Chapter - 1

Introduction
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 practical and impartial social commentator. His plays Silence! The Court is in Session, Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder created new history in the field of Indian Drama. For more than half a decade he had been a highly influential playwright and screenplay 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.

Vijay Tendulkar in his career wrote 28 full length plays, 25 one act plays, two novels, one biography, five short story anthologies, 15 screenplays, 16 plays for children and five volumes of essays. He translated some plays, biographies and novels into Marathi.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born to Bhalavarkar Saraswath Brahmin couple of lower middle class on January 6 1928 in Kolapur Maharashtra. Recollecting his childhood days he says:

I was a sicky child. I had a persistent cough and asthmatic wheezing. This made my parents over protective. I was special and precious to them. They were afraid of losing me if they were not careful. Two younger brothers were born much later. But I remained the favorite. For a long time my mother dressed me like a girl. She made me wear frocks and a bindi on my forehead. People Must have laughed but it did not bother me then. I was my mother’s pet known as a mother’s child. And this close relationship became stronger through the years until she passed away.

Tendulkar’s father was a head clerk at a British publishing firm and running a small publishing business. “Looking back I also remember my father and my eldest brother who were lovers of literature and the theatre of those days. Both of them wrote and acted in amateur productions of plays and my father even directed plays in amateur groups where he used to take me as a child for the rehearsals. The rehearsals took place at night because the actors were busy during the day.
working in their offices. It was not possible to get a place for rehearsals in a respectable locality then because theatre was not considered to be respectable profession and those who did theatre were looked down as wayward characters.

These literary surroundings made him familiar with literature and he took up writing. The western plays that he watched while growing up influenced him to write plays. At an early age of eleven Vijay Tendulkar wrote his first play and acted and directed that play. Having the spirit of patriotism in his heart like most of the other responsible persons Vijay at the age 14 participated in the 1942 Indian freedom movement leaving his studies.

Initially, Tendulkar began writing for newspapers like ‘Maratha’ and ‘Loksatta’. He was not known as crusading journalist. He was known more for his columns and creative writing. He wrote two plays Amchavur Koun Prem Karnar and Gruhastha in his early twenties. As the second play Gruhastha was not a successful play he was depressed easily and took a vow not to write plays again.

Having selfreliance to write well and to write what he desired he broke the vow and wrote Shrimant which brought him good name as a writer. This play created new waves with its non conservative story in which an unmarried young lady who is pregnant protests her father to abort her child and when her father tries to buy a husband to her in order to save his social prestige. This radical story was new to the audience of those times. It seems that it was not given any awards at the Maharashtra State Drama Competition because it was found to be immoral.

Tendulkar experienced struggle in his early days in Mumbai. From this he learnt the woes of the urban lower middle class people in tenements in Mumbai. It proved extremely useful in his life and experience 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 of 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 modern 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 Agastha, Sulabha Deshpande etc.

In 1961 Tendulkar wrote the play *Gidhade* (*the vultures*). But it was not produced until 1970. The theme of the play is violence on the basis of morally ruined family system. Thus Tendulkar explored violence in its many forms. So this play *Gidhade* is considered to be a turning point in Tendulkar’s writing style. It has filthy characters. This play deals with narrow mindedness of human beings and destruction of human love and human values. In this play Hari Pitale who is a business man earns a lot of money by cheating his own brother. His children Ramakanth, Umakanth and Manik have the same nature. For earning money they are ready to do even the meanest thing. They torture their father and get the bank balance of him. With that money they enjoy a lot with liquor and other luxuries. When their sister becomes pregnant, Ramakanth and Umakanth begin to blackmail her lover, even they hurt the leg of their sister. After learning that their sister’s lover is dead they kick on her stomach which causes the abortion. Hari hates his children and says “if I die it’ll be a release! They are all waiting for it. But I am your own father. If I die, I’ll become a ghost. I’ll sit on your chest! I won’t let you sleep” But there is some kind of conflict in that house. Rajininath, one of the sons of Hari Pitale and Rama, wife of Ramakanth. Rama hesitates with her husband who takes excessive alcoholic drinks and becomes impotent. Rajininath and Rama commit adultery, and she becomes pregnant. Her husband is very happy. Ultimately her husband aborts the foetus with physical violence when he learns the truth from Umakanth. Here the dramatist portrays the violence, sex and cupidity in a naturalistic manner. But the dramatist’s opinion is that even the villain must be examined from all angles.

*The Vultures* is indeed the most violent of Tendulkar’s plays. It reminds one of webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. It is replete with violent imagery, consisting of blood, eeriness, and mad raving both Hari Pitale and Manik thirst for revenge. Both succeed in their mission. While Pappa succeeds in driving
Ramakant to the streets, Manik succeeds in causing Rama's abortion. The dialogue is composed of words which seem appropriate to the mouths of the characters who utter them. On the whole, the play is, no doubt, naturalistic in its portrayal of domestic violence caused by greed.

Tendulkar wrote *Shantata! Court Chali Aahe* (1967) (*Silence! the Court is in Session*) based on a story *Diepanna* (1956). It was performed on the stage in 1967 and proved as one of his finest works. The story of this play is about human hypocrisy. The protagonist Benare, a school teacher who is rebellious, is a member of the amateur theatre group called 'The Sonare Moti Tenement Progressive Association'. Other members Kashikar, Balurokde, Karnik, Sukatme, Ponkshe all belong to middle class family of Bombay. As one among them has not come they ask 'Samanth', the villager to replace him. A mock trial is arranged to make him understand court procedure. A mock charge 'infanticide' is leveled against Benare. The mock trial becomes serious. They are eager to expose the personal life of Benare cruelly. Unable to bear the harsh behaviour of co-actors in the name of mock trial, Benare collapses in the dock. Benare says at the beginning “My life is my own. My will is my own. My wishes are my own. No one can kill those - no one! I will do what I like with myself and my life!” But at the end she collapses in the dock.

Even though Tendulkar is known for the harsh words of his characters, in this play he uses poetic words which directly touch the hearts of the readers or the audience:

The parrot to the sparrow said,
‘Why, oh why are your eyes so red?”
‘Oh, my dear friend what shall I say?
Some one has stolen my nest away!’
Sparrow, sparrow, poor little sparrow...
Oh, brother crow, oh brother crow
Were you there? Did you see it go?’
‘No I don’t know. I didn’t see.
What are your troubles to do with me?’
O sparrow, sparrow poor little sparrow... (SC 121)
The playwright here questioned about love, sex, marriage and morality. Irony, pathos, satire are used in this play: Satyadev Dube, famous director presented it in movie form in 1971. For this movie Tendulkar wrote screenplay.

In 1972 he wrote Sakharam Binder. Here he deals with individual morality and violence in the household. The topic he had chosen for this play is domination of male gender over female gender. The protagonist Sakharam who ironically claims not believe in outdated social norms and conventional marriages. He arranges a shelter for abandoned wives but uses them for sexual pleasures, not concerning their moods as he likes and justifies with pseudo arguments. This play begins with harsh words of the main character with the women he brought to his house. It still being watched and it remains one of the most intricate character studies in Indian theatre.

In the same year he penned Ghashiram Kotwal, a brilliant satire on political violence. It is a controversial depiction of the historical character ‘Nana Phadnavis’. Brahmins community angered and anty-Ghashiram agitation took place in Mumbai and in the metropolis. It was banned in 1971-72. It made a political comment on the raise of ‘the Shivsena’ in Maharashtra. In fact Ghashiram Kotwal is a traditional musical performed with modern techniques and broad changes in Marathi theatre. This run for a record with over 6000 performances in original and translated versions. It’s a political satire written as historical drama.

Tendulkar wrote Kamala based on a real life incident (Indian Express journalist brought a girl from rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference). Here in this play the writer raises some questions regarding the value system of modern success-oriented generation which is ready to sacrifice human values even in the name of humanity itself. The innate self deception is exposed dramatically. Jaising, a journalist who is self seeking, is at the center. He purchases, a woman from the flesh market. He treats that woman as an object thinks what will happen to Kamala after this expose. Tendulkar stresses the behaviour which brings promotion as well as reputation in his professional life. He never of the present journalists. Kakasahib provides the ideals of journalism. This play explores the position of women in contemporary Indian society. Saritha,
wife of jaisingh, realizes that she is also in the same predicament as Kamala. Sarita says to Kakasahib “I was asleep... Kamala woke me up with a shock. Kamala showed me every thing... I saw that the man I thought my partner was the master of a slave. I have no rights at all in this house...slaves don’t have rights, do Kakasahib?... Dance to their master’s whim. Laugh, when says, laugh. Cry, when says, cry. When he says pickup the phone, they must pick it up... when he says lie on the bed. (she is twisted in pain)” (KL 46). N.S.Dharan says about the play Kamala:

the play offers Vijay Tendulkar enough scope to scoff at the kind of trendy journalism practiced by Jadhav, and also to strike a contrast between the journalism in the vernacular and that in English. Tendulkar uses the play also to dwell on the characteristic suffering of the Indian middle class women perpetrated by selfish, malicious, secretive and hypocritical male chauvinists. The man-woman relationship, another of Tendulkar’s favorite theme, is also deftly touched upon in the complex relationship between Jadhav and his wife, Saritha. Kamala is gyno centric play in the sense that it is built on the metamorphosis of Saritha emerging from being a docile wife to an assertive, mature woman at the end.3

In 1983 Tendulkar wrote Kanyadaan. In this play he portrays Dalit writer as a drunkard, manipulator, blackmailer, narrowminded and wife beater. It is a play about a girl of high caste political family who thinks to marry a dalit young poet. She gets permission from her parents and marry him. Soon she understands that there is a cruel man inside of the poet. With his sadism he tries to punish her arguing that it is revenge of Dalits against the high caste. Her father who wants to reform the society thinks that he is powerless to set right his own daughter’s family. He finds how she has become a victim.

Kanyadaan is perhaps the most controversial of all the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar. It dwells on an extremely sensitive social and political issue, namely, the conflict between upper castes and Dalits, a phenomenon still rampanty prevalent in several parts of India. Despite fifty years of independence Dalits continue to suffer abject misery and ill-treatment at the hands of the upper
castes. 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 evade easy solutions and a creative writer, he does not take sides.

His play *Encounter in Umbagland* deals with political theme. It mirrors the political situation in the second half of sixties and first half of seventies. This is about the plot of five ministers when the king of umbagland dies all of a sudden. They make Vijaya, the princess ruler. She learns woes of the people through visiting. She wants to do something good for the upliftment of the people belonging to the tribe of Kadamda. The five ministers who want to make her a mere puppet in their hands to work for the people of that tribe. Unable to endure her activities the ministers try to incite the people against her. When she faces angry crowd she uses her power of eloquence and convince the people and cleverly direct them towards the ministers. The people now rebellious against the ministers. They seek the help of Vijaya to protect them from the angry mob. Through this play Tendulkar gives a clear picture of the innocence of the people and the cunning nature of the political leaders.

In 1992 he wrote *The Cyclewallah*. This play has the elements of fantasy to convey the sameness of human nature. It reflects the lives of people spending their time in fantasies with out having knowledge of reality. This last play perhaps is final comment on himself and the reality surrounding him. We are not sure that this play is a metaphor of contemporary Indian reality or an allegory about life's journey. This play reminds us about the works of great journey writers such as *Odyssey* (Homer), *Landide* (Voltaire), *Peercynt* (Isben), *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett).

A young man wants to begin a world trip on his bicycle. He dreams of lands, mountains, oceans, exotic places and different people. This adventure gets gloomy as the journey progresses and the cyclist faces difficult elements of human and natural. Perils of the journey are mixed with uneasy laughter. Here unlike most of the Tendulkar's other plays there is no strong female character.
Tendulkar wrote *Mitrachigost* (2001) (*A Friend’s Story*) a play with powerful theme of homosexual relationship. Mitra, principal character has no redeeming qualities like other characters of Tendulkar’s plays. It’s also about the hunger of power. It has economical, fast paced and perfect structured plot. It revealed the playwright’s skills.

Generally speaking writers respond quickly for every thing happening around them. Most of the writers are introverts by nature. So they use their pen to show their response. But Vijay Tendulkar used both writing and public comments to show his reaction. In an interview he said “A man who just sits in his room and reads books without looking at the outside world is only half a map”.

Tendulkar was a giant, a social reformer as well as commentator. Even though his effigies were burnt in many states after some political statements he did not turn his back .His was an unshakable pen. As a truth revealer he accepted blames and attacks as part of his life. Tendulkar who ruled the Marathi literary realm for over five decades was not a stranger to controversies. He reacted to the Gujarat riots after Godra incident and said if he had a pistol he would shoot Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. This comment evoked mixed reactions. Modi supporters expressed their strong anger, others lauded him for his remarks.

In 70’s most of the people belonging to the experimental theatre turned towards films. Many directors believed that Vijay Tendulkar could script a meaningful film .They requested him and he wrote award winning film scripts for some of the great directors in Hindi cinema. Many directors became famous through his script writing and honest work. Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Jabbar Patel, Amul Alekar, Nashikat Patwandan, Satyadev Dube are only some examples. His versatility and creativity were reflected in screenplays and dialogues he wrote for many hailed movies. *Manthan* directed by Shyam Benegal brought Tendulkar good fame as a screenplay writer. He won laurels for the screenplays of *Ardhasatya*, *Akrosh* and Marathi film *Saamna*. *Akrosh* directed by Govind Nihalani made clear mark and bagged many national and international awards.
He was not stern and stubborn in listening to the words of others. During the making of Ardhasatya Tendulkar had written different endings but accepted the end suggested by Nihalani. This proved that Tendulkar had open mind. It is apt to say that Tendulkar gave a certain direction to new cinema when others started out. His vision and commitment with reality of the period gave a direction not just in terms of content but also form. That would be the contribution of Vijay Tendulkar to Indian cinema. Tendulkar was attacked for his work many times, some times physically, sometimes verbally. After Gidhade someone beat him with his stick. During the performance of Ghashiram Kotwal some of the audience threw eggs and tomatoes on the actors which means attacking the writer. Tendulkar never cared for this type of attacks. Like Vijay Tendulkar who was impartial in his work, ‘Death’ also showed no partiality and sympathy. It took away the life of his wife Nirmala and his Cinematographer son Raju in 2001. His daughter Priya, an actress also died a year later. Tendulkar was lower in his spirits after these deaths.

Tendulkar never worked for rewards but they were queueing up to him. He was felicitated with many awards and honours including The Padmabhushan (1984), one of the highest awards in India. He was honored with Maharashtra State Government Awards (1956,1969,1972), Sangeeth Natak Academy Award (1971), Sangeet Natak Academy fellowship for life time achievement, The Filmfare Awards(1980,83), Saraswati Samman Award (1993), Kalidasa Samman Award (1999), Maharashtra Government Puraskar (1999), The Jananasthan Award (1999). Later in 2001 he was recognized for the lifetime literary achievement with Katha Chudamani Award.

Proving the words of Shakespeare ‘the world is a stage all men and women are merely players’ true he acted in his role of man and made so many characters act in his dramas and went to eternal sleep on May 19th,2008 after the ultimate five weeks battle with Myasthenia Gravis, a dreadful disease.

People know the ability of Tendulkar. But perhaps it is better to give a high place as a writer than a dramatist in Indian drama. From his words one can understand his ability as a writer “I was a writer first and playwright afterwards. This means I was not at any stage limit myself to play writing, I wrote and loved
to write for different mediums including the day to day newspaper journalism. While having to write for these mediums I learnt to mould my language according to the requirements of the writing. This amounted to playing roles. In the morning I was short story writer, during the day I had to write as a journalist, at night till morning I turned myself into a playwright. Therefore I did not develop one single rigid mould of writing style but enjoyed changing my roles and accordingly my style.4

Speaking about his profession Tendulkar says "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. For the last forty five years I have been writing sitting in newspaper offices, in the road side restaurants, on the crowded running local trains and when my living space did not allow me to myself and write, I have written sitting in the bathroom. And I have written on the sick bed in the hospital inspite of the doctor's advice not to tax myself. He did not know and would not accept that writing was no taxing to me at all. On the contrary it was soothing. It was great relief. It was joy."5

Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Rajendra Nath were four pillars of Indian Drama in the post independence era. These playwrights gave new direction to Indian Drama. They gave a different meaning to the life. Through their works they inspired so many young writers. So the Indian Theater becoming rich and richer.

Arundhati Benarje expresses similar opinion "in the 1960s four dramatists from different regions of India, writing in their own regional languages, were said to have ushered modernity into the sphere of Indian Drama and Theatre. They were Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi and Girish Karnad in Kannada. Rakesh's untimely death left his life's work incomplete, and Kamad has written only intermittently. Sircar, of course has been almost as active as Tendulkar, though his plays can be divided into three distinct periods. Tendulkar, however, has not only been the most productive but has also introduced the greatest variations in his dramatic creations.6

Of these four Playwrights Vijay Tendulkar wielded his pen like mighty warriors wielding swords. With his plays he had made a greater impact on the
audience than many social reformers or actors. His plays were heralded by disputes with the censor. Hard hitting reality in his plays jolted the audience out of their complacency. He depicted his characters with sensitivity and accuracy which earned him so many fans.

Chandrasekhar Barve rightly says:

The depiction of life in Tendulkar’s plays has an invisible but solid foundation in his philosophy of life. His philosophy includes man, his body and soul, his ego, his associations, the futility in the relations between men, the resultant sense of loneliness, the ideas of sin and virtue, the uncertainty of all these: in short the individual identity of man and his social existence, the harmony and disharmony between the two- these form the essence of Tendulkar’s thinking. Tendulkar’s plays don’t appear to carry the burden of intellectual speculation. And at (perhaps because of this very reason), they remain beyond the shallow, hollow and the cheap, telling us silently, some thing original, beyond words.

Considering all this it can be observed that Tendulkar’s plays tend towards existentialism.

Even though he was accused of obscenity and over violence, exhibition of sexuality, anti Brahmanism, historical distortions and plagiarism. Tendulkar remained truly concerned about the contemporary scenario of Indian Theatre. He was the only Marathi playwright who got worldwide fame and who placed Marathi Theater on the international map. The quality that made him great writer was that he couldn’t be easily slotted, the understand complexities of human lives and he had no endurance for hypocrisy. Most of his plays had Censor trouble and producers went to court, this gave Tendulkar public image of a fighter, writer at cross purposes with the mainstream.

Depiction of women in Indian plays is very problematic since there is an absence of feminine consciousness. Many writers ignored the fact that women in the country are suppressed. Women are victims of patriarchy. It was Tendulkar who brought women violence to light boldly. He wrote about the exploitation of women and women’s problems.
Tendulkar instilled confidence in many young playwrights by his plays. His plays challenged the traditional concepts and norms. He brought to the fore the hidden cruelty and lust in the human nature. It is doubtless to say that he was a brilliant writer with contemporary and unconventional themes. When one talks only about the violence in his plays one does not really understand him. His plays contain humor, pathos, compassion and fantasy. One shouldn't ignore his plays for children. Tendulkar's piercing insight into human behaviour, through his plays which have been perceived by critics as being ahead of their times, his sensitive and accurate portrayal of social issues made him playwright of the millennium. He lived through his work and through that he had injected into the new generation of playwrights. It is apt to say that Tendulkar has guided Marathi Drama that seemed to have lost its proper track, and has kept leading it for over two decades. His place and importance in this respect shall remain unique in the history of Marathi Drama. There may be controversies regarding his greatness but his achievements are beyond question.

Vijay Tendulkar portrayed the society he knew and the predicament of man in it with a special focus on the morbidity in his plays, which remind us of Nietzsche's words 'the disease called man' and also Freud's description of human civilization as 'a universal neurosis'. His plays touch almost every aspect of human life in the modern world and share the disillusionment of the post modern intellectuals. However, they seem to highlight three major issues: gender, power and violence. *Kamala* shows how women are oppressed and exploited at work by their employers. *Ghashiram Kotwal* illustrates the game of power at various levels. *The Vultures* exemplifies violence at its worst. Each play covers all these issues with a difference in quantity and quality.

Speaking about Tendulkar's insights into human condition Nishikant D. Mirajkar says:

Vijay Tendulkar has remained the representative of the contemporary modern drama, not only in Marathi, but also on pan-Indian level, for a long span of last thirty seven years. The fact that majority of his plays became the most controversial, mostly
from ex-dramatic point of view, and have almost churned the public opinions, inviting violent responses and reactions, does not dilute this statement; but on the contrary, strengthens it. Tendulkar symbolizes the new awareness and attempts of Indian dramatists of the last quarter century, to depict the agonies, suffocations and cries of man, focusing particularly on those of middle class. He has been vocalizing different human relations and the tensions implied therein, through his plays, which depict the tragic consequences of confrontations of egos in these relations.

As a dramatist Tendulkar depicted his men and women as he concentrated. He had a thorough grasp of his basic theme of violence and dealt with most of its significant aspects and varieties in the life of human beings. He explored and expressed bitter and gruesome truths. He portrays realistically some of the customs and questions their place in the contemporary society.

Dr. Vena Noble Dass says: “Tendulkar’s drama may be discussed in terms of his exploration of themes, his skill in characterization and his ingenuity in structure. Although Tendulkar’s art is marked by many innovations in technique and subject, he relies on traditions which are social and literary and play an important role in his work. The inevitable conflict between tradition and modernity, conventions and unorthodoxy, a fixed system and the unchecked course of individualism, social restraints and freedom create the tensions in his plays and contribute to their basic forms.”

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 and written by him.

Coelho points out:

In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egoistical man and equally self centered
society. He liberated the Marathi stage from the tyranny of conventional theatre with its mild doses of social and political satire purpose of pure entertainment. His primary concern in plays like 

*Sakuram Binder*, *The Vultures*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* is the failure of human relations due to man's inherent cruelty to his fellow men. There is nothing superficial or exaggerated in his depiction of the vital and often violent stages of man in our society today. In his plays he reviews the innate violence of the so called civilized beings in an urban industrial set up. He attempts to depict the fast changing and frightening aspects of life in modern Maharashtra and India, for that matter.  

California Arts Association produced a documentary on Tendulkar's works which explores the theme of violence at various levels. Atul Peethe (director) Markend Seethe (script writer) made this documentary possible. The Indo American Arts Council's passionate mission to bring awareness of Indian artists and their work is given ample berth by Tendulkar's work. His first play in English *His Fifth Women* was written for the Lark Theatre in New York as part of the Tendulkar festival. It is not ridiculous to say that like Mahatma Gandhi, Tendulkar believed in truth, fought for the truth and wrote the truth. Violence was the truth he discovered in the society he lived in.
REFERENCES