CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

History abounds in the instances of the tyranny of a few over many, of the rich over the poor and the mighty over the meek. This has been the unchanging condition of human life. Writers through the ages – especially writers of tragic drama – have endeavoured to depict the unrelenting cruelty that besets man in his personal and social life. From the earliest Greek tragedians to the contemporary playwrights of cruelty, from Sophocles to Seneca and Jean Genet to Peter Weiss or Vijay Tendulkar, spectacles of the most disgusting forms of hatred, cruelty and aggression have bewildered both the author and the audience.

The trinity of Greek tragic writers, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, began the valiant adventure into the world of cruelty in drama. Aeschylus laid the foundation for an aesthetic of drama that was to influence subsequent plays for over 2,000 years. He brooded over the riddle of destiny. Among playwrights he is the statuary in whose workshop are hewn out gods, Titans, heroic men and women and effigies possessed of speech and almost of life, but practically
incapable of action. After him the time was ripe for the consummate dramatic artist, who appears in Sophocles. Sophocles was the first to sound the depths and explore the shoals of human nature. His personages are real men and women though on the heroic scale, and he is powerfully attracted by the ironies of fortune and by the dark and saturnine aspect of human life as in his trilogy - Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus, and Oedipus Coloneus. Oedipus is insolent and ambitious in Oedipus Tyrannus. Having become the Saviour of Thebes from the Sphinx, he has developed an overconfidence in himself. He thinks that he can always "make dark things plain". He ignores the counsel first given by Tiresias, then by the chorus and later by Jocasta. He refuses to hush up his doubts and brings doom on himself with his unreasonable and obstinate march for knowledge. In Oedipus Coloneus, Oedipus argues that he himself is not responsible for the tragedy. Without his partaking, the Delphic oracle prophesies that he will kill his father, wed his mother and bring a curse on Thebes. He kills his father, otherwise, he could have been murdered by the latter. The people of Thebes give him the Queen and the Kingdom, for he has saved them from the Sphinx. However, he could have averted the catastrophe by acting rationally. Sophocles has focused his dramas on the tyrannical nature of man.
Euripides concentrates on the 'motif' of crime and revenge. His Chophoroe provides a fitting example. In this drama Euripides presents Orestes with continual doubt and horror in his mind. Orestes feels terror and detestation of himself before he murders Clytemnestra; he feels horror as he moves towards his fell purpose; after it has been carried out, the Furies, half personifications of his own thoughts and emotions, goad him on to madness. The 'motif' of his crime is excellently and fully represented; the crime, in spite of the 'motif', is engaged with absolute terror and shame. Medea expresses Medea's horror at her own crime mingled with her hatred and thirst for revenge. As an expression of man's profound reflection on the intricacies of his existence, these early Greek tragedies - cruel, terrifying and bloody - have a timeless validity.

Fresh impetus is given to the cult of cruelty in the contemporary theatre by Antonin Artaud, the French writer of the inter-war years. He brought a radical change in European stage conventions and theatre reform in this century. His concept of the Theatre of Cruelty was a reaction against the drama current in Europe and the Western world since the Renaissance. He complains that for four hundred
years, that is, since the Renaissance, we have become accustomed to purely descriptive, narrative theatre, narrating psychology. Even Shakespeare, in his view, was not free of blame. According to him Shakespeare is responsible for, what Artaud calls the "isolationist concept of theatre." For Artaud, Shakespeare's world view is defective because it is purely secular and humanistic.

Artaud condemns the theatre of Racine along with Shakespeare. He traces the contemporary psychological theatre back to Racine's theatre which he objects because it "has rendered us unaccustomed to direct violent action". He does not favour either the utilitarian concept of drama and art or the escapist view of art.

In place of the mimetic, humanistic, psychological or aesthetic philosophies of drama, Artaud presents his own concept of the Theatre of Cruelty. His theories are propounded in his lectures, "Theatre and Cruelty" and "Theatre and the Plague". In the first of these he proposed the Theatre of Cruelty. "This Theatre", says Artaud, "has nothing to do with the cruelty we practise on one another, hacking at each other's bodies ... but the far more terrible,
essential cruelty objects can practise on us". There is a
metaphysical assumption behind Artaud's formulation. While
most drama and fiction of the West during the four centuries,
from the sixteenth to nineteenth, assumed that man has the
freedom of choice, Artaud asserts: "We are not free and the
sky can still fall on our heads. And above all else theatre
is made to teach us this". In a letter addressed to Mr. R.
de R., he states:

it seems to me Creation, life itself, can only
be defined by a kind of strictness, the funda­
mental cruelty guiding things towards their
inexorable goal, what ever the cost".

Artaud's philosophy of the theatre rests on the
perception of cruelty at the heart of nature and man. There
is latent in the human psyche a taste for crime, sexuality
and savageness. He insists that a play must first "disturb
our peace of mind" and release our repressed subconscious.
He sees theatre as a raging and infectious social purge like
the plague. He rejects the tyranny of the spoken word on
stage and replaces it with a concrete language of sound and
imagery. He opines that theatre should provide the specta­
tor with the true essence of dreams in which his fondness for
crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his neurotic fantasies, his utopian sense of life and things, even his cannibalism "gush forth not on a theoretical and illusory level but on an inner plane".

Artaud's ideas achieved international attention in the 1960s through the productions of Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare company, especially The Persecution and Association of Jean-Paul Marat as performed by the inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade which called for emotional states verging on hysteria from most of the cast during each performance. And Artaud's proposals were accepted by leading theatre exponents like Edward Bond and Harold Pinter in England, Jerzy Grotowski in Poland or Jean Genet in France itself. To them, as for Artaud, theatre was the full-scale invocation of cruelty, violence and terror. His influence is clearly felt in writers as disparate as Ionesco and Beckett, Weiss and Bond, Fugard and Tendulkar. They rouse the spectator not through his mind but through his senses and emotions. Like Artaud, they propose to attack by means of cruelty and physical shock. This kind of thinking has led, in the 1960s and 1970s, to extreme cruelty in the theatre. The new playwright
in the idiom of cruelty uses shock tactics which assault the eye and the ear, scandalous spectacle and obscenity, blood baths and horror. But the best of these dramatists like Genet or Bond show in their best works a capability to synthesize the theatrical impulses of Artaud with the finest features of intellectual drama or verbal drama.

Jean Genet and Peter Weiss reveal this synthesis superbly in plays like Death Watch or The Maids or the Marat/Sade. In Genet's isolated world of perverted prisoners and barbarous outlaws, he depicts the most pernicious evil as having a specific quality and purity about it almost akin to absolute virtue. He celebrates the most obscene and beastly in man's nature and ignores the norms of common decency and decorum. In his early plays, Genet does not portray real events but he brings to life the fantastic daydreams of a prisoner. He employs his pet device of "A Hall of Mirrors" to create a process of manifold reflections by which he arrives at a better perspective of reality and cruelty than any rational approach could hope to achieve. In the Black Mass Rituals which end The Maids, frustration and violence are reincarnated, almost like another resurrected saviour.
Genet's magnum opus in the theatre of cruelty is the allegorical epic on the flourish and decay of a whole society as portrayed in *The Balcony*. The play presents a splendid spectacle of social revolution set against the evanescent world of the Grand Balcony - a brothel of noble dimensions, as Genet calls it. His vision in the balcony may be vindictive and crippled by the outcast's furious rage at society but it has a significance. His theme here is a fundamental fathom into the nature of aggression, cruelty and sex. This moving scenic spectacle, outrageous and offensive as it appears is an obvious testimony to the tenants of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. It uses all the emotive devices of Artaud's theatre - mime and mystery, lyric poetry and violent exaggeration, oral and visual attacks, cruel twists of fate or fortune and sudden shock tactics. It is total theatre as Artaud imagines it.

Peter Weiss's provocative play *Marat/Sade* is an excellent example of cruelty in theatre where the quintessence of things - cruelty and lust, agony and joy makes itself felt internally rather than externally. It makes the audience identify themselves with these wild fictitious inmates of the Cheronton lunatic asylum and it also makes their rational faculties fail to distinguish sanity from
insanity after witnessing the bizarre aberrations and perver-
sions of this nightmarish play and its characters. Edward
Bond's Lear is a puzzling representation of cruelty in
modern theatre. Bond's the other play Saved with its stoning
of the baby in a perambulator by a hostile crowd of teenage
hooligans is much more horror-striking and breath-taking.
Such plays reveal the cruelty inherent in human soul over-
brimming the murky dehumanized environment whose sole feature
is social and individual restlessness. It is more startling
that man has become so insensitive today that he c
an view
this terrific cruelty with absolute indifference.

A similar trend pervades the works of Athal
Fugard, the white South African playwright with an anti-
apartheid stance. His best plays like Trio in Statements are
the outcome of harmonizing Artaud's concept of cruelty and
Grotowski's notion of Poor Theatre. His objective is not
only to shock and confuse but also to shock and enlighten
those who complacently ignore the injustices of their hostile
and cruel system. In his theatre of ideas Fugard penetrates
the heart of his native audience, black or white and awakens
the consciences all over the world. His plays are keen
exposures of the cruelty and violence inherent in racist
regime and his plays have compelled the South African white rulers to arrest his actors along with him on several occasions for violating the draconian laws of the land on stage. His best plays like Island and Sizwe Bansi is Dead or more recently My Children! My Africa! are all tragic and nightmarish in their evocation of the raw violence and cruelty of his native land. In Island he portrays the pathetic isolation of two black political prisoners in the dreaded Robben Island penitentiary and the grotesque forms of torture, physical and psychological, they suffer at the hands of their white guard. However, Fugard also hints at a victim-aggressor relationship between the two black prisoners at some moments during their long incarceration. All the characters in the plays of Fugard are drawn from the outcasts of society and his plots depict a relationship inherently violent which reflects the tensions and antagonisms of life in South Africa. Later he began playmaking by group improvisation and experiments with the potential of the actors themselves. They started creating plays in Fugard's Serpent Players Group out of their immediate experience. Sizwe Bansi is a brilliant product in this stream following Artaud's requisite of genuine theatre.
In this brief escapade into modern theatre of cruelty we come home to Vijay Tendulkar. "Initially influenced by the rebellion movements the world over in the sixties, he quickly picked up the anti-establishment jargon. Riding on the crest of a new wave, he shaped his 'nihilist philosophy'. Tendulkar is influenced by the tradition of the Theatre of Cruelty and with Artaud he believes that the theatre has to disturb our peace and release our pent-up emotions. Tendulkar's plays not only disturb our peace but even shock us. Focusing the viewer's attention on the cynical philosophy of life, he leads his audience to believe that man is "base, villainous and cruel". His plays are documents on the innate cruelty in man.

Tendulkar has been in the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for almost forty years. Beginning his career as a dramatist in the mid-fifties, this prolific writer has twenty eight full-length plays, twenty-four one-act plays, and eleven children's dramas to his credit. Many of these plays have been translated and produced in major Indian languages. His play Silence! the Court is in Session earned him a place among leading Indian playwrights in the late sixties while Ghashiram Kotwal won him international
fame in the mid-seventies. The play Kanyadan has recently fetched him Saraswati Samman Award. But his plays The Vultures and Sakharam Binder made him a highly controversial figure and Kamala extended his fame. Encounter in Umbugland exposes the diplomacy in power game.

In all his plays - An Island called Man (1955), The Walls Between (1958), Nest of Wax (1958), I Won, I Lost (1963), Rain O Rain (1964), Silence! (1967), The Vultures (1970) - Tendulkar exposes the cruelty inherent in man and the failure of human relations on account of this inherent cruelty. In Silence! the Court is in Session, Benare is humiliated and persecuted beyond the norms of civilized society on the false charge of infanticide and is driven to suicide by an amateur group in which she is also a member. This outrageous exploitation of the woman springs from the men out of their sense of failure and frustration in their life and they enjoy themselves at the expense of Benare. The Vultures explores the cruelty inherent in family relations which is the result of their continuous close breeding. Love is a mirage in the family of Hari Pitale. He cheats his brother and later he is persecuted for money by his children. Tendulkar exposes the raw cruelty in man through their greed for money and loveless life. Soon after writing the play he
himself was shocked that he could write such a play wrought with violence and sex. Sakharam Binder is the most naturalistic play. For many decades no play has created such a sensation in the theatre world of Maharashtra as Sakharam Binder. It delves deep into the crude, aggressive and violent nature of man and his struggle for the recognition of his authority. Sakharam endeavours ruthlessly to dominate helpless women and stands at crossroads between a spiritual force and a physical fascination, represented by the two women - Laxmi and Champa - in the play. Ghashiram Kotwal is a landmark in Indian theatre. Set in a historical background, the play focuses on the corruption, cruelty and inhuman strategies embedded in the power games, where sex and religion are also exploited. Nana Phadnavis of Poona exploits Ghashiram's thirst for power and revenge and soon hands him over to the Brahmans of Poona who stone him to death. Ghashiram himself makes his daughter a victim in the game of power whereas Nana dares to corrupt even gods. Encounter in Umbuland is essentially a political play. It unveils the essential nature of the game of politics and also the basic craving for power in human nature. The play unravels the treacherous political intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the corruption and hypocrisy involved in holding on to them. The Cabinet ministers make
Princess Vijaya the Queen of Umbugland to use her as their pawn, but their anticipations were belied by her diplomacy and autocracy. And the play is interspersed with the shrewd comments on the nature of politics and on that of the politicians, by Prannarayan, a man of third sex. As in Silence! and Sakharam Binder Tendulkar explores the position of women in contemporary Indian society in Kamala. Tendulkar exposes in Kamala the chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who believes himself to be liberal-minded. Jaisin Nam Jadav, a sensational journalist, exploits Kamala, the woman he bought in the flesh market, for his prosperity in personal life and for his promotion in professional life. He treats his wife also as no better than a slave and later he is treated as a slave by his employer. The play itself is a symbol of slavery and selfishness. Kanyadan like the other plays of Tendulkar is a controversial play. Tendulkar concentrates on the cruelty of dalit husbands towards their Brahmin wives and the violence that breeds in intimacy. He focuses on the futility of ideals in the face of sagacity incipient in man. Nath Devalalikar, a Brahmin and a socialist, lets his daughter marry a dalit poet, with an aspiration of uplifting the dalits. But after the marriage, the dalit husband becomes cruel and beats his wife violently. His wife lives a life of torture and tension.
Tendulkar is criticized for his outrageous naturalism in his plays. However shocking and horrifying man’s innate cruelty and its manifestations in life, the ethical question remains unanswered. But Tendulkar’s objective is not to suggest any solution to the cruelty, violence and horror pervading man’s life but to present it and disturb our peace. A probe into the cruelty inherent in human psyche as depicted in Tendulkar’s plays is intended in the ensuing chapters.
REFERENCES:


2. Ibid., p. 64.

3. Ibid., p. 60.

4. Ibid., p. 60.

5. Ibid., p. 79.