’s intention of showing the realistic world of modern politics where the crafty, licentious and law-breaker politicians prosper and flourish.52

Ghashiram embarks on the path to power for taking revenge on the Poona society, which has ill-treated him. The very first act, which he has to do, is to sacrifice his daughter’s chastity. Thus he loses his humanity. Once he gets power it starts corrupting him. He begins enjoying tormenting the people. He shows no mercy even to simple and innocent people. He does not remember how he himself had suffered like them in the past. His daughter gets killed. He wants to avenge her death from Nana. But Nana reminds him of his superior power and Ghashiram gives up that idea. It is clear that protecting his power has become more important to Ghashiram than avenging his daughter’s death. Ghashiram crosses the extremes in his pursuit of revenge. He creates a hell not only for the Poona Brahmins but also for himself and his daughter by violating moral laws as well as his paternal duty. Through the character of Nana, Tendulkar exposes the people in power who create and destroy Ghashirams in order to fulfil their own wishes and mislead the society. While he is trying to get hold of Gauri, she reminds him that he is standing in front of the Ganesha idol. Nana tells her that Lord Ganesha won’t object to it. Thus his desecration of the sacred exposes his moral degeneration.
A Friend’s Story:

Vijay Tendulkar’s play ‘Mitrachi Goshta’ (A Friend’s Story) is translated into English by Gowri Ramnarayan. It is a stark commentary on the nature of both heterosexual and homosexual love. According to V.B. Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar has presented the pathos and tragedy of a lesbian relationship with extreme seriousness and sensitivity in A Friend’s Story. The play presents the pathetic life of Sumitra, the protagonist, who is a lesbian. Nothing like this had been presented on the stage in India way back in 1980. The play created a sensation due to its daring and unusual subject.

Bapu (Shrikant Marathe) is the narrator as well as a character in the play. He first sees Sumitra Dev (Mitra) when she takes admission in his college in B.A. Part II. The masculine vigour in Mitra’s stride and speech, her loud laughter and carefree manners and her habit of looking directly into the eyes of the person she is talking to, make it crystal clear that she is different from all the other girls. There is a unique combination of an attractive feminine figure and an aggressive masculinity in Mitra, which makes her quite popular among the boys.

A casual incident gives Bapu a chance to meet Mitra. He stumbles upon a photograph of Mitra smoking a cigarette and approaches her to return it. To his amazement Mitra is not at all concerned about it. However, she invites Bapu for a cup of tea and insists on paying the bill herself. Noting Bapu’s silence, she asks him point blank: “Why are you so quiet? Not fallen in love with me, have you?” (Act I, p. 423) A common girl is unlikely to talk to a boy like this in their first meeting. Her unusual nature, boldness and her total disregard to social taboos come out here.
Bapu’s next meeting with Sumitra is quite strange. Mitra invites him on the pretext that she has some work with him. Bapu recognizes that she wants to tell him something but is unable to do it. She appears to be under a lot of stress. She catches Bapu’s hand and wants to know how he felt. She asks: “Who makes us the way we are and sends us here? Why are we what we are?” (Act I. p. 424) Her unusual behaviour is explained in her next meeting with Bapu, which takes place after her unsuccessful suicide attempt. Bapu is her only friend and she confides everything to him. She narrates how she used to play boyish games during her childhood. Her family decided to get her married to a decent boy. She met the boy a few times. Suddenly she realised that she felt no physical thrill in his company. She became worried. After brooding for a long time she concluded that she was deficient in some way. She performed an experiment to test the fact. She tried to have intercourse with a servant in the family. The truth dawned on her that ‘she could never become a man’s partner’ in the act. She was so greatly disturbed that she had tried to commit suicide. However, she was saved. Bapu suggests that she should take her family in her confidence. Mitra replies: “The question is, even if I were to tell them, will they understand? They may not even know that such a condition exists.” (Act I. p. 433) Mitra’s plight is evident from her words. It is a natural physical harmonal imbalance, which prevents her from living like a normal woman. She has no other option except to suffer in silence.

Until now Mitra had only been conscious of her differentness. Now an incident occurs which convinces her that she is a lesbian. Pande, Bapu’s roommate, organizes a play with an all female cast. He asks Mitra to play the male lead and
Mitra agrees. Nama Deshmukh, the college beauty, is playing the heroine’s role. The contact with Nama causes strange changes in Mitra. To her utter bafflement she realizes that she has fallen in love with Nama. She tells Bapu: “Bapu, that girl has found a place in my heart. I… I have some very strange feelings… towards her. I tried hard to reject them…but they won’t go away”. (Act I. p. 440) Now Mitra realises her situation and decides to flow with the stream.

Bapu is an innocent and good-natured guy with a keen insight into life. He is fully conscious of Mitra’s differentness but he likes her as a friend. Though he does not like Mitra’s idea of trying to ensnare Nama into her web, he agrees to help her. He manages to get Pande out of the room when it is required by Mitra to meet Nama. At first, Nama refuses to meet Mitra. Mitra finds out that she is having an affair with Manya Dalvi, the college ruffian. She becomes jealous of Manya. Earlier we feel sympathy for Mitra because of her inborn physical deficiency. Now we see the other side of Mitra. To separate Nama from Manya, she writes anonymous letters to Nama and her father and that too in Bapu’s handwriting. She shows no consideration to the fact that her action may cause trouble to Bapu, her only friend. Thus the incident brings out the unscrupulousness, selfishness and stubbornness of Mitra. Manya finds out that the handwriting of the anonymous letters matches with that of Bapu. He beats Bapu. Even when Mitra comes to know about this, she is not apologetic. She refuses to listen to Bapu’s sane suggestion saying that if she has sinned then the wages of sin will fall to her lot. She has made up her mind to possess Nama at any cost. She does not seem to have any conscience. She tells Bapu: “I’m a lousy person. Did I even tell
you I’m pure as a lily?…At any cost, I want to get Nama out of his control. I want Nama, all of her, understand? (Act II. p. 454)

Pande, Bapu’s roommate, had found Mitra irresistible when she played the male lead in the play organised by him. He falls in love with Mitra but cannot dare to say anything in front of her. He keeps pestering Bapu to arrange his meeting with Mitra. Realizing Pande’s miserable condition, Bapu informs him of Mitra’s being a lesbian. Pande is unable to digest this fact. He feels greatly hurt. He leaves the city and joins the army. Actually Pande is a strong willed person who is ready to face all odds in life. But he refuses to face the reality and runs away from the situation. This incident clearly brings out society’s attitude towards a person like Mitra. Society does not accept such deviant behaviour.

Mitra succeeds in bringing Nama to Bapu’s room a few times. They become quite close. One day Dalvi suddenly enters Bapu’s room and finds Mitra and Nama together. He abuses Mitra and forces Nama to leave the place with him. Mitra feels utterly humiliated. At the same time her rage is uncontrollable. She is angry not because of Dalvi’s abusive words but because Nama left with him quickly without any protest. She can do nothing except bang her head on the wall. Bapu advises her to forget Nama. She replies that her life has no meaning without Nama. Bapu realises that she is hell bent on treading the path of endless pain and agony.

Mitra and Nama begin to meet again without Dalvi’s knowledge. Once Dalvi approaches Bapu and demands his room for his meeting with Nama. He informs Mitra of this complication. He voices his intention of leaving the room. Mitra requests him to let the room be in his name whereas she would pay the rent. Bapu
refuses and Mitra leaves the place in great anger. After some days Mitra turns up at his new room. She speaks rudely to Bapu and calls him a traitor and a worm. She has come to ask for some money and gets it.

During a college outing Bapu gets a chance to speak to Nama. From their conversation it becomes clear that the relationship with Mitra has become a burden for Nama. She is fed up of Mitra’s domination and bullying her all the time. Nama says: “…I feel afraid of her…she’s very headstrong…short-tempered.” (Act III. p. 469) Mitra is always preoccupied with her own problems. She never tries to understand Nama’s difficulties. Once Nama joked about getting married and got the scare of her life as Mitra nearly strangled her. Mitra plans to keep Nama under her thumb all her life. She plainly tells Bapu that she will not allow Nama to leave her by threatening to make their relationship public. Bapu advises her against such blackmailing.

During the vacation Bapu leaves for his village. On his return he hears that Mitra and Nama’s affair has become a public scandal. A magazine has even published an article about it. The college management is mulling action against them. When their affair was exposed in front of the society, Nama, at first, denied it and then put the blame over Mitra, charging her of blackmailing. She stops meeting Mitra. However, Mitra is still not ready to leave her. Bapu realises that Mitra is lonely and isolated. On hearing about Mitra’s plan of keeping Nama to herself by blackmailing her, he had lost his sympathy for her. But now once again he feels considerate towards her. When Nama informs him of her departure for Calcutta to get married there, he tells Mitra about it. Actually Bapu feels that now he can convince Mitra to
forget Nama and begin her life afresh. He even makes Mitra promise to him that she will make a new beginning. But Mitra does not keep her word and goes to Calcutta in Nama’s pursuit. Bapu feels terribly hurt and decides to end his friendship with Mitra. When Mitra returns from Calcutta Bapu tells her that he is not going to be “a doormat to be used at need and kicked aside when not needed any more.” (Act III. p. 486).

Mitra also realises that she has not done justice to their friendship. She says:“Okay, I deserve it. I am like that. I create problems for others. No one wants me. You had to join the rest at one point or the other. I knew it, I don’t blame you. I blame myself.” (Act III. p. 486).

It looks as if losing Bapu’s friendship is an even bigger blow to Mitra than losing Nama. She is also thrown out of her house. She starts living in the women’s hostel. Having lost her way in life completely, she becomes a whore. One day, Pande and Manya Dalvi take Bapu to the army club to drink wine. Mitra comes there in the company of a couple of officers. She starts drinking heavily. Then she begins ranting and raving about Bapu’s having broken his friendship with her. She confesses that Bapu was like a mother to her. For Pande and Dalvi, Mitra is just an abnormal person, a social outcaste. They get sadistic pleasure from her plight. But Bapu is genuinely concerned. He starts wondering whether he had done the right thing by breaking off from Mitra. After some days he gets the news of Mitra’s suicide. Thus Mitra struggles against a hostile society all her life. Bapu is her only support. Rohini Hattangady (the renowned actress who played Mitra in 1980) comments: “When Bapu too, doesn’t understand her and feels that while going to Calcutta she has gone overboard, she is angry-at Bapu and at herself, and breaks away from him. For Mitra, it is not breaking
away from Bapu but breaking away from herself—from her being ‘Mitra’. She tries to be ‘feminine’ and cannot do it, and one-day commits suicide—and succeeds! ”

Instead of showing sympathy to Mitra who is suffering from a physical deformity, our society victimises her for her unconventional behaviour. Manya Dalvi persecutes Mitra for blackmailing Nama. He himself goes on ditching many girls including Nama. Mitra gets punishment for her crime but society turns a blind eye towards Dalvi’s activities. Shailaja Wadikar rightly comments that *A Friend’s Story* “attacks the male-dominated society that punishes a woman but lets a man go scot-free to commit more crimes.”

The play clearly brings out the oppressive and exploitative nature of society, which derives vicious pleasure in inflicting miseries on unusual people like Mitra. Not even Mitra’s near and dear ones try to help her by referring her to a doctor or a psychologist. On the contrary they drive her out of the house that results in her becoming a prostitute. The playwright also brings out the violence hidden inside a pervert like Mitra. The way she wants to control Nama bears testimony to this fact.

Through Pande’s character the playwright criticises the male who wishes to posess a woman for pleasure but does not mind denouncing her if she is not available. Through Manya Dalvi’s character the playwright brings out male dominance in our society. Even Bapu follows the conventional pattern of behaviour in the end. Nama cannot withstand the pressures of society and becomes a conformist. She surrenders to the social forces. Mitra does not surrender to the conventional forces and so has to die. Mitra as a rebel is impressive. She shows the courage to fulfil her wishes. She does not feel guilty about her unnatural relationship with Nama. She exploits Nama
for physical pleasure and Bapu for emotional support. Nama becomes a soft target for both Mitra and Manya because of her weak personality. Mitra can insult or ditch anyone for her own benefit. She tries to break the traditional shackles of society. Bapu offers a new point of view of looking towards the marginalised people. If these people are accepted, there is hope of their rehabilitation. Manya’s treatment of Nama shows how men treat women as mere objects of utility and control them to satisfy their male-ego. Manya and Pande represent the society by enjoying Mitra’s plight. Except Bapu, everyone attacks Mitra’s abnormality. Pande’s going to army instead of changing the girl after knowing about her differentness is difficult to digest. Manya gives up Nama but continues to persecute Mitra that is unsatisfactory.

*Kamala:*

Tendulkar’s play ‘*Kamala*’ (translated into English by Priya Adarkar) reveals his keen insight into the pitiable status of women in the male dominated urban middle class society. The author was inspired in writing this play by a real life incident reported in ‘The Indian Express’ by a journalist, who actually bought a woman in a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference to expose the inhuman flesh trade. Tendulkar’s keen insight into the selfish, corrupt and oppressive world of contemporary journalism comes out clearly in it. According to N.S. Dharan, *Kamala* brings out the “characteristic suffering of the Indian middle class women perpetrated by selfish, malicious, secretive and hypocritical male chauvinists.”56 Tendulkar depicts the exploitation of women by the success-oriented men for whom women are mere stepping-stones for their achievements. The playwright also brings out three different kinds of responses to exploitation through the characters of Sarita, an
educated housewife, Kamala, an ignorant tribal woman and Kamalabai, a maidservant. This thought provoking play questions the established values of the society and exposes the evils and shortcomings of the contemporary society with an impartial and analytical mind.

Jaisingh Jadhav is a well-known investigative journalist working as an Associate Editor in an English daily. His wife’s name is Sarita. Born in an aristocratic family, Sarita is well educated. She has brought Kamalabai, a maidservant from Phaltan, her native place. The Jadhav family lives in a small bungalow in the fashionable New Delhi neighborhood of Neeti Bagh. The play opens with Kakasaheb, Sarita’s uncle, attending a phone call. We come to know that Jaisingh has been out of town for some time. Sarita has no idea as to where and why Jaisingh has gone. She dutifully receives every phone call and notes down the details. Her manner is just like that of a Personal Assistant, which is explained by Sarita in following words - “I have to write down each phone call.” (Act I. p. 3) To Kakasaheb’s suggestion that she needn’t write every caller’s name, she replies - “If I say they didn’t tell me their names he gets angry with me for not asking”. (Act I. p. 3) The incident points out the secondary status assigned to Sarita, a highly educated woman, by her husband.

Sarita receives a message of Jaisingh’s expected return. She hurriedly tidies away the things in the house. She gives several instructions to Kamalabai, the maidservant, regarding various things of Jaisingh’s requirement, as if a VIP is arriving at her house. Finally Jaisingh enters with Kamala, a village woman wearing a torn, dirty sari. While investigating the incidents of flesh-trade in the remote villages of India, he came to know about a place called Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar where
human beings are bought and sold. Jaisingh has bought Kamala for two hundred and fifty rupees to prove that such auctions are taking place. On the surface Jaisingh is fighting for the cause of the poor and the down trodden. In reality, he just wants to use this incident to get publicity and promotion. Maya Pandit rightly points out that Jaisingh is more committed to sales and advertisements of his newspaper than to human values like freedom. He wants to present Kamala in a press conference. He does not allow her to bath or change clothes before that. Kamala is under the impression that Jaisingh is going to keep her in his house forever as his mistress. He does not tell her his real intention. He tells Sarita: “What’s so unusual about the Luhardaga flesh market? Women are sold in many places like that, all over the country. How do you think all the red light districts could operate - without that? That’s not the point. The point is how we project Luhardaga - the technique of it. The art lies in presenting the case - not in the case itself!” (Act I. p. 15) Thus Jaisingh uses Kamala as an object for advancement in his professional life. Sarita does not like Jaisingh’s treatment of Kamala. On being questioned about Kamala’s future after the press conference, Jaisingh declares that she will be sent to a Women’s Home. Sarita’s protest, as usual, falls on deaf ears.

Before taking Kamala to the press conference, Jaisingh tells her that a feast is being held in her honour. Kamala requests him to excuse her as she is feeling quite tired. Jadhav sternly asks her whether she is going to listen to him or not. Kamala acquiesces saying that he is her master. The happenings of the conference are reported through a dialogue between Jadhav and Jain who are celebrating its success with liquor. Jaisingh refers to Kamala’s plight with great delight. She was so nervous
and scared that she had wanted to run away. He had prevailed on her to stay and forced her to answer all the queries, some of them quite vulgar. Kakasaheb points out that everyone had fun at Kamala’s expense. Jaisingh says – “I didn’t hold this Press Conference for my own benefit. It was to drag this criminal sale of human beings into the light of the day.” (Act I. p. 31) Kakasaheb immediately responds, “And you sold a woman to them to do so”. It is clear that Jaisingh only poses as an upholder of moral principles. Mrs. P. Pramila Devi remarks: “Jaisingh’s enthusiasm is directed towards sheer sensationalism. He makes Kamala a laughing stock, exposing her to the press men’s vulgar inquiries.”

There is a conversation between Sarita and Kamala. Kamala innocently asks her how much Jaisingh has paid to buy Sarita. This question makes Sarita realise that her own condition is no better than Kamala’s. Jain, Jaisingh’s fellow journalist, is also aware of Sarita’s exploitation at the hands of her husband. He says to Sarita: “This warrior against exploitation in the country is exploiting you. He’s made a drudge out of a horse-riding independent girl from a princely house. … Shame on you! Hero of anti-exploitation campaigns makes slave of wife!” (Act I. p. 17) Sarita however does not pay any attention to his words. Arundhati Banerjee aptly comments: “Like Kamala, Sarita is also an object in Jadhav’s life, an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. Kamala’s entry into the household reveals to Sarita the selfish hypocrisy of her husband and the insignificance of her own existence.”

After this incident, we find a marked change in Sarita’s attitude towards her husband. Earlier she used to defend Jaisingh in whatever he did. Now she starts
defying him. She opposes Jaisingh’s decision to send Kamala to an orphanage. Then she refuses to accompany Jaisingh to a party. While talking to Kakasaheb, she refers to Jaisingh sarcastically as the ‘gentleman’ and suggests that she will bare the fact of her slavery in front of the world in a press conference. She will make it public that though she is a wife, she is treated no better than a domestic slave. Shibu Simon writes: “Sarita, like ‘Nora’ in Ibsen’s ‘A Doll’s House’, has thus undergone a sea-change and is now entirely an independent and assertive woman who has finally discovered her real identity.”

Though the play is titled as Kamala, it is Sarita who comes out as the central character. The arrival of Kamala makes her conscious of her husband’s double standards and her own pitiable condition. On being questioned by Kakasaheb regarding her submissive attitude in the last ten years of her married life, she replies: “Kamala showed me everything. Because of her, I suddenly saw things clearly. I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house. Because I’m a slave.” (Act II. p. 46) Kakasaheb tries to defend Jaisingh saying that he is no different from other men. Sarita refuses to bear any more humiliation. She declares her rebellious intention of exposing her husband’s hypocrisy before the whole world.

Sarita’s response to exploitation by Jaisingh is different to that of Kamala and Kamalabai. Kamala, being an illiterate and ignorant tribal woman, meekly surrenders to Jaisingh’s domination. To her, Jaisingh is the master to whom she has to obey in everything. Kamalabai, the maidservant, is also a victim of Jaisingh’s domination. He is an unkind and inconsiderate boss who makes her work very hard. All Kamalabai
can do is to ask Sarita to send her back to her native place. Even Sarita does not go all the way in her rebellion. She gives up the thought of exposing Jaisingh when she learns about his dismissal from the job. Sheth Singhania, the owner of the daily Jaisingh works with, succumbs to the pressure from certain politicians and dismisses Jaisingh from his job because of his expose of the flesh trade in the press conference. Jaisingh completely breaks down at this news. Sarita offers emotional support to him at this juncture. Thus she returns to her earlier role of a dutiful wife. This leads us to think whether the charge, that women themselves are responsible for their suffering and exploitation, holds water.

Sarita gives up her rebellion at the end of the play. However, she does not lose her self-belief and conviction. She tells Kakasaheb: “...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 no one will rule over me.” (Act II. p. 52) The quiet determination in these words suggests that she has not given up her struggle for identity. Her seemingly doll-like existence has changed into an assertive and mature personality. From an ordinary passive wife, she transforms into a woman with a will of her own, a will that happens to be different from her husband’s. Thus, Tendulkar presents an interesting picture of the slavery, which a wife is subjected to by her husband in day-to-day life and her response to it. Shailaja Wadikar’s comment that sarita has neither the will nor the guts to rebel against her exploitative husband does not seem to be true. As Sarita herself is a sufferer, she understands the agony that Jaisingh is going through when he is dismissed from his job. Shanta Gokhale's
interpretation of Sarita’s postponement of her rebellion as an act of a compassionate human being appears to be more correct.\textsuperscript{62}

Tendulkar's \textit{Kamala} reveals the oppressive nature of our society in which everybody is a slave at some place or the other. Kamala is a slave in spite of being a citizen of an independent democratic country. Sarita is an educated and sophisticated slave in our family system sanctified by the social conventions. Even Jaisingh, the journalist, is reduced to being a slave due to the nexus between the state and the newspaper industry. According to M. Sarat Babu, Kamala is an indictment of women's victimisation by men and men's victimisation by our business-oriented capital dominated society.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, Jaisingh who exploits Kamala, Kamalabai and Sarita, himself gets exploited and oppressed by his employer.

The institution of journalism has been subjected to a severe scrutiny by Tendulkar in \textit{Kamala}. Being a member of the journalist community, Tendulkar is keenly aware of the evil practices that have crept in this field. He dislikes the fact that the noble institution of press, which can bring about positive changes in the society by spreading awareness among people and emphasizing moral values, is being used as just another profit-making business by unscrupulous press-owners and journalists. Tendulkar has a high conception of this profession, which can play an important role in bringing social change by exposing the evils that exist in the society. The newspapers should provide authentic information about the current events and problems in the lives of people. They should try to rectify the problems by suggesting the ways and means to solve them. The press must not bow down in front of the powerful politicians and their wealthy supporters. The current situation in this field is
far from being satisfactory. So the playwright criticizes the foulness that permeates the contemporary jounalism through the characters of Jaisingh Jadhav, Jain, his colleague, and Sheth Singhania, the owner of the newspaper. He contrasts the behaviour and thinking of these people with Kakasaheb, owner of a newspaper in vernacular. Kakasaheb stands for the true ideals of journalism and becomes the playwright’s mouthpiece for his condemnation of the unscrupulous pressmen.

There are numerous instances of heated debates between Kakasaheb and Jaisingh with regard to their opposite stance about the roles of the newspapers and the journalists. While talking to Sarita, Kakasaheb once bemoans the fact that the journalists of new generation such as Jaisigh do not pay heed to the content of their reporting. All their energy is directed towards being on the spot of the action and sending an eyewitness report to their respective newspapers. A journalist cannot afford to be left behind his fellow-journalists. Kakasaheb remarks: “What sort of journalism is it that smacks its lips as it writes blood-thirsty descriptions instead of commentary? Its business isn’t news - its bloodshed!” (Act I. p. 6)

Being an investigative journalist, Jaisingh is accustomed to getting anonymous phone-calls threatening him with dire consequences for writing against certain persons. He takes such threats in his stride and continues with his ambitious and adventurous reports of scams and scandals. It brings out the single-mindedness of the young generation of journalists who are so eager to get name, fame and money that they disregard threats to their lives. The same urge to rise in his profession, however, makes Jaisingh use Kamala as a means of fulfilling his ambitions. He purchases Kamala as a proof of the existence of flesh-trade and presents her in front
of the world by organising a press-conference. He is not interested in the rehabilitation and well being of Kamala. As soon as his purpose is served, he dispatches her to an orphanage. For Jaisingh, Kamala is only a means to his end of achieving fame. He does not think of her as a human being. That’s why he does not try to protect Kamala from the uncivil and vulgar queries put to her by his fellow pressmen.

The hollowness of the tall claims made by Jaisingh regarding the whole ‘Kamala-episode’ becomes evident during the press conference. As an evidence of the inhuman flesh-trade, Kamla is presented in front of the invitees. Now what do the so-called cultured and pragmatic journalists do? They begin asking Kamala questions about the free-sex that is supposed to happen among the tribal people and her own experiences in this regard. Such unashamed display of pleasure at the plight of an ignorant and poor woman puts several question marks on the attitude of these people of looking at social maladies.

Kakasaheb can see through the style of working of mercenary journalists like Jaisingh quite clearly. He sarcastically tells Jaisingh that he intends to give up his passion for evidence and run his newspaper in future with an eye on higher circulation by appointing a couple of dare-devil investigative journalists in the mould of Jaisingh. Kakasaheb is certain that he will be able to build a bungalow in a short time just like Jaisingh has done. This is a biting comment on how careerist persons climb the ladders of success in a short time-span by compromising with the ideals of a profession. When Jaisingh tries to defend his class by suggesting that there is a social purpose behind all of their actions, Kakasaheb retorts that the majority of the
population cannot understand their English language newspaper. If they really want to spread awareness among people, they should write in a language, which people can easily understand. Thus the playwright highlights the elitist nature of Jaisingh’s journalism.

Though Jaisingh’s actions are prompted by selfish motives, he becomes instrumental in bringing a serious social malady out in the open. His life, however, takes a tragic turn as certain influential politicians are supposed to be involved in the flesh-trade. Sheth Singhania, Jaisingh’s boss, finds it more beneficial to join hands with these influential persons and cover up the whole matter. The profit that he makes from the newspaper business is more important to him than exposing a social malady. He does not care for social welfare, impartiality, fearlessness and an urge to spread awareness among people, which should be his guiding spirit. Tendulkar exposes the nexus between corrupt politicians and selfish businessmen through this incident. Thus he expresses serious concern about the fact that the newspapers and journalists are not doing what is expected of them ideally. The playwright seems to be warning the society about the improper functioning of one of its key institutions due to the evil and harmful tendencies that have crept in it.

Kanyadaan:

Tendulkar’s ‘Kanyadaan’ (The Gift of a Daughter) has been translated into English by Gowri Ramnarayan. It depicts the tragedy of an idealistic father and daughter duo, Nath Devlalikar and Jyoti. Nath, a humanistic and liberal politician, encourages his daughter Jyoti’s marriage with Arun Athawale, a backward class poet and writer. Jyoti is unable to lead a happy domestic life with Arun. This inter-caste
marriage fails to work due to the social tensions caused by casteism. Shilpi Rishi Srivastava comments: “Tendulkar explores the texture of modernity and social change in India through the forces this marriage unleashes.”

She also thinks that this play concerns itself with questions that are crucial to all societies grappling with change and social barriers. The playwright actually felt disturbed and confused when this play was selected for the Saraswati Samman. According to Tendulkar, *Kanyadaan* “is not the story of a victory; it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion. It gives expression to a deep-rooted malaise and its pains.”

Nath is a member of the State Legislative Council. His wife, Seva, is also actively involved in politics. The couple is so busy that they hardly have any time to give to their children, Jayaprakash and Jyoti. Jyoti, aged about 20, is an obedient and dutiful daughter. She has imbibed all the ideals and principles of her visionary father and is determined to embark on a path of truth and goodness as shown by him in her life. Nath, a seasoned and principled politician, is a socialist. He believes in the dictum: Hate the sin, not the sinner. He is fully committed to uprooting casteism and caste distinctions from society. His wife Seva also shares his concerns. Her approach towards life, however, is practical as against her husband’s idealistic and liberal attitude.

At the beginning of the play we are given a vivid picture of the everyday life of Devlalikar family. Nath and Seva are always busy in travelling from one place to another in connection with their political activities. Jyoti and Jay try to help them as much as possible. It is only on rare occasions that the whole family is able to sit together. Jyoti has to almost take an appointment from Nath and Seva when she wants
to tell them together something important. She says that she has decided to get married to Arun Athawale, a dalit poet and writer. Nath and Seva react differently to the information about Arun’s background. Seva expresses her apprehensions due to Arun’s not having a secure job and the vast cultural difference between them. Nath, on the other hand, is overjoyed to hear that his daughter wants to marry a dalit youth. Nath says: “But if my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn’t have pleased me as much…” (Act I. Scene I. p. 504) All his life he has been crying hoarse for destroying the caste distinctions in our society. Now he has actually got a chance to do something concrete in that direction. It appears as if he thinks of Jyoti’s decision from only an idealist’s point of view. As Jyoti’s father he should have considered the prospects of her happiness after this marriage. Jyoti makes it clear that she has not fallen in love with Arun. They had met in the socialists’ study group. She was impressed by his poetry and felt that she “could do anything to make him happy.” Arun once asked her whether the very idea of marrying a dalit youth like him is dreadful to her. She replied in the negative. Probably incredulous, he suggested that they should get married in that case. Jyoti accepted it. Now she herself appears to be in two minds though she has no intention of going back on her words. Seva’s sane suggestions that there is no compatibility in Arun and Jyoti’s lifestyles and she may not be able to handle the relationship with a person culturally different from her, fall on deaf ears. Nath, in his over-enthusiasm to break caste barriers, supports Jyoti whole-heartedly. Traditionally a father performs the Kanyadaan i.e. the giving of the gift of a daughter to a suitable boy only when he is certain that his daughter will lead a happy life after the marriage. Here, however, Jyoti’s marriage, for Nath, becomes a
kind of experiment to bridge the gap between various sections of our society. He does not for a moment think that he is making a guinea pig of his daughter in this difficult experiment.

Jyoti brings Arun to her house to introduce him to her family. Arun is restless at finding himself in an upper class atmosphere. The memories of the difficult wandering life and the hardships of his ancestors flood his mind. He wants to know whether Jyoti will be able to adjust to his lifestyle. He says: “Will you marry me and eat stinking bread with spoilt dal in my father’s hut? Without vomiting?” (Act I. Scene II. p. 513) It is clear that there is a great deal of pent up anger in Arun’s mind about the atrocities committed on dalits by the upper caste people in the past. Jyoti innocently tries to make a little fun of him and gets her arm twisted by him in return. This does not go well with Seva who watches this incident having just returned from outside. She enquires about Arun’s future plans. She hints at the difficult challenges he will have to face in career as well as life. Arun feels piqued. He declares that after marriage they will brew illicit liquor and earn a lot of money. When Jyoti tries to save the situation he abruptly asks her to shut up. Now Nath enters and behaves very cordially towards Arun. After Arun has left, Seva and Jay express their displeasure at Arun’s rude behaviour. Nath tries to justify Aruns’s rudeness by pointing to his upbringing in a hostile environment. He alludes to the old social reformers who not only advocated window remarriage but themselves married windows. He exhorts his family members to change their outlook. On being questioned about her impression about Arun, Jyoti replies that he is a complex person. She is hopeful of understanding Arun and adjusting with him. Nath also feels that upper caste girls like Jyoti can
polish off the rough edges in the personalites of dalit youths like Arun. He burdens Jyoti with the responsibility of bringing out the true potential in Arun. Maya Pandit writes that Nath “puts the entire onus of bringing about the transformation in society on Jyoti.” 66 This implies that it is a path of no return for her.

Now the action of the play shifts to some months later. We find that Arun and Jyoti have got married. But Jyoti still lives with her parents, as Arun has not been able to procure an accommodation for them. Sometimes Arun takes Jyoti out and they spend the night at the residence of someone of Arun’s acquaintance. No one is happy. Nath keeps brooding all the time. Seva suggests to him that they should never have allowed this marriage to take place. Arun sometimes gets drunk and even beats Jyoti. Nath thinks of allowing Arun to live in the house along with Jyoti. He is surprised when Jyoti tells him that she is fed up with Arun’s rude behavior and has decided not to live with him any more. Nath still thinks of this marriage as a significant social experiment. So he desperately wants this marriage to work. Nath says; “We must save this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake...This is not just a question of our daughter’s life, Seva, this has ...a far wider significance...this experiment is a very precious experiment”. (Act II. Scene I. p. 537) Arun arrives in a drunken state. He asks for forgiveness from Jyoti He even pretends to punish himself by cutting off his hands with which he had beaten Jyoti. He justifies his violent behaviour by saying that he has grown up watching his mother get beaten by his drunk father every day. He claims that he is a barbarian and cannot give any guarantee of good behaviour in future. Jyoti realises that she will have to solve this problem herself as she has married Arun of her own free will. So she decides to live with Arun. Nath feels proud
of his daughter’s courage in trying to face this problem squarely. However, he also realises the abundance of the hardships that may be there in store for her. N.S. Dharan aptly comments that Nath is besieged by unknown fears regarding Jyoti’s future.\textsuperscript{67}

Once again the action of the play shifts to some months later. Jyoti and Arun are living in a dirty room in a slum. Arun is not doing any job, so the responsibility of earning has fallen on Jyoti’s shoulders. Moreover, she is in the sixth month of pregnancy. Arun still tortures and beats her. Recently he has kicked her in the belly, which has resulted in her getting an internal wound. One is left aghast at this cruel and inhuman treatment meted out to Jyoti by Arun. In the meanwhile Aruns’s autobiography gets published and wins accolades. Nath is impressed by Arun’s depiction of his humiliating experiences in life in his autobiography. When he comes to know about Jyoti’s physical torture at the hands of Arun, he is extremely perplexed. He just cannot apprehend how a person who gives a sensitive literary portrayal of his hardships can cause sufferings to his wife. Seva sees through Arun’s behaviour quite clearly. She says that Arun is taking out his anger against the high caste people on his wife who also belongs to that class. She says: “I will say that in this excellent book, whatever the author has said about injustice and exploitation is hypocrisy of the first order. Because this man himself exploits my daughter”. (Act II. Scene II. p. 545) Here Arun comes out as a great hypocrite who talks about his own exploitation in his book, but himself becomes an exploiter of his upper caste wife. According to Dr. Tamilselvi Kanakiah, Arun’s ill treatment of Jyoti is an instance of a dalit avenging the sufferings of his community for ages together.\textsuperscript{68} He also accuses
Jyoti’s parents of false and dirty crimes. Nath is quite troubled to hear all this. However, he stops Jayaprakash from abusing Arun.

Arun enters in the company of Hammeer Rao Kamle and Vamanseth Nevrgaonkar, two dalit littérateurs. He requests Nath to preside over a function in which his autobiography is to be discussed. When Nath refuses to accept this proposal, Arun says that Nath’s name has already been announced in this regard. The organisers had taken his consent for granted. Arun tries to blackmail Nath by saying that people will accuse that the upper caste father-in-law could not digest the literary success of his dalit son-in-law if he refused to attend this function. Nath refuses to bow down to such blackmailing. After Arun leaves, Nath is unable to control his fury at Arun’s unscrupulous tactics. He starts calling Arun names whereas he himself had stopped Jayaprakash from doing that a little while earlier. Seva, however, thinks calmly about this situation. She then suggests to Nath to accept Arun’s wish so that Jyoti’s further torture may be prevented. Nath also realises it. He feels completely helpless and decides to go to the function.

After Nath’s return from the function, Jayaprakash praises the speech that he gave about Arun’s autobiography. But Nath who is looking dispirited and weary disagrees with him. Nath knows inside his heart that he has given an insincere and hypocritical speech. He has praised Arun only with a view of saving troubles for his daughter at the hands of Arun. To complicate the matters Jyoti too comes to the function and listens to his speech. She has been the most severe critic of his speeches right from her childhood. The expression on her face makes it clear to Nath that she has seen through the hollowness of his speech. Now Jyoti arrives and questions Nath
about his intentions behind making an insincere speech. She cannot tolerate falsehood in her father who has taught her to follow the path of truth. Nath, at first, tries to defend his behaviour by stating that he has really liked Arun’s book. Jyoti accuses him of trying to dodge the issue. She had learnt from Nath that the beastliness in man can be subdued and the goodness in him can be aroused. Her experiences of life have taught her otherwise. She has realised that Arun is both the beast and the lover, inseparable and incurable. Believing in and following her father’s principles have closed all her options in life. She minces no words in telling her father that she was deeply offended by his hypocrisy. She could perceive Nath’s intense hatred for Arun hidden behind his hypocritical praise of him. But Jyoti refuses to budge from the path, which Nath has shown her though he himself has got away from that path. She is determined to accept Arun as he is. Finally Nath gives up all his idealism seeing the suffering it has brought for his daughter. He suggests Jyoti to leave Arun as she has her father to support her. Jyoti angrily charges him of having made her a guinea pig in his experiment to transform the society. Forbidding Nath and Seva from even coming to her house, she leaves, obviously, never to return.

Thus the play depicts the miserable failure of Nath’s romantic idealism. In his over-enthusiasm for a liberal outlook, he ends up failing in his duties as a father. One cannot help having the feeling that Jyoti’s miseries could have been avoided had Nath considered the pros and cons of her marriage to Arun a little more rationally. Nutan Gosavi aptly comments that Nath’s Kanyadaan of Jyoti turns out to be a “sacrifice of his daughter on the altar of his socio-political ideology.”

Casteism and the conflict between the upper caste people and dalits is a burning social problem in India.
*Kanyadaan* depicts a family’s attempt to cure this social deformity and its disastrous consequences. The play deals with the problems in the way of creating a casteless society and brings out the ambivalence inherent in the words and deeds of both the promoters and the beneficiaries of dalit upliftment programmes. Tendulkar appears to be suggesting that an inter-caste marriage is not a child’s play. He warns about the risks involved in it if appropriate care is not taken.

According to Shailaja Wadilkar, Nath envisions the creation of “an egalitarian, humanitarian society where human beings are treated as human beings and not as animals.” So Jyoti’s marriage with Arun, for Nath, is a step taken towards the fulfillment of this dream. The hollowness of his idealism dawns on Nath when he finds that getting name, fame and position in society does not alter Arun’s cruel behavior towards Jyoti. On one hand he gives a poignant expression to his painful experiences in his autobiography, on the other hand, he kicks Jyoti in the stomach though she is in the sixth month of pregnancy. This event shakes Nath’s conviction that earth can be turned into heaven by destroying the propensities towards evil that exist in man. His firm belief that ‘no man is fundamentally evil’ is shaken. Nath blames himself: “I had this maniacal urge to uproot casteism and caste distinctions from our society. As a result I pushed my own daughter into a sea of misery…” (Act II. Scene III. p. 557) N.S. Dharan rightly states that Nath the idealist, in the end, turns into a disillusioned realist due to the bitter experiences of life and Jyoti, from a soft spoken, highly cultured Brahmin girl, transforms into a hardened dalit girl.
Vijay Tendulkar’s Social Vision:

Along with Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar is one of the leading playwrights in contemporary Indian Theatre. The protagonists of his plays represent the young generation of 1960s and 1970s. Like the characters in John Osborne’s plays, they express their anger and frustration at the condition of society. That’s why, he was hailed as the ‘angry young man’ of the Marathi theatre due to his rebellion against the established values of a snobbishly orthodox society. The study of Tendulkar’s plays makes clear his honest desire to make society a better place to live. He satirises the ills of the society and alerts people about the odd situations of life. The ugliness of society and the darker aspects of human nature are exposed through his plays. He appears to be saying that we cannot improve the condition of our society unless we get rid of the inborn tendencies in the human nature such as lust, violence, selfishness, treachery, jealousy and the craving for power.

The urban, white-collar, middle-class people are the subjects of Tendulkar’s plays. His keen observation of life becomes evident through his portrayal of the agonies and sufferings in their lives. He depicts the disharmony in the relationship between an individual and the society and exposes the vices and weaknesses of both. The demoralised and the degraded picture of human life, which he portrays, is beyond one’s imagination. All the filth and squalor in the society is laid bare in order to make us conscious of the problems and to make us think about their solutions. The playwright is content to observe and record but does not offer any counsel and guidance directly. He is rightly called a thinking man’s playwright. His thought
provoking plays question the established values of the society. A social critic with merciless gaze, he is very much concerned about the ailments of modern society and takes genuine interest in the efforts that are being made to cure these ailments. The effect, which the social maladies have on his consciousness, is evident from his plays, but he does not aim at suggesting their solutions.

The Maharashtrian society was in a state of turmoil due to various reasons during the 1960s and 1970s, when most of Tendulkar’s plays were written. The Maharashtra state had come into existence in 1960. But it had not brought about any great changes in the lives of people. It was a dynamic period of sweeping social changes that were taking place due to the pressure of the circumstances as well as the newly awakened class-consciousness among people of various classes of society. It was the time of the social movements of the youth and the revolt of the backward class people. People had begun to think whether their problems had been solved after getting the independence as the earlier euphoria was over. There was no dearth of incidents like murders and riots, scams and scandals. Incapable and indifferent leaders and officials further complicated the matters. There was a widespread dissatisfaction about the customs and traditions which had persisted in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. Such kind of severe discontent pointed towards a desire for change in the society. It was against this background that Tendulkar started writing his plays. He portrayed the social unrest in his plays truthfully. When a literary work truthfully exposes such conditions making the society accept what it does not wish to believe to be true, it can hurt the society and may become controversial with objections being raised about the motives of the writer. That’s
what happened with Tendulkar. Gowri Ramnarayan observes that Tendulkar was criticised for exaggerating the spiritual bankruptcy of the degenerate socio-cultural milieu and accused of projecting the squalor, poverty, crime and disorder in an unrealistic manner. He was also charged of promoting defeatist apathy. He had to face an enormous hostility from the conservative community. However, the playwright had not aimed at creating or perpetuating social unrest. He was only showing a mirror to the society while giving an expression to his heart-felt sensibilities. Tendulkar’s portrayal of Nana Fadnavis in his play *Ghashiram Kotwal* as a symbol of a corrupt and immoral government and that of the eponymous character of *Sakharam Binder* who tries to overcome, though unsuccessfully, the restraints created by the institutions of marriage and family serve as apt examples in this regard.

The speed of industrialisation and urbanisation was increasing rapidly. It was giving rise to new problems in its wake. A handful of the capitalists were enjoying great wealth. Majority of the people, however, were still poor. Money had become the gateway to social prestige. The lives and thinking of the people were changing with the changing times. Industrialisation facilitated the growth of the materialistic culture but led to the decline of man’s spirit. This resulted in a loss of values and gradual dehumanisation of man. A feeling of alienation from self as well as others began to grow. The loneliness of an individual appears to be one of the favourite themes of Tendulkar. The cruel circumstances surrounding such a person are exposed in his plays. The despair of an individual resulting from either his conflict with a hostile society or his own failure to fulfil his dreams is revealed by the playwright effectively
through the long speeches that his characters give. Rama in The Vultures, Benare in Silence! The Court is in Session and the eponymous character of Ghashiram Kotwal deliver such speeches giving vent to their misery and despair. Their helplessness and utter loneliness is brought out through them. Tendulkar makes us conscious of the severe conflict that goes on in the minds of his characters through these speeches.

The bitter experiences of men and women in their lives were made the subjects of his plays by Tendulkar. He portrayed the complex and chaotic socio-political conditions in contemporary times, the corrupt governmental machinery, declining moral standards and the gradual dehumanisation of human spirit through his plays. He admitted his inability to show the stories of victory and romantic dreams by neglecting the rottenness in contemporary life. The persons who try to live a happy and meaningful life fighting with the hostile circumstances win the sympathy and admiration of Tendulkar. The characters in his plays often end up on the losing side in the battles that they face in their lives. While feeling sorry for their defeats, the playwright admires them for putting up a brave fight. There is a mixture of optimism as well as despair in the playwright’s outlook towards the future.

Tendulkar has endeavoured to understand life with all its pains, conflicts and contradictions. He strove to describe it truthfully through his plays. He presented a true picture of life, incorporating an interplay of the positive as well as the negative aspects of life. In an interview published in ‘The Hindu’, Tendulkar said, “May be at some point of time, I will stop writing physically. But I will continue to write in my mind.”\textsuperscript{73} It shows his compulsive urge to keep writing. Tendulkar feels that life is dark and cruel. A writer should not close his eyes at the sight of suffering and
maladies just because it might make him uncomfortable. In an interview, Tendulkar once said, “I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live.” Tendulkar did not make deliberate research before writing anything. He once said, “I don’t deliberately try to find out things before I write. One does not live to write. You live, and writing becomes an offshoot from it. I live my life keeping my eyes open, observing things, and then something comes to me from what I had seen before and I write it down.” He felt that theatre is for the thick-skinned and the stubborn. One must be ready to digest bitter criticism and failures in order to survive in this field. He minced no words in criticising those who give theatre up before even attempting to do it seriously.

Delivering the prestigious Sri Ram Memorial Lectures for Performing Arts in 1997 in New Delhi, Tendulkar said, “Give me a piece of paper, any paper, and a pen and I shall write as naturally as a bird flies or a fish swims.” Such was his love of writing. He wrote sitting in newspapers offices, in the roadside restaurants, on the crowded local trains and sometimes sitting in the bathroom too. He has written on the sick bed in the hospital in spite of his doctor’s advice against it. Far from taxing him, it was a relief and joy to him. While summing up his lifelong involvement in theatre during the Sri Ram Memorial Lecture, Tendulkar observed that his playwriting years had helped him to grow as a human being and enabled him to analyse life - his own and the lives of others. It made him realise the complexities of the human mind, which defies all available theories and logic.
Tendulkar does not write plays with the sole intention of entertaining the audiences and getting commercial success. Instead of giving happy endings and showing the complete victory of the good over the evil, the usual formulae of professional playwrights, Tendulkar chose to show a realistic picture of society and human life with all its ugliness and nakedness. He used the medium of theatre to air his views and thoughts about various issues concerning society and did not compromise with them for getting commercial success and popularity. Tendulkar chose drama as the means of exposing the defects of Indian society. The preoccupation with depicting the dark side of life points to the playwright’s intense longing to change it and his wish for the creation of an ideal society. The life that he has painted is gloomy and dark but his love of humanity and his commitment to human values is beyond question. He himself modestly says that the intention of his writing is to explore himself, his life and thoughts. It is the result of his efforts to understand human life. He secretly wants people to mend their ways. By repeatedly showing us the lowest depths to which human beings can fall, he induces in us a disapproval of evil. He makes us introspect by showing that the evildoers do not prosper or succeed in life. Tendulkar does not provide any solutions to the problems he depicts in his plays. In an interview, Tendulkar said that he did not think it is possible to suggest any viable solutions to the complex human situation. He attempts to take his audience with him in an exploration of human situation so that they may get insights into the great jigsaw puzzle of human existence and enrich their understanding of the life around them.78 N.S. Dharan aptly comments that Tendulkar’s method of raising disturbing questions but never bothering to answer
them is truly characteristic of a genuine playwright whose foremost concern is to open his reader-audience’s eyes to a social problem which continues to evade easy solutions.79

Tendulkar’s genuine concern for the welfare of women is reflected through their realistic and sensitive portrayal in his plays. His plays skilfully expose the gender discrimination in our society and the resultant plight of women. He shows how women are exploited with the aid of social customs and traditions. He exposes the exploitation of the institution of marriage in order to uphold the male dominance. He shows how the uneducated women are not even aware of their sad condition. He criticises the conservative minds of women who do not show enough guts in their fight against injustice. According to Tendulkar, education and self-sufficiency are the answers to women’s problems.

In the days when Tendulkar began writing his plays, the sphere of women’s awareness had been gradually developing though the restrictions imposed upon them by the society were as rigid as ever. Even after getting economic self-dependence, they were being exploited in the domain of family and under the institution of marriage. The issues like extra-marital relations, unwed pregnancy etc. had existed earlier also. The society had become advanced enough to discuss these issues openly. The same thing applied to the drama also. The problems that used to get buried within the four walls of a house were now getting out into the open and even presented through the plays of that time. Tendulkar took the lead in giving vent to such issues through his plays. He has discussed several aspects of the man-woman relationship in his plays.
In *Sakharam Binder*, the unconventional character of Champa who engages in mechanical sex with Sakharam under the influence of liquor and mercilessly beats her sadistic husband gave a severe jolt to the Marathi theatre. Sakharam keeps on changing his mistresses when he becomes bored with them. But he insists on his women to remain completely faithful to him. What Sakharam expects from his woman applies to many men in our society. The exploitation of women goes on under the pleasantly deceptive garb of the institution of marriage. There are many such Sakharams around us who change their women like clothes but expect total devotion and faithfulness from their partner. Such people succeed because the women cannot survive alone in our society. They need the support of man to live with their heads held high. The playwright appears to be suggesting a change in the mentality of the society in this regard. Unless that happens, people like Sakharam will continue to prosper. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar shows how our male dominated society resents the behaviour of an independent and self-reliant woman like Benare who wants to live her life on her own terms. The society resents her demand for getting equal rights as compared to men. The people around Benare do not miss a single opportunity to humiliate her. It reveals the society’s hostile outlook towards a woman who does not conform to the traditional image expected of her. Tendulkar raises the issue of men being shown leniency by society through the character of Prof. Damle who is not held responsible or punished though he is an equal partner in Benare’s crime.

The proper development of a woman’s personality is hindered by the traditional notions about her role. She is expected to be meek, submissive and patient.
She is conditioned to subordinate her will and desires to those of the men unselfishly right from her childhood. Our patriarchal system forces women to conform to this role so that they can be disciplined and controlled. Tendulkar appears to suggest that women end up as victims due to such kind of sociological conditioning forced on them. Tendulkar’s women characters such as Rama in *The Vultures*, Lakshmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder*, Gauri in *Ghashiram Kotwal* and Jyoti in *Kanyadaan* end up as victims because of their inability to challenge the institutions of marriage and family. Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session* and to some extent Sarita in *Kamala* try to stand against the male domination. The only exception is Vijaya in *Encounter in Umbugland* whom Tendulkar has portrayed as a liberated new woman. Vijaya is an intelligent, strong and determined person. Instead of becoming a victim like most other women characters of Tendulkar, she successfully handles the responsibilities of being the ruler of Umbugland and defeats the ministers who try to make a puppet of her.

Tendulkar appears to be suggesting that all men are exploiters of women. Even the sensitive and liberal men are no exception to this. Thus Kakasaheb in *Kamala* who opposes Jaisingh’s exploitative journalism turns a blind eye to his oppressive treatment to Sarita, his wife. On the contrary, he seems to justify Jaisingh’s dominating behaviour by suggesting that all men are like that. Our society has different standards for men and women. They are heavily in favour of men and do not allow the woman to live her life in the real sense. The institution of marriage has established the supremacy of the husband over the wife and confirmed the secondary
status of her existence. It is essential to change the society’s mentality in order to give justice to half of the population. That is what Tendulkar tries to do through his plays.

Tendulkar’s portrayal of the plight of women is different from his predecessors. Maya Pandit observes, “Playwrights before Tendulkar, like Warerkar and Acharya Atre, did try to present a critical view of the double standards of morality for men and women but no one before had tried to debunk the myth that family provides a place of protection, comfort and security; that motherhood is the supreme justification and most noble aspiration of a woman’s life.” The punishment given to Benare of destroying the foetus in her womb for breaking social norms clearly exposes society’s strategy of glorifying motherhood to control the women’s behaviour. The mind-boggling oppression of Tendulkar’s women characters such as Rama, Gauri, Sarita and Jyoti takes place inside the sphere of family.

While expressing her sadness at the fact that almost all women characters of Tendulkar meekly submit to the injustice, violence and harassment done to them, Kalindi Deshpande blames Tendulkar of wriggling out of his responsibility of putting a woman’s suffering in a social context and of capitulating before the Establishment and its reactionary value system. However, it must be understood that Tendulkar has projected whatever he has seen around him. While projecting the characters in the grip of their situations, Tendulkar tries to be objective as far as possible. He tries to go beyond his personal feelings, emotions and thoughts and refrains from taking sides. He also feels that women themselves ought to be determined enough to liberate themselves. By showing their abject surrender to male-domination and injustice, Tendulkar seems to suggest that they should be more courageous, determined and
assertive in dealing with their problems. He appears to urge the women to change their conservative mind-sets and to show more guts in their fight against injustice.

In *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar shows that Jyoti becomes a victim of casteism and the scars that it has left on the mind of her backward class husband, Arun. He inflicts physical as well as psychological cruelty upon her. In response to his cruel treatment and her utter humiliation, Jyoti declares her intention of becoming an ideal wife to him and accepting the lifestyle and thinking of her husband and his family completely. Though she is educated and conscious of her identity as a woman, she decides to suffer the injustice patiently. The reason of such behaviour probably lies in her inability to get out of her relationship with Arun. Unlike man, a woman finds it very difficult to get out of a relationship as it goes deep into her skin. The same can be said about Rama in *The Vultures* who is unable to leave Ramakant, her husband, in spite of her great mental and physical torture by him. By portraying the plight of Jyoti and Rama, Tendulkar wants the women to be on their guard against excessive involvement in an unjust relationship.

The responsibility of the emancipation of women rests on the whole society and not on the women only. Tendulkar seems to have honestly accepted this challenge as an intensely socially conscious person. A woman who is conscious of her self-identity and is getting ample opportunities and freedom to develop herself is immensely beneficial for society. Tendulkar’s efforts seem to be directed towards this phenomenon.

Though Vijay Tendulkar has dealt with the lives of the upper and lower class people also, it is mainly the urban, white collared middle class people that the
playwright is concerned with in his plays. The middle class has been historically considered as the flag-bearer of the higher ideals and values of society. By portraying the defects that have entered into the lives of these people and the tremendous amount of exploitation and oppression that goes on among them, Tendulkar points out the precarious condition of our society today. Mere political independence and acceptance of a democratic system does not guarantee equality. It requires change in our thinking. The playwright aims at bringing a change in the mentality of the people.

Though the Indian constitution has provided for liberty, equality and fraternity to everybody, the problems and sufferings of an individual have not been removed completely. The exploitation of the weak at the hands of the powerful, irresponsible behaviour and double standards of some people in society, lie at the root of this malady. There is a conflict between the people who prefer status quo and those who want changes in the existing structures and institutions. Generally the people who are in majority become exploiters and they exploit those who are in minority. Various types of discriminations such as racial, religious, economic and political, fall to the lot of the exploited people. The traditional customs and beliefs also facilitate such oppression. The dominant class can use such customs and beliefs as weapons against the meek and the underprivileged people. These people find it extremely difficult to become free from the customs and traditions, which have social and religious sanction. In order to solve this problem it is necessary to make the exploited people aware of the injustice being done to them. Creating awareness among people is a step to bring a humanistic and just social structure into existence. Tendulkar gives vent to the cry of the exploited individual who is suffering in such conditions. He ably
depicts the grief, despair and unrest of a suffering individual. He aims at the development of a new type of man, a really cultured human personality free from oppression and prejudices and hopeful about the future. He tries to stop the society’s indifference towards liberal, humanistic and reformist ideas. The Maharashtrian society, which had a tradition of social reformers and thinkers like Agarkar, Phule, Karve and Ambedkar, had become indifferent towards social change bowing down to orthodoxy and male domination. Tendulkar reawakened it through his writings.

Tendulkar’s outlook as a writer towards the issues of inequality, exploitation and oppression that exists in our society is different from his response towards these issues as a socially aware person. As a conscious social being, he raises his voice against such things by participating in protests meetings or aligning himself with some civil liberty organizations. But as a writer he analyses the issue of exploitation in a ruthlessly cold manner and raises incisive questions instead of choosing his side. Tendulkar says: “As a writer I feel fascinated by the violent exploited-exploiter relationship and obsessively delve deep into it instead of taking a position against it. That takes me to a point where I feel that this relationship is eternal, a fact of life however cruel, and will never end.” Thus Tendulkar is not afraid of confronting the exploitative and oppressive society. According to Tendulkar, human beings can be divided into two classes – the exploiters and the exploited. It is the natural human condition. If we survey the history of mankind we find that this issue has existed in all societies at all times. It was in the form of the master-slave relationship in ancient times. It was replaced by the landlord-serf relationship in the medieval period. In modern era, it has taken the form of the conflict between the capitalists and the
labourers. Women have been exploited in the family whereas men have been victimised at the workplace. Moreover, the victims of one situation become the victimisers in another. It is an eternal process. That’s why; his favourite metaphor for human life is the ‘Mickey Mouse’ as he believes that human beings are like the Mickey Mouse and its kin, fighting for survival. Tendulkar says, “In this battle one mouse kills another. Many mice gang up and ruthlessly destroy each other. I see this as a sort of blind justice.” Thus the playwright accepts violence and oppression as inexorable parts of life.

Tendulkar’s characters such as Mrs. Kashikar and Balu Rokde in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Manik in *The Vultures*, Sakharam and Lakshmi in *Sakharam Binder*, Mitra in *A Friend’s Story*, Arun in *Kanyadaan* and the eponymous character of *Ghashiram Kotwal* are victims of exploitation and oppression. A person who has faced oppression is expected to show kindness while dealing with others who are facing similar situations. But the irony of human nature is that it does not happen that way. These persons take out the anger hidden inside them for their exploitation on other unfortunate beings. The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is quite remarkable in this regard. The wheel of exploitation turns a full circle in this play. Ghashiram who is victimised by the Poona Brahmins mercilessly persecutes them after getting a powerful post by catering to Nana’s lewd tastes. On discovering the possibility of Ghashiram becoming a nuisance to him, Nana refuses to shield him when the *Peshwa* orders an enquiry into the incident of twenty-two Brahmins dying of suffocation due to Ghashiram’s orders. Now the mob of the Poona Brahmins takes the law in their hands and kills Ghashiram after inflicting severe physical tortures on him. In
Kanyadan, Arun, a victim of casteism, leaves no stone unturned to inflict mental as well as physical tortures on Jyoti, his wife. He sees in her a representative of the same class, which has exploited his ancestors in the past. Thus the playwright highlights the constant switching of roles between the victims and the victimisers.

Tendulkar’s characters such as the amateur actors in Silence! The Court is in Session including Sukhatme, Ponkshe, Karnik, Balu, Damle and the Kashikar couple, do not approve of Benare’s independent lifestyle and thinking. When circumstances give them an opportunity to criticise and discipline Benare under the garb of a mock-trial, they pounce on this opportunity. The suffering and torture of Benare goes on unabated as the issues connected with her private life are brought out into the open, one by one, under the pretext of upholding social norms and values. In The Vultures, all the members of the Pitale family except Rama and Rajaninath seem to be capable of scaling any depth for the sake of money. So great is their greed that the children beat their father and the brothers break their sister’s leg. The father, Mr. Pitale, is in no way less heartless than his offspring. He had earlier driven Sakharam, his brother, out of the family business. Towards the end of the play, Mr. Pitale tries to enlist the support of Rajaninath, his bastard son, for recapturing his property from his children through a law-suit. Manik who has been wronged by her brother tries to avenge herself by aborting Rama, her sister-in-law.

The eponymous character of Tendulkar’s Sakahram Binder has evolved a unique way of satisfying his lust by giving shelter to women who have been deserted by their husbands. He forces Lakshmi and later, Champa, to satisfy his lust. He does not pay any attention to his partner’s health or mood. He also makes them do all the
rigorous household chores. He beats Lakshmi several times for disobeying him. He murders Champa in rage when Lakshmi discloses the fact of her sleeping with Dawood to him. In Ghashiram Kotwal, Ghashiram falls to such a low level in order to satisfy his thirst for revenge that he barters the chastity of Gauri, his daughter, for the post of the Chief Inspector of Poona. Nana also does not hesitate to make a person with a suspicious motive the Kotwal of Poona. Thus Nana’s misuse of power in order to satisfy his lust results in great sufferings for the innocent citizens of Poona.

Tendulkar’s play A Friend’s Story depicts the society’s inhuman oppression of Mitra, a girl suffering from an abnormality. Manya Dalvi, who changes his mistresses like clothes, persecutes Mitra in a cruel manner for trying to snatch Nama, his latest object of pleasure, from him. He brings Mitra’s abnormality out into the open and the great humiliation that is heaped on Mitra results in her suicide at the end of the play. The theme of Tendulkar’s play Kamala is that everybody is a slave at one place or the another. Jaisingh who exploits Sarita, his wife and Kamala, whom he has bought in a flesh-market, gets victimised by his employer at the end of the play and is sacked from the job. Thus Tendulkar portrays the exploitation of human beings in an oppressive society in all of his translated plays.

Human beings are intelligent animals that live in groups. They are quite weak and cannot survive without the help of others. That’s why; they have to live in groups. The collective life of such groups gives rise to the society. The society suppresses an individual’s real nature and distorts his personality. An individual becomes deformed and dehumanised as a result of this. The inequality in society facilitates exploitation and oppression of individuals. Through his plays, Tendulkar
conveys that the social inequality, exploitation and oppression, which have been in existence since ages, continue unabated till today. There is a strange amalgamation of positive qualities such as love and pity, and negative qualities such as wickedness and cruelty in a human being. Thus both good and evil co-exist in man, and a battle is continuously going on between them in the society. Tendulkar believes that man is a part of the animal world. Despite his stronger brain, he is no different from the animals and has their basic instincts. In the face of personal gain, lust or greed, the layer of culture peels off and human beings turn into animals. Often circumstances are so terrifying and hostile that a human being reacts like an animal. Tendulkar asks us to accept this reality about ourselves. He believes that violence is an inexorable fact of life and puts it forward in his plays. He is ahead of his contemporaries in sensing the violence that lurks under the surface of our society. Tendulkar depicts the surfacing of the darker aspects of human nature and the resultant suffering of human beings. He does not hide the truth even if it is quite hideous and bitter.

Tendulkar displays an acute awareness of the changes that had come in society in the post-World War II period. The onward march of modernism and individualism and the revaluation of old values had resulted in a conflict between tradition and modernity and man’s alienation from his own self. As a result, the tendencies towards cruelty and violence are on the rise. Tendulkar projects the psychological, physical and verbal violence through the thinking, actions and words of his characters respectively. The middle class society did not like the portrayal of violent incidents on stage or even in drama such as kicking a pregnant woman in the belly as in The Vultures and Kanyadaan, maiming as of Manik in The Vultures and
murder as of Champa in *Sakharam Binder*. The violence in society has been increasing with the passing of time. If one looks at the headlines of newspapers in contemporary times, it is discovered that such violent incidents have become everyday phenomena. Thus Tendulkar seems to have correctly guessed the direction in which our society is moving and tried to give a timely warning through his plays.

Tendulkar appears to give great importance to the freedom of an individual. Taking an amoral and non-committed stance, he refrains from judging his characters and offers his sympathy to all of them. He does not think that he is entitled to evaluate lives of other people in the capacity of a playwright. He tries to understand human beings, the situations in which they are placed and the times they belong to. While depicting truthfully whatever he has observed, he tries to be objective to the extent possible. He does not take sides by endeavouring to overcome his personal thoughts and emotions while portraying people as he sees them. A distinguishing feature of Tendulkar’s plays is his preoccupation with the portrayal of the dark side of life. His focus is on the vulture and not the eagle in man. While responding to a query whether he thinks there is a beast hidden in man rather than an angel, Tendulkar replied that there is definitely the permanent presence of animal in man along with all the animal instincts. While facing unusual and stressful situations, man appears to behave like an animal.  

Tendulkar says: “To explore myself, my life, my thoughts and to strive constantly to discover “something” in life – that’s the sole intention of my writing.” He refuses to propogate any particular ideology. Whatever he found in life, his as well as others’, was reflected in his plays. His intense curiosity about the deprived
and defeated people and the urge to scrutinise them closely led to their repeated portrayal in his plays. He wants to understand where the viciousness, the aggressive characters display, comes from. The keen eye of the playwright identifies the vicious and deprived characters in the society and exposes them in his plays. The playwright’s own vision of society and human life comes out through it.

The fate of Tendulkar’s vicious characters such as Mr. Pitale, Ramakant, Umakant and Manik in *The Vultures*, Jaisingh in *Kamala* and the eponymous characters of *Sakharam Binder* and *Ghashiram Kotwal* is tragic. There is a mad scramble in society to reach the top position. These characters compete for the highest rung in the social hierarchy. The coveting of materialistic pleasures at the cost of human values results in their turning into vultures. There is a lack of love in their lives. They resort to violence and oppression to get money as well as pleasure. Being dissatisfied with their own lives, they inflict tortures on others so that they can feel better. Their inhuman treatment to others appears to be a sort of revenge against the society. All their cruelty, cunningness and treachery prove to be futile as they end up as losers in the struggle of life. Most of them become frustrated and deformed personalities. By showing that the evil-doers do not prosper and succeed in life, Tendulkar tries to induce a disapproval of their evil ways. The playwright appears to be suggesting that a person cannot become happy or successful by indulging in inhuman actions. The plight of the vicious characters in Tendulkar’s plays is the result mostly of their own actions and to some extent, the circumstances around them. They are free to make their choice about their course of action. So they themselves are responsible for their suffering. The playwright gives an expression to the
senselessness of human condition and the predicament of the modern man who has lost his sense of meaning in life.

Some of the vicious characters in Tendulkar’s plays such as Damle in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Nana in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Manya in *A Friend’s Story* and Arun in *Kanyadaan*, do not get punished for their sins. This seems to suggest the playwright’s belief that there is an absence of poetic justice in the world. We experience a sense of waste as the virtuous and kind-hearted characters in the company of the vicious characters also suffer a lot of misery. Thus Rama’s life becomes a living hell due to the vulture-like members of her family in *The Vultures*. Similarly, Gauri suffers for no fault of hers in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Jyoti’s life becomes miserable as the scars left on Arun, her husband’s mind by casteism make him treat her as an enemy in *Kanyadaan*. The playwright’s acute awareness of the social reality becomes evident from such incidents portrayed in his plays. In addition to his penetrating insight, Tendulkar brings a touch of tenderness to the depiction of these characters whose suffering is quite uncalled for. It shows the humanistic attitude of the playwright.

Through his exploration of the actual condition of the society and the harsh realities of life, Tendulkar makes a significant statement on human life. He reminds the reader-audience that man is unable to conquer the beast inside himself in spite of having made a tremendous progress. Thus he gives us a new way of looking at self and society. The playwright appears to be in the quest of the regeneration of human beings. He wants to improve the quality of our life and desires freedom, happiness and peace for everyone. His dislike of hypocrisy, vulgarity, barbarism and narrow-
mindedness which reduce human beings to the level of the beasts comes out through his attacks on the social evils and the portrayal of the reality of life in all its nakedness. By attacking the outdated norms, beliefs and values, he makes clear his desire for a new way of life. For Tendulkar drama is not a means of providing entertainment but a device to change people’s attitude towards life and its problems. Even though his plays are based on contemporary real-life situations, the problems that he deals with are universal. The human defects are common to all ages and societies. It is true that he focuses on the vultures and not the eagles while dealing with the exploitation of human beings in an oppressive society. But that is the playwright’s choice.

Tendulkar’s perception of society and human life is reflected in his works. Tendulkar divides the human race into two classes – the victimisers and the victims. He perceives it to be the natural human condition. The victims who suffer at the hands of the aggressors prey upon others with great ardour when they get a chance. Thus, Tendulkar accepts exploitation and violence as inexorable facts of life. While facing critical moments and testing conditions, the layer of culture and civilisation, which hides the essential beastiality of man, peels of. A human being reacts like an animal in such circumstances. Tendulkar tries to capture the elusive and ever changing human behaviour in his plays.

The motive of the creation of a humanitarian society, based on the principle of equality, seems to be hidden behind Tendulkar’s outwardly amoral and non-committal stance. His plays bring out man’s wolfish cruelty to man and his malicious and revengeful attitude towards his fellow beings. He finds that human life cannot be
anything but miserable, as many evils such as corruption greed, harassment and casteism etc. have become integral parts of our society. Tendulkar appears to be saying to the whole society that one cannot become happy or successful by indulging in inhuman actions. In his plays, he scrutinises the people closely. He removes the mask from the faces of people who appear respectable, clean and pious outwardly and exposes their inhuman face. One finds the lowest levels of human behaviour through the beastlike actions of the wicked characters in his works. These violent acts are no different from the incidents one reads about in the newspapers. Thus the playwright uses his medium effectively to reveal the social realities and acts as an eye-opener for us. His commitment for the betterment of society and his sympathy for the oppressed people stand out. His plays appear to be an effort towards awakening mankind’s conscience. His desire that the society should be free of all the maladies is reflected through his plays. The fact that his plays have become very popular seems to indicate that the playwright has succeeded in his mission of spreading awareness in the society.
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