PREFACE

Vijay Tendulkar, unquestionably one of the celebrated playwrights of the Marathi theatre, who gained immense popularity as a maestro and Indian playwright of the post independence era, was also a prolific screenplay and television writer, efficient political journalist, effective literary essayist and a practical and impartial social commentator. His plays Silence! The Court is in Session, Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharan Binder created new history in the field of Indian Drama. For more than half a decade he had been a highly influential playwright and screen play writer in Maharashtra. As he took clues from real life incidents and social circumstances for his writings he became eminent in the circle of the playwrights.

Tendulkar experienced problems in his early days in Mumbri. From his experiences he learnt the woes of the urban and lower middle class people in tenements in Mumbai. It proved extremely useful in his life and also in depicting his characters for his plays. Tendulkar’s early plays were the first in Marathi theatre to bring the realities of modern urban life on the stage. This was a clear break from the sententious, sentimental and melodramatic plays that dominated the main stream stage at the time. With his modern themes came a new language, crisp and understated.

In 1950s and 1960s he changed Marathi theatre with his powerful writings. ‘Rangayaan’, one of the famous theatre groups with its modernly equipped and experimental presentations supported him by adding power to his plays while introducing new dimensions of life. This theatre group had famous actors like Mohan Agashta, Sulabha Deshpande etc.

The most active and without a doubt the mostly controversial playwright of the modern Marathi stage for the last twenty years, Tendulkar’s significant plays are Kamala and Kanyadaan, which are considered as landmarks in Marathi theatre. For many decades no play has created such a sensation in the theatre world of Maharashtra as Tendulkar’s Marathi plays. Many of his plays have been translated into English and, appropriately enough, they are considered as constituting a significant component of the corpus of contemporary Indian English Literature, although drama as a literary genre in English is yet to record a conspicuous growth in the Indian literary realm.

Tendulkar never worked for rewards but they were queuing up to him. He was felicitated with many awards and honours including The Padmabhushan (1984), one of the

The present thesis analyzes the thematic concerns in the selected plays of Tendulkar. It is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is “Introduction” which discusses, Vijay Tendulkar’s life and works in detail. The chapter also focuses upon Tendulkar’s place in Indian English Drama and his contribution to it.

The second chapter “The theme of Plight and Plunder of a woman” in Silence! The Court is in Session examines the urban middle class morals and is a documentary of gynocentrism where premarital sex and abortion are debated from the perspective of women struggling to liberate themselves from a world dominated by men. It can be seen as a perfect mockery against existing judicial system in India. The play combines social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society.

Silence! The court is in Session in some respects is typical of Tendulkar’s writing. The experience of the play, as is usual with him, stems not from a concept but a real incident. In this particular case the stimulus came from an amateur group on its way to stage a mock trial in a village near Bombay. In his earlier works Shrimant and Mi Jinkalo Mi Harlo, he had dwelt on the woes of middle class with a degree of sympathy, bordering on sentiment. The change was possibly the result of a deep personal experience. For on the one hand, it unleashed characters, Benare, Sakharam and Ghashiram in a state of collision with accepted norms and on the other, it revealed ineffectual middle class types with an ugly vicious leer lurking under a smug surface.

Obliviously the audience were in a mood to listen to a playwright ready to fix a remorseless gaze on the contradictions within a personality, even the most insignificant one, and a playwright who refused to offer easy legal remedies to social problems or to pin his faith on a change of heart in men. Acutely conscious of the violent impulses behind a respectable façade and of overwhelming compulsions of sex, he could place his discoveries
within a recognizably Indian context, essentially middle class, and rooted. His long years of experiences had taught him to mould his familiar material into dramatic shape.

The third chapter “The Themes of Violence, Sexuality, Treachery and foul politics” in the musical historical play Ghashiram Kotwal discusses the ruthless manipulation of power. The play is an exposure of Brahmin corruption and presentation as well as study of power game. The story of Ghashiram was the story of one aspect of mankind. There is also an underplay of the culture, history, society and regional politics. It recounts the power game played out in terms of caste ascendency in politics.

Ghashiram is the chief protagonist of the play. He belongs not only to the late 18th century Peshwa Empire but to all phases of human history. His rise and growth from savaldas to the most controversial Kotwal of Poona is symbolic of the growth of corruption in our society. So the incident in the play is historical but the context is universal and timeless. According to Girish Karnad in Ghashiram Kotwal Tendulkar uses Dashavatara since like the myth of Bhasmasura, Ghashiram threatens to destroy his own creator.

Ghashiram comes to Poona to earn a means of livelihood. But he is tortured, humiliated and banished from the city by the Brahmins. His cruelty arises from his misery. He leaves Poona with a decision to return and also take a revenge on Brahmins by acquiring the position of Kotwal. To fulfill his ambition he uses his innocent, pretty daughter, Gauri as his means. Nana accidentally meets her in the temple of Lord Ganesha and has an excessive desire to enjoy sex with her. Ghashiram gets an opportunity to get closer to Nana. Nana makes him Kotwal and he sends his innocent lass to him. After acquiring the position of Kotwal, he does what he has decided. The city of Poona starts trembling with the name of Ghashiram. The natural order is for the time being wholly subverted. Destructive principles reign supreme.

The fourth chapter “The Themes of Sex and Violence” in Sakharam Binder examines the man and woman relationship, the lower middle class society and its violence. It is a genuine stench from the abyss, whether that abyss means lower middle class hell or the economic and sexual aggression interest in our inequitable and repressive society. Thus, the play explores complications of human nature, two necessary components of which one is sex and the other violence.
It is a simple melodramatic story of a village book binder who works in a printing press and carries the impression that since so far he has been lucky enough in coming across society's cast away women, it wouldn't be difficult even today. In fact it is not, what with the status of women in this male dominated feudal society where all the consequences of male adjustment are thrust by the breadwinner on bread dependent female. Sakharam gets hold of such women, and while promises them shelter, wastes no time before spreading his cards across on table and later himself on the mat. It's a part of his shelter providing contract. A month or a year when he gets tired of particular women, he throws her out, or some such thing. Tendulkar touches on his pet subject of the downtrodden, hapless female as he did in Silence! The Court is in Session and Gidhade.

The fifth chapter entitled “The Theme of Slavery of Women” in Kamala is an indictment of the success oriented male society in which women are mere stepping stones for the achievements of men. The play discusses the problem of women especially with regard to human flesh trade. It is also a powerful treatise against journalism where repertory can be disported by the personal attitudes of journalists even though they claim to be proud of their objective.

Kamala was inspired by a real life incident reported in The New Indian Express by Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at press conference. By using this incident as the launching pad, Kamala raises certain cardinal questions regarding the value system of the modern success – oriented generation which is ready to sacrifice human values even in the name of humanity itself. The innate self-deception of this standpoint is exposed dramatically by the playwright.

At the centre of the play is the self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh, who treats the woman he has purchases from the flesh – market as an object that can buy him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. He is one of those modern day individuals who pursue their goal relentlessly. Really Jaisingh never stops to think what will happen to Kamala after his expose. Saritha, Jaisingh’s wife is in her own way as exploited as Kamala. Here we can easily expose the male chauvinism intrinsic in the modern Indian male who believes himself to be liberal – minded.

The sixth chapter “The Theme of Conflict between upper class and Dalits” in Kanyadaan deals with an extremely sensitive issue namely the conflict between upper class
and Dalits, a phenomenon still rampantly prevalent in several parts of India. Despite sixty years of Independence Dalits continue to suffer object misery and ill-treatment at the hands of the upper castes. The play explores the texture of modernity and social change in India through a marriage between two people of different castes and backgrounds.

*Kanyadaan* is perhaps the most controversial of all the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar. It dwells on an extremely sensitive social and political issue. Politicians, instead of trying to uproot this evil, seem to capitalize on it. Tendulkar delves deep into this social evil and presents it as it is. He raises disturbing questions, but never bothers to answer them. This method of his 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. And as a creative writer, he does not take sides.

The last and final chapter "conclusion" summarizes the deliberations of the earlier chapters and establishes the achievement of Vijay Tendulkar as one of the greatest ever playwrights in Indian English Literature.

Tendulkar had the zeal to write whatever the circumstances that made him take up writing. He did not fail to explore the society he had seen and observed. Of all the dramatists in India Tendulkar was the one whose life was most obviously connected with the writing of violence in human beings. The cruelty and the futility of human life and validity of human values and also its relevance to life are probed deeply by him.