POLITICS OF CULTURE

She must always be cheerful, clever in (the management of her) household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils and economical in expenditure.

Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure (elsewhere) or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife.

Manu

In India and Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the Ramayana or the Mahabharata for the first time. The stories are there, “always already.”

Ramanujan in Richman

The cultural hegemony, as formulated by Gramsci, sets up a relationship between culture and power, and also explains the political functions of cultural symbols. Indian culture upholds the assignment of discrete roles to a man and a woman. A number of such assertions of Dharmashastras invite a woman to perform certain duties and remain cheerful in odds of life, directing her to be faithful to her husband and worship him for entire life. Instead of having a complementary position in relation to the husband, she stumbles upon a subordinate status. A man on the other hand, is to be admired and exalted irrespective of his familial, and marital integrity, and conduct.

The mythological stories, sayings and interpretations which are known as the cultural tools, encourage the younger generation to witness, comprehend and imbibe this fact of subordination. These mythologies are essentially delusive manifestations that represent the reality symbolically and metaphorically. Women, even in ancient Greece, were treated as instruments of commodification, as in Homer’s Iliad, abducted Helen, and Briseis ‘a prize of honour’ become the force behind the Great War. Such practices tend to invest women with symbolic worth as workers, sexual partners and bearers of children. The images of woman spectacled in these myths tend to regulate the existence of contemporary woman.

Under the prevailing societal hierarchy, too, as was the case in the ancient times, man alone controls the status of women. The conscientious spirits while raising
issues concerning woman’s subjugation are always in “social struggle mode” to understand her representation at home and in society. The man, a dominating figure, keeps arguing and acting in favour of male domination on the pretext of cultural conditioning—or rather the politics of culture. With regard to this politics, Stuart Hall states that the processes of signification are independent of ‘how things are’ but how they are re-presented by various social groups in specific ways:

You cannot learn, through common sense, how things are: you can only discover where they fit into the existing scheme of things. In this way, its [ideology] very taken-for-grantedness is what establishes it as a medium in which its own premises and presuppositions are being rendered invisible by its apparent transparency. (qtd. in Hebdige 11)

Culture, in fact, plays a vital role in human development; and is more capable of casting people into certain moulds and ideals than any other material force. It has been defined in various dictionaries in different ways, though, more or less with the same connotations. The Oxford English Dictionary refers it to the action or practice of cultivating the soil; the cultivation or development (of the mind, faculties and manners), improvement or refinement by education and training; the intellectual side of civilisation; the prosecution or special attention or study of any subject or pursuit. The American Heritage English Dictionary treats it to be the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. Merriam Webster Dictionary considers culture as enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training, the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic. The Dictionary of Modern Sociology terms ‘culture’ as the total, generally organized way of life, including values, norms, institutions, and artifacts, that is passed on from generation to generation by learning alone. Culture is thus symbolic of behaviour patterns, habits, beliefs and way of living of human beings; and is a mirror of social structure. Ideas, attitudes and symbols are the cultural forces that make a social organization possible.

On a similar note, the father of sociology, Durkheim, defines culture as a type of social fact which in turn is the ways of acting, thinking and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing, outside individual consciousness. For
anthropologists, the term ‘culture’ also refers to a society or a group in which many or all people live and think in the same ways. Defining all forms of social action in terms of means and ends, the ultimate fact of human life, Parsons understands the basic function of culture as setting a scale of priorities that contains the fundamental alternatives of selective orientations (qtd. in K Allan 63-64).

Differentiating between the social and ideological culture, Edward B. Tylor in Primitive Culture states that the former pertains to people’s forms of social organization, while the latter relates to what people think, value, believe and hold as ideals. In their article “The Politics of Culture” Rivkin and Ryan maintain that in its general sense, culture is also the way people behave while eating, talking with each other, interacting at work, engaging in ritualized social behaviour such as social gatherings (1025).

While declaring culture as a “whole way of life”, a conscious expression and representation of universal truth, Raymond Williams brings forth its dual aspects—the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to, and the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested (qtd. in Baker 59). An idealistic theory reckons culture as a purely autonomous realm of human endeavour, free from the material world of work and politics i.e. higher truth and superior reality. Culture is ambiguous and may be defined as a standard of aesthetic excellence, a superior reality and more generally as a set of values and beliefs implicit in a particular way of life. Even as a scientific term, for Hebdige, it refers both to a process and a product, the “quality of life”, the effects in human terms of mechanization, the division of labour and the creation of mass society (qtd. in During 358).

In his Culture and Anarchy (1869), Victorian scholar, Matthew Arnold associates popular culture with anarchy. He defines culture as sweetness and light and a study of perfection which is internal to human mind and general to the whole community. He gives a concept of elite, high or dominant culture, which is mainly meant for the classes and consequently leads to the exclusion of the masses. Arnold analyses literature and the arts as the repository of culture, of a complex of aesthetic, moral and spiritual values which are threatened by continual advance of mechanism and materialistic civilization, and is elevated to the pursuit of wealth (qtd. in Habib
It is harmony of all the powers working for the beauty and worth of human nature. Culture stands in opposition to the mechanical civilization:

> It has a very important function to fulfill for mankind. And this function is particularly important in our modern world, of which the whole civilization is... mechanical and external, and tends constantly to become more so. (Arnold 14-15)

The literary and non-literary cultures, for Leavis, are inextricably connected—in a healthy culture there is, ‘behind the literature, a social culture and an art of living.’ Thus, cultural health must entail some kind of unity of sophisticated and popular cultures and a cultural decline comes there as a result of industrialization and techniques of mass production (qtd. in Milner and Browit 30-31).

Culture embodies the “best that has been thought and said” in a society as is believed by Stuart Hall in his *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. It is the ensemble of the great ideas, as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy. It also refers to the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure time and entertainment which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ‘ordinary people’—what is called the ‘mass culture’ or the ‘popular culture’ of an age (2). As the old working class community life fragmented, the cultural studies too took two main courses; the old notion of culture as a whole way of life became increasingly difficult to sustain: attention moved from locally produced and often long-standing cultural forms...to culture as organised from afar—both by the state through its educational system and by what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called, ‘the culture industry’, that is, highly developed music, film and broadcasting businesses. Much more important, however, was the logic by which culture was set apart from politics... was overturned (qtd. in During 4). In his seminal book *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968), E.P. Thompson described that the identity of the working class as working class had always had a strongly political and conflictual component—that identity was not just a matter of particular cultural interest and values (qtd. in During 4). Within a constitutional realm, different types of culture co-exist concurrently—ethnic culture, religious culture, institutional cultures and international or global culture. This global culture is generated by states; and
gender equality may be accepted conceptually in some subcultures, while patriarchy may prevail in the other.

There is an irreducible sense in which culture is something that, once we have subjectively internalized it and made it “ours,” we are objectively stuck with—at least for some time, perhaps until changed circumstances create conditions that make potentially alternative cultures accessible (B Berger 16). An ‘ideal’ culture is formed by meanings, symbols and values and is inferred from material objects and other customary behaviour including language itself. According to Bennett M. Berger, it is used to distinguish the behaviour that the culture ideally prescribed and the real behaviour distributed among a population (16).

Dealing with the idea of inherited ‘politics of culture’, Christian Parenti in his essay “Reflection on the Politics of Culture” states that a society based on slaves corresponds to a racist culture full of peculiar laws, science, and mythology, with devices of suppression acting against both slaves and the critics of slavery. For him, culture is mediated through a social structure and is not an abstract force. Culture is obtained from an association of social relations involving informal and formal agencies like family and peers; and from articulated and legally chartered institutions such as churches, schools, media, and government agencies, respectively. These social institutions are regularly misrepresented as politically neutral by dominating class which is advantaged otherwise.

For Parenti, it takes another turn when culture is seen as harmless accumulation of solutions and practices, making people follow ‘cultural relativism’. In that case, they are supposed to respect other cultures and avoid ‘ethnocentrism’. The exchange value of culture is overshadowing its utilization value, thus leading people into ‘buying’ instead of ‘creating’ culture. The folk culture is replaced by mass culture, a construction in a manner that diverts people from thinking about larger realities. Parenti again remarks that by constantly appealing to the lowest common denominator, a sensationalist popular culture lowers the common denominator still further. In his opinion, the entertainment culture (the entertainment industry) even if supposedly apolitical in intent, is in reality, political in its impact, propagating images and values that are often downright sexist, racist, consumerist, authoritarian, militaristic, and imperialist. Today, media culture gives the people what they want reversing the supply-demand concept of economics. The preferences of readers are
directed as well overlooked consistently. Even painting and photography experience systemic repression and censorship. In true capitalist style, works of art are considered as objects of pecuniary investment and private acquisition by corporate honchos. By assigning ideological connotation to artistic expression, art is labelled as “propaganda” with political dimensions.

While dealing with this politics Antonio Gramsci considers ‘hegemony’ as the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (qtd. in Crehan 102). For Gramsci, ‘culture’ at any point in time in a society is the outcome and embodiment of hegemony. Hegemony, in his scheme of concepts, is used to understand how both culture and ideology work. Gramsci believes that as the social and cultural conditions transform, the content of hegemonic forces gets distorted. People, who have hegemonic control, run the system by coercion thereby directing the cultural development. Whatever we perceive to be our common culture is the careful transmission of class-dominated values. Gramsci in his Selections from the Prison Notebooks conceptualizes class hegemony, while noting that the state is only the outer ditch behind which there [stands] a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks. Thus an arrangement of cultural values and institutions generally is not thought to be political.

Like Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’, Foucault in The History of Sexuality (1978) argues that power has historical location: the great institutions of power that developed in middle ages—monarchy, the state with its apparatus—rose up on the basis of a multiplicity of prior powers, and to a certain extent, in opposition to them… If these institutions were able to implant themselves, if by profiting from whole series of tactical alliances, they were able to gain acceptance, this was because they presented themselves as agencies of regulation, arbitration, and demarcation… (86-87). For Foucault, this power is concerned with oppressing and constraining; and it operates within everyday relations between people and institutions. He admits that the most oppressive measures are, in fact, productive, giving rise to new forms of behaviour rather than simply closing down or censoring certain forms of behaviour.
Foucault’s model of power is enacted and contested, focusing on individuals as active subjects:

> Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain... power is employed and exercised through a net like organization... individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (qtd. in Kelly 36)

Analyzing this struggle for domination and terming it as “anti authority struggles” he further states that there is an “opposition of power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over mentally ill, of medicine over the population and of administration over the ways people live” (qtd. in Smart 135). Simultaneously, Sara Mills while discussing Foucault’s Power/Knowledge remarks that in Foucault’s opinion where there are imbalances of power relations between groups of people or institutions/states, there will be a production of knowledge (69). In “Subject and Power”, Foucault states that power functions through the structuration of possible actions and capacities of free agents; and this structuration is effected through government, which determines “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed...to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (221). Questions of power may be addressed in two broad ways—by looking at power aspect of established order of culture and by investigating the political economy of cultural production. The former is about power implications on society’s cultural patterns, and the latter is about how the form and content of cultural objects is shaped by economic and political control of cultural productions (Hall, Neitz and Battani 168-169). Culture and power of a given society can shape and mould an individual thoroughly. Sudhir Kakar, a cultural psychologist, observes: “The overwhelming importance of cultures in personality formation is now recognized by most dynamic psychologies. Culture is so pervasive that even an individual seems to break away from it, as in states of insanity, the ‘madness’ is still influenced by its norms and rituals” (*Inner* 8-9).

Within Marxist materialism for Lenin, culture is a conscious existence and often portrayed as a propagandist ‘instrument’ or weapon of vanguard that makes the development of revolutionary consciousness possible. Paradoxically, western Marxism looks at culture as the condition against the development of revolutionary
consciousness. Culture is both a function and a source of identity, as Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978), takes up European construction of the east as primitive and underdeveloped and such discourse moves from imaginative representations of the east to actual administrative manifestations (qtd. in Hart 88). For an understanding of the functioning of the society, French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser introduces scientific theory of the “Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses” (RSAs and ISAs) to explain how the proponents of capitalism create and maintain conditions favourable to capitalistic society, and how the ways of thinking are directed in a society. ISAs function massively and predominantly by ideology but also function secondarily by repression... Thus school and churches use suitable method of punishment, expulsion, selection etc to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of Family...the same is true of cultural IS apparatus, etc (98). They secure the expected goal by remaining behind the ‘shield’ thereby naturalizing the dominant ideology which is that of the ruling class. Ideologies are organized sets of fundamental and often normative ideas and attitudes and these ideologies are used to frame, legitimate, or validate opinions and actions in the domain to which they are applicable. Language fixes a world that is so much more stable and coherent than what we actually see taking its place in our consciousness and becomes what we think we have seen (Hodge and Kress 5). Ideologies persist over time, are unconscious and rarely questioned, and when they are, an adequate explanation of their existence is given. Ideology thus shapes the thought and forms the basis of language. This language controls the people giving rise to social and cultural practices.

The politics of culture simultaneously challenges how representation of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and culture dis-empowers some groups while privileging others. The cultural bias provides a basis for inequality, as it promotes the domination of one class/group over the other, and also acts as a means of acquiring oppositional points of view to those in dominance (Rivkin and Ryan 1025). Stuart Hall, one of the insightful analysts of cultural politics says:

Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit on what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable within the given vocabularies of motive and action available to us. Their dominance lies precisely in the power
they have to contain within their limits, to frame within their circumference of thought, the reasoning- and calculation of other social groups. (qtd. in Nelson and Grossberg 44)

Within cultural studies, sex and gender are considered social constructions fundamentally implicated in matters of representation. They are matters of culture, rather than of nature. Cultural studies have decidedly proved that women worldwide are regarded as subordinate to men. The subject positions are constructed for them pushing them to patriarchal world of domesticity and beautification.

A human being struggles for individual survival and the society also works for its continuity and survival. Today’s social world is designed with both male and female actors and human society that is heading towards certain social change has to incorporate the goals, thoughts, activities of the “second sex” in De Beauvoir’s terminology. The politics of culture exists in social stratification: men over women; rich over poor; majority over minority and colonizer over colonized. Here in this chapter, an emphasis is laid on the impact of power and domination of men over women. In a particular cultural tradition, the acceptance of women with their relative power and contribution, vary enormously from one culture to the other over different periods in history. Virtually all the contemporary societies are male dominated; even if the intensity of subordination varies. Thus, sexual asymmetry has been a universal fact of social life. Human activities and feelings are organized around culture-specific expectations, plans and symbols, controlling the actions and permitting the species to survive. Rosaldo and Lamphere elucidate what is male and what is female will depend upon interpretations of biology that are associated with any culture’s mode of life (5).

Most of the literature that determines the values and course of life has deliberately painted an ideal picture of woman, the subordinate group. This representation is further responsible for the conditioning of Indian society, which in turn, gets prejudiced with the typical lower role expectation from women. Writers like A.K. Ramanujan, Mahadevi Verma or Rabindranath Tagore dared to portray the rational picture of an average Indian woman. The commercialization of media channels and literatures in the name of popular culture premeditate the personification of woman as an ideal forfeiting daughter-in-law, daughter, wife or mother. The premeditated success of latter corresponds to the patriarchal domination prevalent in societal structures.
Against the backdrop of politics of culture, the impact of power and domination of men over women in two plays of Vijay Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures* will form the focus of the study in the current chapter. The diversified Indian culture establishes more or less a similar social system, whether it is Bengal in North or Maharashtra in west, with, of course, slight variations. Tendulkar, as a keen observer of Marathi society, tries to illustrate the conditions of underprivileged women like Champa and Laxmi in *Sakharam Binder* and Rama and Manik in *The Vultures*, the two plays taken for analysis in this chapter. These women become victims of violence and male dominance. All these characters struggle hard in their patriarchal surroundings, protesting in one way or the other. The counterfeit expectation of their families to bear children or fulfill their wishes also finds place in Tendulkar’s critique. As a witness to various movements of reformation and in his endeavour to strengthen the status of underprivileged women through his protagonists, he attempts to re-write the politicized historical representation of women in India; and challenges traditional conceptions of those processes established by males. With his keen observance of humankind, Tendulkar admits:

> At a very early stage of my life I had developed a curiosity for people...without consciously trying, I have an ear for the speech habits of people and also an eye for their mannerisms and personal peculiarities...everything gets recorded and stored in the computer of the brain. I don’t have to call for it as I write. It comes by itself. (qtd. in Choudhury and Rajan 118)

The discriminations and exploitation based on Gender is cosmopolitan. The socio-culturally defined roles, responsibilities and behavioural patterns of men and women further strengthen the inequalities and hierarchies in society. Habib Tanvir in his play *Ek Aurat Hypatia Bhi Thi* brings forth a mathematician woman Hypatia, who was killed by Christian bigots in 4th century A.D. Alexandria. The killing of Hypatia is an indication of, in words of Tanvir, ‘a social and intellectual bigotry’ and a male dominion (S Deshpande *Theatre* 83-84). Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) defines this male domination, ‘patriarchy’ as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (20). In a patriarchal set-up, men control women’s production, reproduction and sexuality. Patriarchy within a particular caste or class also differs in terms of their religious and regional
variations. Similarly, subordination of women in developed countries is different from what it is in developing countries. According to historian Romila Thapar, within the Indian sub-continent itself, there have been infinite variations on the status of women, diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals (qtd. in M Mohanty 297). In the plays under study, one encounters two different kinds of women, coming from different familial and economic backgrounds. There are Laxmi and Champa in _Sakharam Binder_ who are the deserted women, whereas Rama in _The Vultures_ is a typical performer of household chores.

The Indian patriarchal society is suspicious of positive changes in the lifestyle of its women, as the patriarchs believe that their position as housewife makes them better women and individuals to preserve the sanity and purity of the culture. The life of a woman undergoes multiple phases—girl-child, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, widow etc; each phase dealing with a definite role. A woman’s life, indeed, undergoes far greater culture-dominated changes and adjustments from one phase to another. Her significance is measured only in relation to men; though she is eventually considered to be “indispensable for the continuation of society since she has the unique power of giving birth” (Leslie 49). Marriage and family are the basic institutions in which cultural power plays dominant role in shaping the family structures. It is the result of social conditioning that takes place within the structures of family.

Hindu culture envisages marriage as the essential and most important social ritual. Traditionally, here, a good woman is taken to be synonymous with a good wife. The Rig Vedic marriage hymns emphasize the equality of husband and wife, which is indicated by the use of term _Dampati_. The marriage hymns welcome her arrival to take charge of the entire household and to take care of the physical and spiritual welfare of all its members. In Ayodhyakanda of _Ramacaritamanasa_, Anasuya, wife of sage Atri, instructs Sita about the obligations of a Hindu wife:

*Listen O Princess; mother, father and brother are all friendly helpers to a limited degree; but a husband, Sita, is an unlimited blessing; and vile is the woman who refuses to serve him. Fortitude, piety, a friend and a wife—these four are tested only in time of adversity. Though her Lord be old, sick, dull headed, indigent, blind, bad-tempered or utterly wretched, yet if his wife treats him with disrespect, she shall suffer all*
the torments of Hell. To be devoted in thought and word and deed to her husband’s feet is her only religious duty her only guiding rule. 
(Tulasidasa 466)

The metaphors that Vyasa employs for this marital relationship are: “A wife has to follow her husband everywhere like a shadow, she has to support him like companion, has to execute his orders like a servant or slave… According to Shastras, such good conduct would be rewarded in this life by well being” (Klostermaier 313). S. Radhakrishnan in *The Hindu View of Life* (1926) affirms that “marriage is not the end of struggle; it is but the beginning of strenuous life where we attempt to realize the larger ideal by subordinating our private interest and inclinations. On the sanctity of marriage he adds that it depends on the practice of domestic virtues, integrity of family and rearing of children” (Schilpp 780-781).

The social laws postulated by Manu have downgraded the woman as a fickle and an unstable person. It is asserted that since women by their very nature are disloyal, they should be made dependent on men; whereas a husband should be constantly worshipped as a god, master, owner or provider. Uma Chakraborty remarks that importance of mythology cannot be underestimated in the formation of pativrata ideal. She further illustrates: “While Manu is quite straightforward about the need of women under control—daughter should be under the surveillance of her father, as a wife under her husband and as a widow under her son—the mythologies are more subtle in the ways they work” (75). *Stridharampatni* by Trambakayajvan (1665-1750) restricts the rights of women considerably; it envisages the notion that husband is God for wife, the source of her salvation, the purpose of her life in whom she realizes her purushartha. In *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the tour de force of Hindu society, an ideal womanhood occupies the centre stage, but such an idealized image of woman is found in a few mythical aristocratic dynasties. In *RigVeda Samhita*, woman has been elevated to a status equal to that of man where it is written that “to call woman the weaker sex is libel; it is man’s injustice to woman. The wife is not the husband’s bond-slave, but his companion and his helpmate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows and as free as the husband to choose her own path” (B Pandit 118). This lofty and sacred place enjoyed by women in the Hindu scriptures, being contrary to the realities, demands possible interpretation of their misrepresented status. Emphasis repetitively has been laid on those scriptural ideals which privilege men and constrain
women. With the pervasive influence of Vedic religion and penetration of Brahmanic rituals, the place of woman in Vedic society witnessed restrictions on their independence and a clear preponderance of patriarchal rule.

The subjugation of women, according to Engels, under the capitalist “free market” is rooted in their central role of the family as unpaid providers of the domestic services necessary for the maintenance of society. The family provides these services more cheaply for the ruling class (both in economic and political terms) than any other alternative. In fact, the word family comes from the Latin term *famulus* which means household slave, and *familia*, the totality of slaves belonging to one man, the patriarch, who inherited all the wealth and wielded absolute power over all members of the household. This shift towards gender inequality was presented as a natural, not a social process. The need to maintain the family, a part of culture, as the basic unit of class-divided societies thus constitutes the material basis for the subordination of women (Brewer in Engels 9-11).

Tendulkar’s plays significantly project the issues concerning gender construction, familial relationships and institution of marriage. Modern writers have tried to transform the image of woman projected in the myths, in accordance with their own ideological inclinations. The challenge thrown by women to Victorian patriarchy and consequent male response finds place in Strindberg’s plays. His female characters like Laura in *The Father* and Alice in *The Dance of Death* expound legitimate reasons to wage a war against males (Shideler 101). Tendulkar, in *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder* according to Veena Noble Das, provides different roles to women of middle class and lower middle class respectively—very different from the roles played by women in the traditional literature (qtd. in Pandey and Barua 9). The underprivileged position of Rama in the family of vultures captures attention and draws sympathy of the readers, who are not offended by her preference for an extra-marital attraction.

*Sakharam Binder*, as translated by Kumud Mehta and Shanta Gokhale, was shown for the first time on 10th March 1972 under the direction of Kamlakar Sarang at Welcome Theatre (Madge 182). In this play, Laxmi and Champa are different from each other; but each is dominant in her own ways, and Sakharam swings from one to the other. While portraying their characters, Tendulkar deviates from the traditional image of an ideal woman and anoints them as realistic characters of the contemporary
society. He also depicts the role of culture in shaping the macho discourse of physical arrogance of males in this play. The violence in males is instinctive in Tendulkar’s scheme of life—an outcome of one’s upbringing. This violence against women could be understood in the terms of colonizer-colonized relationship as propounded by Frantz Fanon through his expression “compartmentalized world.” As long as the states experience colonial rule and supremacy, cultural variations and adaptabilities become visible in corresponding societies and their inhabitants.

Colonialism acts via economic and political control; and through cultural hegemony. The colonized people are subjected to a hegemony that is material, cultural and psychological; and they see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer. The colonizer dominates the ruled society, casting a deep impact on the social system. The colonized thereafter uses violence to drive out the colonizer. Similar instincts are injected in the society. Violence, though a condemnable act, works as a form of social therapy, a physical act of rejection of colonial cultural hegemony. This colonial attitude, that is the urge to dominate and rule, has been deeply embedded in the Indian males. Incidents of wife beating and other deterrent actions involving violence, as is visible in the play, are prevalent in the Indian social system.

Sakharam Binder, the protagonist of the play, is a book-binder by occupation and comes from the urban, lower middle class. He is a man without any edifying human emotions, least of all, love. He performs his sexual duties in a primordial, perfunctory manner, without any sensual attachment, marital bonding or expression of love. There is a seed of dichotomy in his character. He is also a non-conformist, who, time and again, says that he has been “born all naked” but asks Laxmi to stay at home, not to speak with strangers and draw veil over her face in necessity. Laxmi is not to go out or talk to other men and is deprived of most trivial sources of dignity and self-respect. She is not only a victim of Sakharam’s strange code of sexual conduct but she also has to bear his abuses and beating. He commands her at the commencement of their new life:

If someone calls, you’re supposed to look up and talk. If it’s a stranger, you will have to cover your head and answer him briefly. That’s all. And if I’m not around, don’t admit anyone into the house. Maybe I’m a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper. Why maybe? I am all that. And I
drink. But I must be respected in my own house. I am the master here. (CPT 126)

Sakharam brings home hapless women who have been rendered homeless and keeps them without marrying them. In a similar construction, Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Light Out* (2000), presents the spectacle of daily rape of women, watched at a distance by the residents of a nearby apartment; Leela and Naina are anguished by the cries for help but the men Bhasker and Mohan quieten their conscience by arguing that the victims were after all only prostitutes and not decent women and therefore didn’t need any help (Iyer 18). Champa and Lakshmi, the victimized duo in the *Sakharam Binder*, come under the analogous category. There are obvious questions from the feminists as posed by Padmanabhan—is a prostitute not a woman? Can she not seek justice against violation? Naina, one of the women, responds in a cross-examination: if only decent women can be raped what is the point of being decent? (Naikar 70) The subversion created in human relationship by Padmanabhan is correctly observed by Chinese writer Rey Chow: “This method of subversion is fundamentally formal in that it exceeds and violates the coherence of cultural forms from within, and replaces that coherence with dislocations, perversities and crudities” (qtd. in Gnanamony 2). Sakharam’s enigmatic conduct not only affects a deconstruction of all morality and social hypocrisy, but it also brings about the deconstruction of his own “moral” when he stands accused of the same double standards and hypocrisy. Arundhati Banerjee in introduction of *Collected Plays in Translation* gives her observation about the author and his portrayal: “Tendulkar seems keen to demonstrate the basic and essential complexity of human nature, which is neither black nor white, but varying shades of gray” (xiii).

Sakharam justifies his actions with claims of being inspired by modern, unconventional thoughts, and comes up with hollow arguments meant, in fact, to bind women. Sakharam, thus, represents the hollowness of patriarchal morality. The first lessons of patriarchy are absorbed in the family where the head of the family is a man—father, brother or uncle—who reins women’s sexuality, labour or production, reproduction and mobility. In a family controlled by males, the birth of male child is always preferred. The male child is considered as the inheritor of the family estate, while the girl child is considered as *parayadhan* (other’s property) in Indian social system. For Henry Summer Maine, Law member Council of Governor General of.
India from 1862 to 1869, the Indian joint family is the ‘patriarchal family’. It is constituted by a group of persons related in the male line, subject to absolute power of the senior most male member. In the South Asian context, kinship systems are largely based on patrilineal descent which is the foundation of a pervasive patriarchal ideology that rationalizes the differential access of men and women to the material and symbolic resources of society (Khullar 363, 377).

Tendulkar carries out a double deconstruction—there is the negation of marriage in the play; yet the play manages to suggest that the reality of marriage has everything undeserving of the institution of marriage. Gertrude R. Jennings in Husbands for All (1920) enacts a satire on a government decree that due to shortages of marriageable men, all men under forty must have two wives till 1925. Sakharam’s world is unique in itself. He is the autocratic ruler in his house, where he takes man-woman (marital) relation to be absolutely commercial. In Amrita Pritam’s Pinjar, the fifteen years old Pooro is kidnapped by her Muslim abductor, Rashid, out of revenge from her family. Her family knows that she is blameless in their feuds of honour, yet they disown her without mercy. Pritam questions if the kidnapped person had been a son, no father would have behaved so selfishly. There is similar commodification of women in the play, when the women who need food and shelter are picked up by Sakharam, who needs them for his sexual appetite and for looking after the house. Lillian Hellman’s Another Part of the Forest (1946) presents an identical commodification of three women, Lavinia, Birdie and Regina, who are governed by husband or son or father, are at a disadvantage since they are socially and economically powerless. Pritam’s another story “Stench of Kerosene”, translated by Khushwant Singh, has the protagonist Guleri, the suffering wife, facing similar abandonment by her husband Manek as she is unable to provide him a child. All these women protagonists share the same fate as experienced by Tendulkar’s Laxmi. Here, Laxmi is discarded by her husband, because she is barren. Under the agreement arrived at between Sakharam and Lakshmi, the latter is given the safe shelter for keeping mum and is not to interfere in the family affairs. He brings down the marital chord to a mere contract—the contract being ‘a link based on needs: the need ended the link snapped’ (CPT 182). Laxmi is almost reduced to a slave, trapped in a world and a vocation which is both designed and run by unscrupulous men like Sakharam.
The humaneness in him seems to have been subjugated to such cynicism under the weight of the hypocritical social mores that it manifests itself in a perverted form. He, being non-conformist, advocates women’s rebellion, but still feels that the suppressed wives should respect their husbands, however inhuman and brutal they may be. He utters:

I’m hot-headed...lose my temper; I beat the life out of people. I’ve a foul mouth. There’s always a bidi or an oath on my lip...I won’t hear any complaints later. I like everything in order here... I am the master here. But a house must be a home, you understand? (CPT 125)

He is more hypocritical than those husbands. He treats these women as their husbands treat them, that too, without involving himself in the institution of marriage. The cultural domination makes him criticize the husbands for their pretensions and attitude towards their wives: “I tell you, Miyan, those fellows—they can’t father a brat and they take it all out on their wives. 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” (CPT 129). The bitter critic of institution of marriage himself turns out to be a puny male chauvinist.

Religious diversity demands cultural assimilation in two individuals, having dissimilar upbringing and contrasting personalities. Dawood and Sakharam, though they come from different religious backgrounds, display harmonious relationship between them from every angle. Inter-religion relationships are shown to be in consolidation, especially when Tendulkar, who is self-professedly a socialist, tries to provide a solution for religious conflict through his protagonist, Sakharam. This conflict does arise with intrusion of Laxmi, who becomes contemptuous of Dawood because of Muslim religion of the latter. If she declines to join Dawood in singing, and participates only in the aarti, it is because she has internalized this kind of a code through masculine domination. She, therefore, becomes the victim and an agent of this politics and violence from the domineering male:

SAKHARAM. I see. Why shouldn’t Dawood sing aarti?

LAXMI. Because—he’s a Muslim, isn’t he?

SAKHARAM. Why shouldn’t he sing it?

LAXMI. He’s a Muslim—and we—we’re Hindus.
SAKHARAM. Say it again!

LAXMI. What’s wrong with what I said? How can a Muslim join in a prayer to Ganpati?

SAKHARAM. Why not? If I can join in, why can’t he?

[Sakharam hits her again and again.]

DAWOOD. Sakharam, let her go.

[Sakharam takes a belt from the peg.]

SAKHARAM [to Laxmi]. Say it again. Just say it again.

[Straightens up, her body convulsed with pain.]

LAXMI. I’m only speaking the truth. A Muslim singing an aarti to Ganpati and in my house—

[Sakharam lashes at her with the belt.] (CPT 144-45)

The secular ideals of Sakharam get shattered at the end, when male ego and passion for domination come into play. The myth of his working class secularism is exploded once sexual jealousy wells up in him, after he learns about Champa’s indulgence with Dawood, his Muslim friend, which consequently leads to Champa’s murder (Pandey and Barua 35). His ego gets severely dented, as he is torn between his megalomania and maddening infatuation for Champa. A dominating male, who keeps destitute women in his house only for his sexual gratification and household work, finds their infidelity intolerable that too, based on mere suspicion.

Sakharam pretends to be a redeemer of the women, but actually he is just an egoistic epicure. This is where his politics lies. He is least bothered about the independence and feelings of the women in his house. He provides shelter to these women, because he uses them on his own terms and conditions. He turns out to be a ‘foul-mouthed womanizer’. He is the master of the house, and the woman has to obey his word like a slave. He asks Laxmi for pressing his legs just after her arrival in the house and reminds her of the custom in his house:

You heard me? The custom here is—to have my legs pressed before I go to sleep. They came and they went, but the custom hasn’t changed. And it won’t change, either! (CPT 132)
Michel Foucault sees power relations in everyday life, and in his account, power operates locally, circulates in the capillaries of the social body and emanates from every point in the social field. These meanings and practices are usually internalized by those who are at the receiving end, at the subordinate positions. Laxmi in Sakharam Binder not only accepts the domination of Sakharam, but admires him like god, ignoring all his misdeeds: “Please don’t send me away. Nowhere I can go. Nobody to turn to. I’ll do all the work. I don’t ask for anything just a roof over my head and to die in your lap” (CPT 182).

Lakshmi has to satisfy his excessive physical lust, and provide him with domestic comforts ungrudgingly. Her position shows how a woman is reduced to a helpless partner in a contractual arrangement, formalized originally on mutual understanding. Sakharam is not at all ready to listen to whatever Laxmi says or anyone else has to say. Whatevsoever may be the origin and background of a woman, the social obligation and pressure has to be observed by her. One can observe the domination, the power of the male during a conversation between the two:

SAKHARAM. Munsif be damned! Once a woman is thrown over, nobody calls her respectable. Remember that, I at least took you in... I had six before you. I disowned my own father. I wouldn’t let anyone boss over me. But I did listen to you, didn’t I? Didn’t I?

LAXMI. And you beat me in return. And cursed me and tortured me.

SAKHARAM. Then what did you expect me to do? Be your slave and lick your feet? (CPT 147, 150)

The actions of the characters and other events in Tendulkar’s plays are determined by the forces, which are inevitable and over which human beings have no control. Tennessee Williams’ A Streetcar Named Desire presents Stella and Stanley’s relationship based on anything but love, and the wife is physically abused by the husband. Stanley’s temper is something more than just an average temper that leads to smashing of things or even hurting Stella. Like him, Sakharam’s dichotomous attitude makes him violent towards the women he brings in. Heredity and environment are the determining forces that shape their nature, character, and behaviour.

These plays reflect the precariousness of the balance between man’s free will and predestination. They further throw light on the grim account of doings and
misdoings of the characters trapped in the grip of their animal like nature and sordid environment. Violence in masculine gender turns and pushes them into an insensible craze:

SAKHARAM. Hey! There, get up. Come on, get up. Are you going to get up or...? I’ll hit you now if you don’t get up. Get up, I said!

SAKHARAM. Laugh...Laugh like you did...

LAXMI. What? [drowsily]... It’s night yet.

SAKHARAM. First laugh... Laugh like you did...

LAXMI. What do you mean? Like what? God, I am so sleepy!

Haven’t slept at all two whole nights.

SAKHARAM. Sleep later. Laugh first. Laugh... the way you laughed when the ant was crawling on you. (CPT 141)

The personality of a child is not developed with conscious parental intention; rather he turns out to be a product of the social experiences. According to Nancy Chodorow, both the boys and the girls in the first few years are preoccupied with issues of separation and individuation. The socialization of boys tends to be oriented towards achievement and self-reliance and that of girls towards nurturance and responsibility. Girls are thus pressurized to be involved with and connected to others, boys to deny this involvement and connection (qtd. in Rosaldo and Lamphere 46, 55).

Sakharam Binder had run away from his house at an early age of eleven, just because of his father’s reprimand. He admits: “I ran away from home when I was eleven. Got fed up with my father’s beatings. Nothing I did ever seemed right. You would think I was his enemy or something. The way he would thrash me!” (CPT 127) However, the females in the play are not allowed the same independence, at an older age, even after getting married. They are rather thrown away from their houses. A quality of embeddedness in social interface and personal relationship characterizes women’s life as compared to that of men. Nancy Chodorow states that: “Right from childhood, the daughters participate in an intergenerational world with their mother, and often with their aunts and grandmother, whereas boys are on their own or participate in a single-generation world of age mates” (qtd. in Rosaldo and Lamphere 57).
The violent streak in Sakharam’s personality is probably a result of the frequent beatings he got from his father during his childhood. It can be argued that he indulges in violence against women because of his own experience of the oppressive and violent patriarchal relationship between himself and his father. Sakharam is very much conscious of his origin and he frequently spits his anger in his communication with other characters. On one occasion, he says to Laxmi:

There you are! Not born a Brahmin and yet you’ve a Brahmin’s ways! And me! Born in a Brahmin family, but I’m a Mahar, dirty scavenger...I see ...the gods? Must be around somewhere ...there were a couple of pictures. Don’t know if she took the lot with her. The one who came after her, she wasn’t interested. She used to worship her husband’s shirt. The man was out to kill her, but, as far as she was concerned, he was God... (CPT 127)

In a way, it is the violence in man and his relationships that gets directed at a woman. It is she who becomes the object of this violence, as the relationship between man and woman turns into a battlefield, with the odds loaded heavily against the latter. Sakharam’s character represents society in microcosm, where the dominant male reveals his brutal side when he uses violence (both verbal and physical) against the women in the play. As a man, he is part of higher echelons of social hierarchy, from where social norms are regulated. Tendulkar thus lays bare the inner and outer, psychological and social grounds of patriarchal heterosexual violence. Violence, whether it is physical or psychological, when used against women, is a consequence of gender relations taking men at a higher position than women. These expressions of violence take place in a man-woman relationship within the family, the community and the state as all these institutions fulfill critical and interactive functions in defining (socializing), maintaining (mechanizing) and legitimating (legalizing) the violence. Culture and society direct the development and propagation of violent behaviour in men.

A family, according to Gerda Lerner, plays an important role in creating a hierarchical system, as it not only mirrors the order in the state and educates its children, but also creates and constantly reinforces that order (217). It, therefore, becomes responsible for socializing the next generation for patriarchal values. The boys, like their fathers, learn to be dominating and aggressive and girls, who imitate
the demeanour of their mothers, learn to be caring, loving and submissive. These stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are not only social constructs but are internalized by both men and women. In the course of the play, Sakharam’s role shifts from a victim to rescuer and finally to persecutor; Laxmi becomes a persecutor from a victim and Champa oscillates between two contrary positions i.e. victim to rescuer, and again from rescuer to victim in the end. Sakharam, who is a master at one time, becomes a slave of Laxmi, while the latter who is a slave initially, turns into a master in the end.

All the characters in the play are shaped in line with cultural and social upheavals experienced by them. Sakharam, the protagonist, takes refuge in tobacco, liquor and inordinate mechanical sex in order to overcome his frustration and deformity. Cruel treatment of Champa by mother in the young age, and by her husband, later makes her coarse and violent. This is the way personality and the very life of a human being is determined and shaped by the circumstances and the culture in which he or she resides or he or she is a part of. Even a woman like Laxmi who appears to be ordinary, sympathetic, religious, sensitive, kind and generous becomes treacherous and vengeful at the end.

Through the character of Champa, Tendulkar questions the prevalent expectations of the masculine social stratum from the point of view of a woman. Champa’s obsession and consequent betrayal in Sakharam’s scheme of things is excruciating for him. The man in Sakharam wants to control the mysterious power that a woman like Champa, possesses. The will to control and dominate coaxes him to work against her. Consequently, he forces a woman to stay stagnant, running the household, rearing the children, and participate in religious rituals as an assistant to him. She has to bear his children and educate them in their traditional practices. A woman’s nature or prakrati is like the soil, where the man plants his seed to grow into “conjoined images” (Wadley 115). To maintain dominance a husband, the male, directs his wife to uphold the home and the family that he makes and provides to her.

In her Gender Trouble (1990), Judith Butler suggests that both sex and gender are socially constructed. The subjects are, therefore, formed and defined by the structures created by the institutions of power (34). The statement of existence of the subjects before the representation is used as an instrument to give legitimacy to social contract. Women are the subjects produced by institutions, thus paving way for social
construction and naturalizing its process. That Sakharam Binder keeps all those women in his house as mistresses who are deserted and cast off for no fault of theirs, or, who cannot bear children, or, who are not money bank, or, who are no longer useful to their husbands due to their growing age, is a representation of the social construction. Borrowing from social science, the important distinction between sex and gender, Kate Millett attacks the social scientists treating the culturally learned female characteristics (passivity, docility etc.) as natural and terms it to be an expression of ‘sexual politics’. Ideologically sexual politics obtains consent through socialization of both sexes to basic patriarchal polities with regard to temperament, role and status...temperament involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category...based on the needs and values of dominant group... (Millett 26).

Sakharam Binder’s masculinity in Tendulkar’s plays is projected as a weak and regressive force, prone to violence and marital aberration. His treatment of women as mere objects, whether it is Champa or Laxmi, is the consequence of cultural legacy. Kuhn argues that this cultural way of seeing a female body as a sex object has deep material and historical roots: “Whenever we look at painted, drawn, sculpted or photographed images of women, it is important for us to remind ourselves that images of women have traditionally been the province and property of men” (qtd. in Carilli and Campbell 4). Patriarchal systems ensure that the male gaze is internalized by women. Berger states that men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly, an object of vision: a sight (qtd. in Carilli and Campbell 5).

In Indian cultural system, women are further objectified since they are made to use things like purdah, bangles, mangal-sutra, sindoor, bindi etc. It is observed that either these are mandatory for women, or, they dignify their femininity, carrying certain associational symbolic values for them. In the Indian perspective, it is very important for a woman to wear the symbolic mangal-sutra to reveal her marital status. This fact is revealed by Laxmi, for whom marriage is a bond for life, envisaging sanctity and piousness:

My misfortune, I couldn’t keep the man I married. For me this one was my husband. I worshipped him. Even when I was away, I’d worship
him in silence every day. [Pulls out of her choli some black beads strung on a cotton thread. It is a mangal-sutra of sorts.] Look at this; I wore this in his name. I belong to him. If I have to be kicked, let him kick me; if I have to die, let me die on his lap—in full glory like a married woman... (CPT 187)

The married woman does not mind being kicked or let down by her husband, her very God. She is made to accept death as a suhagan prior to her husband peacefully. Bhagwati Prasad Vajpeyi in Anath Patni (1928) presents a woman who, even after her rejection by her in-laws, considers herself married. Though she later becomes a doctor, but remains devoted to the husband and is present on the day of her husband’s death (Das History 1911-1956 331-332). Here, towards the end of the play, Champa is killed by Sakharam in frenzy. He, along with Laxmi, devises a strategy to bury the dead body in the courtyard. Laxmi coaxes him to do so by showing the mangal-sutra she wears for him:

See—see here—I’ve worn this round my neck in your name—all these days. The man, who tied the first one, broke the bond, himself. I didn’t break it. She left her husband. She was unfaithful to you. You are a good man. God will forgive you. I’ll tell him. He listens to me. Wait. I’ll go and get the shovel. You keep sitting—I’ll be back. (CPT 197)

Certainly, all these symbols constitute a rigid code of bondage which is limited solely to women. Vrinda Nabar in Caste as Woman (1982) takes this symbolic value system critically: “It is a grim pointer to our blinkered perception of culture’s stranglehold that we see them without exception, as heavy with suggestions of romance, lyricism, beauty, enchantment, fulfillment etc. As long as we ignore their darker implications, they would continue as symbols of forms of oppression for a significant number of Indian women” (44).

In Indian patriarchal order, such a glorification of Indian womanhood certainly gets threatened by western education. Here a woman is taught to pray for death before her husband. Eventually, if her husband dies first, she is considered to be an outsider and suspected to be the mysterious cause of his demise. Being widowed, such a woman becomes a social anomaly without meaning or place. Politicized culture magnifies the role of a widow. A man as widower leads his life in complete freedom,
devoid of any obligation, whereas a woman as a widow has to face social taboos and acrimony, enforced by the males in the society.

Women are not only objectified symbolically, the control directs their conduct and overall ways of dealing with circumstances. They are supposed to work in accordance with the will of men. In Indian cultural and social set-up, women are not even supposed to name their husbands. The male in the society points out such cultural practices only to reinforce his expectations from the female:

SAKHARAM. Laxmi? [Gazing at her] Nice name that. And your husband's name?

[Laxmi silent. Presses his legs.]

SAKHARAM. Your husband's name?

[She continues to press his legs in silence.]

Why, of course! A good wife is not supposed to utter his name? I'm not used to all this!

[She sobs and puts a corner of her sari to her eyes.]

What's wrong? Oh, all right. I won't ask you. The whole lot of you! All alike where this one thing's concerned. Mention your husband’s name and your eyes begin to brim over with tears. He kicks you out of the house; he is out to squeeze the life out of you. But he's your God. You ought to worship a god like that with shoes and slippers! He should be whipped in public. Gods, eh? (CPT 133)

The inability to speak against the domination of patriarchal men sustain due to consensus offered by the women. Pointing to this subordination Gramsci believes that the subordinate groups are encouraged by the dominant group to negotiate reality within what are ostensibly the limits of common sense when, in actuality, this common sense is consistent with dominant norms, values and beliefs (qtd. in S Allan 79). Hegemony acts as a system of domination that induces consent in its subjects through ideology as Dominic Strinati in An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture (2004) explains:
It can be argued that Gramsci’s theory suggests that subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reason of their own. (154)

The compulsion for women to fall in line with household traditions has metamorphosed with a passage of time. All actions are not always determined or limited by the structures within which we find ourselves leading our lives. A lot of the time, we act because we are persuaded, compelled and desired to act in certain ways (Geetha 131). Feminists believe that this persuasion and obligation to act in a particular way requires to be challenged and gender roles are to be re-designed. The structures that we inhabit are not mere grids. The life worlds of structures come alive compromising all those acts and practices that grant meaning and relevance to our lives and we habitually call them ‘culture’. V. Geetha in Patriarchy (2007) states that such practices include acts of labour and love, relationships, practices of faith, authority and power. As far as patriarchal arrangements are concerned, it is culture we encounter when we attempt to delineate male and female roles and responsibilities (131-32).

Culture is occupied in the progression of producing and sustaining systems of meaningful forms, controls them in its interest and bends them to its purposes. We may broadly equate culture with notion of human consciousness by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature. Sherry B. Ortner opines that women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture. Since it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women are considered part of nature, then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not to say oppress them (qtd. in Rosaldo and Lamphere 73).

The patriarchal ideology is perpetuated by patriarchal creation of knowledge as is reflected education institutions, knowledge system and media which strengthen masculine supremacy. After breaking the shackles of colonial rule in Indian subcontinent, the system was delivered to the freedom fighters for initiation of new developmental policies. Education as the fundamental footing was expected to direct the course of social and economic progress during this phase. At this crucial time, certain patrilineal voices like Bal Gangadhar Tilak showed callousness for
women education calling it a threat to Hindutva. There was an insistence by Tilak for teaching of only hygiene, domestic economy, child nursing, cooking, sewing and so forth along with Puranas and other religious literature to women. He contemptuously declined certain subjects for women’s education:

As a girl of seven she hugged her baby doll however battered, old and ugly; as woman of twenty she clings to her newborn son... As to the women of future they must grow out of the women of the present... Now is this not we ask, exactly what we have been contending for...

Our shastras and customs require a girl to qualify herself for a married life and if our schools cannot give them necessary training they are worse than useless. Nothing can be gained by Anglicising our girls... a day will come when the managers of the school will be asked to reform their school. (qtd. in Bhattacharya 254)

In his attempt to understand this gender difference, Vijay Tendulkar, through his sacrificing protagonist Rama, who abides by all cultural obligations imposed by society, shows her struggle for existence in a family of petrifying human vultures. The second play titled Gidhade or The Vultures, a two-act play of seven dramatis personae, is replete with violent imagery consisting of blood, eeriness and mad raving. Gidhade (The Vultures) was made available in translation by Priya Adarkar, and it got its inaugural presentation on 29th May 1970 under the direction of Shri Ram Lagoo at Tejpal Theatre, Bombay (Madge 182). Rebuffing regularity of affectionate relationship, the family members here become vultures in the true sense of the word with their fierceness, callousness, covetousness and cunningness. It is a degenerated family, where all the members are full of contempt and jealousy for each other and do not miss any opportunity to quench their thirst for revenge.

Regarding the production of the play, Girish Karnad comments: “The staging of the play Gidhade can be compared to the blasting of bomb in an otherwise complacent marketplace” (qtd. in Tandon 158). In the same way Arundhati Banerjee opines: “Conservative sections of Maharashtrian society were stunned by the open display of illicit sexual relations and scenes of violence that constituted the plot” (qtd. in Wadikar 75). Tendulkar’s characters symbolize the voracious vultures. Their cupidity, vices and immorality substantiate their repulsive sensuality and domestic violence, manifesting the infernal atrocities of devilishness. While Ramakant and
Umakant are the harbingers of death, Rama signifies the triumph of life, facing the antagonism between the forces of life and death. Like John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, Tendulkar’s *The Vultures* foresees wickedness in its most extreme form, exposing the decay and death of hollow hearts of man. Tendulkar doesn’t find himself to be very different from Bosola, for whom man is a “dormouse, an undermining mole, an impudent snake” (Ribner 119).

Vijay Tendulkar, in *The Vultures*, elucidates a household saga of devoted housewife Rama, who is engaged all day long in meeting the demands of all the members of the family. In the same manner, P.K. Atre, in *Gharabaher* (1934), brings forward woman’s place in the home (Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 186). Rama is a kind-hearted woman who thinks and works for others. Ramakant, her husband proves to be an impotent running from one mystic to another to find probable virility to produce a child. Umakant, the younger brother is well aware of the fact of sterility of his brother, though the inability to produce a child is hammered upon poor Rama. She is consistently scolded under one pretext or the other. Still she doesn’t utter a word against this tyranny. It is she who wakes up earliest in the house, manages the house all alone and ultimately receives brutal treatment not only from the male members, but also from Manik, the other female member of the house. Like a faithful slave, she takes the instructions of the lord of the house, and other members of the family of vultures, incessantly without remonstration. Shanta Gokhale in “Tendulkar on his Own Terms” observes: “She is a sparrow. She is painted in the pastel shades of innocence and purity, goodness and willing subservience” (qtd. in Choudhury and Rajan 85).

Invariably, in most cultures and societies, women are consigned to the homes for labour and production, and men to the outer world to rule. Here, the home and hearth are conceptualized essentially as feminine space whereas the outer world of commerce, rule and war is seen as “man’s world”. A woman in India is designated as the queen of household, or its guardian angel in contrast to a man who is the protector and the guardian of the hearth and who brings income. Manu in *Manusmriti*, the key player in Hindu life, declares: “Where women are honoured, there gods are pleased. But where women are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards” (Buhler 58).

The valorization of the space of the home in cultural terms thus coexists with and masks the patriarchal devaluing women’s lived spaces, needs and tasks.
However, in the space of the home, women’s rights to equality, justice and dignity are routinely compromised (Kishwar in Geetha 147). This domesticity is called an enduring virtue and ideal, preventing them from imagining a meaningful life outside the context of home and family. Rama keeps on following the ideal of dealing with this household space in full conformity with utmost dedication. Women are tied to men and men end up valorizing these ties through metaphors of protection and care with their claim that they do such things only for the betterment of their women.

Perturbed over her life amongst vultures, Rama turns to Rajaninath, an illegitimate child in the family, for solace and consideration. Rajaninath is given a space in the house of the Pitale family although the relationship of Hari Pitale, the lord of the house, with his mother is seldom mentioned. Tendulkar tries to portray an intrepid woman in Rama’s character. Rama is not a fatalist, but ready to change her life and does not mind nurturing her healthy womb. Though the potency in her character gets enervated when the child she is carrying is forcibly aborted by her husband. Even her desire to produce a child is an internalization of patriarchal ideology in a woman as she is believed to be unfulfilling, lacking motherhood. She is considered fulfilling her duty, only after she becomes a mother. It is this motherhood of Rama that is pivotal in the play. She acknowledges a full femininity only after becoming a mother:

It is not the fault of doctors, of learned men, of saints and sages! It’s not even my fault! This womb is healthy and sound, I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil is rich, it’s hungry. But the seed won’t take root. (CPT 241)

With the emergence of intellectual and philosophical revolutions, especially in the twentieth century, representation of motherhood has also radically changed. Swami Vivekananda has eulogized: “The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood—that marvelous, all-suffering, unselfish, ever-forgiving mother. The wife walks behind the shadow. She must imitate the life of the mother; that is her duty. But the mother is the ideal of life, she rules the family, she possesses the family” (qtd. in Sahu 159). Likewise, K.R. Sujatha and S. Gokilavani elucidate the conditioning of women in motherhood and opine: “The nature of motherhood is dependent on the cultures and societies that have moulded them. Indian motherhood is
inculcated in the woman from the day of her birth. She is raised to look forward to nothing else and she rates her worth by her efficiency to fulfill this role” (147).

The prevalent ideology of motherhood confirms mothering to be essential to women incessantly glorifying their representations. The tenderness of motherhood is considered as the chief defining quality of a woman. Times to time these orthodox representations are reinforced by their recurrence in literature. Sudhir Kakar in his *The Inner World* (1978) annotates motherhood: “Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or region, whether she is a fresh young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infancies already, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her such a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant borne and nurtured by her safely in childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and redemption” (56).

The sexuality of a woman is channelled into legitimate motherhood within a lightly controlled structure of reproduction to ensure patrilineal succession (Uchikoboriti 69). In *Women, Culture and Society* (1974), Rosaldo and Lamphere argue that an emphasis on women’s maternal role leads to universal opposition between ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ roles that is necessarily asymmetrical; women confined to domestic sphere do not have access to the sorts of authority, prestige and cultural value which is the prerogative of men (8). Patriarchal societies proliferate motherhood, therefore, restricts women’s mobility encumbering them with task of rearing children. The family system where they are asked to devote themselves by educating and raising children transforms the biological factors to sociological one.

Ramakant, a product of such a patriarchal system, lacks civility in his character as he abuses and beats the poor gardener who comes for payment for his work. Due to excessive drinking, he becomes impotent and loses the established business gifted by his father. He is fond of gambling and doesn’t follow any moral or legal constraint for fulfilling self-interest. Umakant, the younger brother, grabs lion’s share from his father in the division of property and has loose morals, someone who can sit at his sister’s buts. He regularly abuses her and mocks her for her promiscuity: “Climb and rolls all over town and then sits scrubbing herself” (*CPT* 214). He doesn’t even spare his brother and forewarns him to disclose his impotency. They are critical of each other and quarrel over trivial issues. In response to a comment by younger brother on his unmarried status, a spat takes place:
UMAKANT [trembling with rage]. Shut up! Don’t bring my personal life into this, Ramya. If you open your trap again, I’ll...I’ll smash it open for you! [Catches tight hold of Ramakant.]

RAMAKANT [freeing himself]. Try it and see.

UMAKANT [retreating]. Just leave me alone, I am telling you. For the last time. (CPT 213)

The behaviour of Ramakant and Umakant towards their sister, and, their hunger for money, is parallel to Friedrich Engel’s line of thinking. Both the brothers are crazy after money and have presumptuous to even push their own sister for an inhuman bargain with her man. They have no qualms about blackmailing the person with whom their unmarried sister is going around:

RAMAKANT. Why shouldn’t we blackmail that Hondur chap? Ourselves?

UMAKANT [scornfully]. Into marrying Manik?

RAMAKANT. Oh, no, no, no! Not that brother. Hear me. She is pregnant. If you want her fixed, put down the money. Cash down. Twenty thousand, what? More if you like. Otherwise, bloody publicity! Uproar in the bloody newspapers! Let us have a go. (CPT 236)

The patriarchal brothers are full of jealousy and contempt for the unmarried sister, who, according to them, is a burden on the family. For the Marxist thinkers, gender relations are located within systems of production and reproduction that characterize different societies and which have historically evolved to take the present dominant form of capitalism. Engels locates the source of women’s subordination, not in biological differences but in the emergence of private property and in women themselves being rendered as a form of property. In this view then, gender inequality is not universal and arises under particular socio-historical situations (9). Recurrent ill-treatment of Manik and the rancorous dialogues directed against her, reveal the poor state of a woman, though she may otherwise be self-confident and from a well-to-do family. Umakant’s repugnance towards his real sister is evident when he remarks:

Why did that cow have to be in such a hurry to block the bathroom? Not a hope now of her coming out for an hour! Thinks herself a beauty
queen at the best of times! And now she is after that raja of Hondur, she has got above herself! As if that sacred elephant would look twice at this poor man’s mare! Hopes that lecher will make her his lawful queen, if you please. (CPT 213)

The inhuman scavenging leads to lack of mutual trust among the family members. Manik, a paranoid, is also self-centered and no different from her brothers. She is in her thirties, smokes cigarettes, drinks liquor, engulfs down pills and appears hysterical. She accuses her brothers of maneuverings to get rid of her in sharing ancestral property. If the brothers are critical, their sister doesn’t lag behind and shares her suspicions:

When I had typhoid last year, far from looking after me, you’d all plotted to put poison in my medicine... I was careful. That is what saved me! I just refused my medicine. I wouldn’t even drink water. That’s what saved me. I never slept. Even in the dark, I never closed my eyes for a second. That is how I survived. (CPT 208)

All these characters are ready to go to any extent to satisfy their greed. N.S. Dharan calls them “embodiments of hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery” (qtd. in Prasad and Barbuddhe 134). They are representatives of modern materialistic culture. Arundhati Banerjee in Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar remarks that the characters in the play The Vultures “are victims of viciousness”. In an assenting voice, Dr Shree Ram Lagoo, an eminent actor and director of the play, considers the characters as ‘victims of cultural degradation of society’ (qtd. in Wadikar 62).

The daughter of the house Manik is outspoken and confident but is not rewarded with due importance. Instead she is charged of being fickle minded. She asks for her rights and is wary of the control her brothers exercise over her life. In an incident, she reveals her frenzy in front of her sister-in-law:

You don’t have to tell me that! Any witch will bear witness to the devil! He will give your name. You will give his... It is not as if one thousand is a burden for me. I just thought that for their one and only sister—but who wants a sister round here? Since the division your husband even charges me board and lodging! I suppose I am lucky he doesn’t flourish a knife at me. And get away with my share at night! That much for him! (CPT 208)
The cultural subordination of women is revealed in their linguistic practices as they are expected to learn to speak in a specific way. When public speech is concerned men master an intangible and formal style of speaking but women are understood to be unaware of the subtleties of gracious language. An overall general view regarding women and whole of the feminine gender is provided in tone and mannerism of Ramakant when they all are engaged in a game of playing cards: “Does not understand the game at all! These women—they just hold their cards in their hands, and throw them down. That’s all their game is. No bloody brains” (CPT 234). Women are called as cultural idiots who blurt out what they mean. Ideologically, they are considered inferior. Men get together murmuring evasive words of circumspect opinion whereas women influence public verdict by shouting. Manik a woman though dominates over another woman yet is not permitted to use the same tone with the males in the house. However, when Umakant, her brother calls her names Manik does not remain calm and reveals her anger:

MANIK [catching hold of Umakant’s neck]. Who you are calling a cow, Umya? You are not worth four paise yourself! Mind your tongue, I am telling you. Don’t run away because I am a woman!

UMAKANT [freeing his neck and hitting her on the buttocks]. You…a woman?

RAMAKANT. What is the evidence?

MANIK. You bastards! You have no shame! Bloody ruffians! (CPT 215)

The visible protest in a woman character in this play is the result of the fact that she has been reared among “vultures”. Though Manik is on the side of the vultures, she does not get a special status in the family. Her masculine tendency, in form of her rage, is an indication of the impact of society and family on an individual irrespective of his or her sex.

Ramakant aborts Manik’s illegitimate child by kicking her and later Ramakant and Manik abort Rama’s illegitimate child leaving her “empty of pain and empty of desires”. Feminists would really be disturbed with such savagery of one woman at the hands of another. While responding to a query on women supporting the rule of men, Kamala Bhasin says that women are very much part of the system, they internalize its
values, they are not free from the hold of patriarchal ideology, and they obviously derive benefits from it, too. In order to retain privileges, women are continually renegotiating their bargaining power, so to speak, sometimes at the cost of other women (15-16). Gerda Lerner, similarly, believes patriarchy to be a system of benevolent “paternalism” which is an unwritten contract for exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for subordination in all matters, sexual service and unpaid domestic service given by the female (240). The obedient women are given certain rights, privileges and security making the subordination invisible and leading to their connivance in it. This is why Manik joyously takes revenge on her sister-in-law, though the perpetrator is her own brother:

I have done it...I have done it as I planned...I cut lemon...I rubbed the ash. Seven times on my loin and my stomach! It’s going to abort—sister-in-law’s baby’s going to abort—Ramya’s brat going to abort—it won’t live. It won’t live! (CPT 260)

The very nature or svabhava of women compels them to be irredeemably weak, feckless and over-promiscuous. However, they might yet aspire to cling to stridharma (ethics for women) to become obedient and submissive wives, obligated ex parte by marriage contract. Uma Chakraborty in Gendering Caste (2003) points out that the ideological level of effectuating the control of women was made possible through the schooling of women in stridharma or pativratadharma; wifely codes were internalized by women who attempted to live up to the idealized notions of pativrata constructed by the ideologues of society. Pativrata, the specific dharma of Hindu wife, then became the ideology which women accepted, and even aspired to, chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood (73-74).

In Indian cultural milieu, a woman is supposed to perform certain duties in a marital and filial relationship. Rama also takes up this ideal role, and looks after every trivial demand of the family members. On one such occasion, she comes across the disparagement of the sister-in-law Manik, who sarcastically advises her that it is only her duty to wake up everyone in the house in morning. Manik says: “Fine! I thought as much! I thought you would do this! I told you again and again last night, wake me at seven! But that is if could stand to see others prospering” (CPT 207).

After the marriage, the bride and bridegroom, according to Praskara Grhyasutra, become a single existence and merge their individuality into one unit.
From contemporary literature, it is evident that marrying off a daughter was considered an obligation, which the parents must discharge and the society did not approve of grown up girls remaining unmarried (Omprakash 271). Manik’s overage for marriage corresponds to the marital obligation for a woman. Her unmarried status draws her brothers’ flak and wrath, and becomes the source of conflict in the family, which pushes Manik towards delirium. But men are free of such obligations.

Similarly, a divorce has initially been a tool in the hands of dominating men to reprimand women of certain abilities. Baudhayana says that a husband should divorce an issueless wife in the tenth year, one who gives birth only to daughters in the twelfth year, one whose children die soon after their birth in the fifteenth year but he can divorce a quarrelsome wife immediately after marriage. Manu goes to the extent of saying that the husband can divorce his wife without any fault of hers and inflict corporal punishment on her. A long list of lapses on the part of wife is given by him, whereas law-givers like him do not give the right of divorce to a wife (Omprakash 272). That may be one reason why a woman like Rama has to adjust in a family like hers without questioning. The cultural inheritance of feminine traits by a woman hinders the very idea of divorce by a woman like her.

There is a sharp disparity between two women, Manik and Rama, portrayed by Tendulkar in this play; but both of them are losers in one or the other way. Women may internalize the patriarchal ideology, as mentioned by Kamala Bhasin and they are given some weightage by their masculine counterpart eloquently, but ultimately they are at the receiving end and face marginalization. Manik, it seems, gets due advantage but she is targeted and ridiculed by her brothers for remaining unmarried for a long time up to a critical age, when it becomes difficult for them to find a good match for her. Family honour for the social and cultural constructions of patriarchy makes the members work against freedom of underprivileged women of the family. Women are compelled to negotiate between ideas of right and wrong sexuality. The linguistic and cultural dyad of the promiscuous woman versus the chaste woman is central to how societies attempt to define and regulate female behaviour. Indeed, this dyad exists at the very core of patriarchal reasoning and arrangements, inducing as it does notions of guilt and fear in women, forcing them to take responsibility for their submissive social status. Often, this is present in the structure and practice of language itself, and every
time we use words that refer derogatorily to promiscuity or loftily to chastity we naturalize notions of appropriateness and inappropriate female behaviour (Geetha 135).

These vultures are too much after materialistic pursuits and spit venom against one another. Hari Pitale, the father usurps the factory of his younger brother Sakharam; and later he himself gets the similar treatment from his sons. He has developed himself by means of his hard work and cunningness. At this stage of his life, he is unable to accept the attitude of working class who, for him, “need a kick as they rise and a curse as they sit” (CPT 208). He is also unscrupulous in his dealings as he has a bastard son. He doubts that his son Ramakant will spoil the business with his crooked deals. His bitterness, caused by his ill treatment at the hand of sons, finds ventilation when he says: “But I am your own father, after all! If I die I’ll become a ghost. I will sit on your chest! I won’t let you enjoy a rupee of it” (CPT 209).

They are not bothered even to push their old father on the ground. For them, he is a confounded nuisance and a ‘bloody burden to the earth’. They are, in fact, waiting for his death. At an instance when they bay for the blood of their father, Ramakant, the elder one can only mock at the old man’s plea for mercy: “Papa, papa! As the seed, so the tree! Did we ever ask to be produced?” (CPT 211) Samik Bandopadhyay states: “The violence in The Vultures is played out in a different kind of entrapment, not the chancy, accidental kind that comes with a defective lock, but a conventionally/socially determined entrapment, viz. that of family” (qtd. in K Chakraborty 103).

Manik, the vulture sister, living her life in her own way, is engaged with Raja of Hondur and carries his illegitimate child. The inhuman brothers even kick her in the belly when they come to know about the death of the man from heart attack and their lost opportunity to grab money from him. For these violent men, it is hard enough to engulf and accommodate an unmarried sister reaching an age of thirty-five. There is an absurd alteration in marital age for girls with advancement in time. In Vedic times, girls apparently were married off after they were physically mature, since procreation was the main purpose of marriage. With the passage of time, however, child marriage gained acceptance and prominence. Chastity in women steadily swapped progeny as the essential expectation of marriage. The conversation between two brothers reveals how unmarried girl in a house is seen as a burden:
RAMAKANT. She is bloody thirty-five years old...and couldn’t care less for the family’s name!

UMAKANT. But I will tell you one thing. If I were in her place, I would have got at least twenty-five thousand out of him, for sure!

RAMAKANT. Who knows? Maybe she will, too! She is a smart girl that way, our little Manik! Experienced! (CPT 215)

Among the high-caste Brahmins of south India, marital knot is seen as a necessity as well as a terrible fact of a woman’s maturity. Girls are pitied by their parents for their imminent fate and even before their puberty, they are married off into a group lacking their kinswomen. They are subordinated to a hostile mother-in-law, and denied a role in production activities to ensure their purity and exclusive attachment to a single male. Such an attitude is shared by women in the western cultures as well. Tennessee Williams in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, introduce Maggie and Brick who live together, but are married only in name. Maggie becomes an outcast of society since her marriage doesn’t produce any child as her husband, an alcoholic, rejects and hates her. The proposal of her husband to go to someone else cannot be accepted by the dedicated wife forcing her to become a cat on the hot tin roof in the marital relationship. Rama, on the contrary, refutes the family configuration she is awarded and takes refuge in Rajninath’s emotional support and facilitations. She is criticized for her disagreement with the cultural code and conception as she indulges with her brother-in-law. Women in marital obligations are supposed to carry certain hopes and dreams for their new homes. However, the home where they enter does not fulfill their expectations. Rama goes under the same experience:

Then she stepped over, the bridal measure,
And crossed the threshold, of her new home.
But it was no home. Not a home, but a hole in a tree
Where vultures lived, in the shapes of men. (CPT 204)

Patriarchal propositions drive Indian women to follow their husbands faithfully. Muktabai Dikshit’s *Jugar* (1950) with its Ibsenian technique provides the iniquitous position of women in marriage (Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 189). Even American writer, Clare Boothe Luce in her satirical comedy *The Women* talks about ideal women who bear children and rely on their husbands financially and are
expected to be perfectly happy in this role. Unpredictably, they are asked to leave their homes and awarded a new environment among the strangers, their new relatives. Whenever the changed atmosphere does not suit them, they are turned into “stony statues” of emotions and the traditional biases do not allow them to protest. The status of Rama is specified in the same manner by her brother-in-law in his poetic emotional outburst: “So Rama went away. A statue of emotions chilled to stone. Alive, she followed after, that living death, her master, with the dogged loyalty, of a barren beast” (CPT 201).

These constructions or social practices are legitimized at another level by religion and religious institutions, considering male authority regarding family, marriage, divorce and inheritance inherently superior. Religion is a strong force for culture, as Emile Durkheim calls it to be a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one moral community (qtd. in Thompson 104). Most religions endorse patriarchal values and all major religions have been interpreted and controlled by men of upper caste and class. The imposition of purdah (veil), restrictions on leaving the domestic space, separation between public and private are all gender specific, used only on women, thereby controlling the mobility of women. They have no right to decide whether they want to be mothers, when they want to be so, the number of children they want to have, whether they can use contraception or terminate a pregnancy and so on and so forth (Bhasin 6).

Rajninath, Rama’s rescuer and supporter, overburdened with the pressure of his step-brothers does not protest in this traditional family set up. He is an abandoned solitary fellow who is furious at his illegitimacy and contemptuous of his father and siblings. He feels that the people in the house are “men accursed...or else the vultures cursed to live their lives as men” (CPT 265). He is aware of Rama’s plight and only feels sorry for her life, when she leaves her house with husband, overburdened with debts. He doesn’t refuse whatever she brings to him, rather incites her by saying: “If you took mud in your hand, it would turn to sweetmeats” (CPT 239). As a typical product of patriarchal society, he is least bothered for an underprivileged woman, the “barren beast, the innocent doe and the mangy dog” for him. He is an inactive character in the play, and finds himself to be a useless worm neutral towards the inhumanity of this family “for twenty-two long years” (CPT 205).
A woman in conventional roles is not threatening. Problem arises in the patriarchal hegemony when she remonstrates. The strong reaction against the “new” woman finds place in P.B. Bhave’s *Vishkanya* (1944) and *Swamini* (1956) for whom an ideal woman is one who doesn’t question the existing moral code and submits herself to her lord and master (Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 190). A woman who is a wife and a mother is benign. Ramakant, one of the vultures, pretends to be a caring husband for his wife Rama, especially when he becomes aware of her motherhood. He says:

> Its’ just a few more days now. The four months will pass by in a flash. What’s there to it! Then her majesty’ll be in ecstasies. Playing with her little prince! You won’t know how the time passes. Then even bloody husband is not welcome to a wife. The baby…the baby…and the baby! That’s all! (CPT 249)

In men’s world, danger is perceived when a woman fails to bear children or when her husband or children have died. The issueless Rama is tormented by Ramakant, her husband, for not giving him a son as the cultural obligation prompts him to run the progeny with a male child. Here, in the domestic background, a man always wants sons to keep his and his forefathers’ name moving. Usually, the desire for getting a male child is stronger in the males in Indian milieu, irrespective of their earnings and financial status. At one instance, Rama too confirms this desire of her husband in her rendezvous with step-brother:

> Every day a new mystic, a swami, an astrologer, a doctor—rubbing your head at the feet of every lump of stone he tells you to. Stretching out a begging hand to them. Asking them the same, same question. Quietly enduring whatever sacred ash, ash of incense, talisman, performing whatever useless vows or diets they may give you. And the truth…that is known to my heart alone, and to God. (CPT 241)

She is made to run to various persons and institutions for the same purpose and has to undergo multiple experimentations and still has to face the brunt of vindictive husband. A similar patriarchal attitude of the father is highlighted by Sri Ande Narayana Swami in a Telugu short story “Putra-Santanam” (The Male Child) who has been cruel towards his daughters and is delighted at the birth of a male child after four daughters though he finds support only from his daughters ultimately (Das
Rama opposes such visits as she is aware of his infertility, but cannot overcome the pressure as is revealed by the conversation:

RAMA. What is the use?

RAMAKANT. Use...what bloody use? You are a fool! So far, we have kissed the feet of at least twenty swamis. In other words, we should have had twenty kids, at least! Rama dear, it’s all luck, you know. Man proposes, God disposes. But let’s just go, this evening. Just for bloody fun. (CPT 212)

Where, there is a dichotomy in private and public sphere of activities, and where they are isolated from one another and placed under single man’s authority, the status of women is subsidiary. They may try and raise their position. But it is known as the men’s world, as the public world is a creation of their own. In Sakharam Binder, Champa is in demand because of her body, but she is criticized for her lack of interest in household work even by a rowdy man like Sakharam. She is condemned as she is devoid of feminine qualities. Rosaldo believes that in an egalitarian society, this dichotomy is weak and limited, and sex roles are softened. If a man is involved in domestic labour, in child care and cooking, he is unable to establish the authority and distance. When public decisions are made in the household, women are eventually awarded a legitimate public role (39). A woman is made to recognize that men and women should be equals and even companions, but in the same breath she is also told to value men for their work. The intrusive acceptance of a woman’s own devaluation attests that woman as a cognizant human and member of culture, has followed out the logic of cultural arguments and has reached culture’s conclusion along with men. De Beauvoir incidentally puts it: “A woman joins men in the festivals that celebrate the successes and victories of the males” (96).

This kind of belief is visible in Rama, who faces such an awful control over her in this house. Dina Mehta’s Brides are not for Burning (1993) based on dowry deaths in which Lakshmi married to Vinod, a businessman’s son, is burnt to death for insufficient dowry, is dedicated to “all the angry young women” and “who can be whatever they choose to be” (Dodiya 133). Rama is not a part of this angry women generation. She, instead, suffers a lot and is turned into nothingness. Persistent domination by in-laws in one way or the other freezes her tears and dries up her desires:
A crumpled nothing. Left her a stark insanity of stone
Frozen from her tears. Empty of pain
And empty of desires. And, on the swinging branch
Of her rotted hopes, five vultures. (CPT 206)

Ramakant not only torments her physically, but also psychologically. He hates his step-brother Rajaninath and doesn’t want his wife Rama even to serve him tea and meals. He directs his wife:

Why are you standing here? Go...go inside. Do your work. Work is important. And look here...remember this. From today, the poet’s tea is out! Let him drink ink. I-n-k ink. A cupful, morning and evening. Excellent for health. A tonic. No joke. (CPT 217)

Within Indian culture, the artificially constructed differences are passed on from one generation of women to another, mother to daughter, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, and so on. The claustrophobic avenues for education prevent girls from obtaining anything but the most pedagogical details of knowledge. For any kind of support women have to fall back on other women, not men. Vrinda Nabar regards such dependence of women of one generation upon an earlier one as insignificant: “It has perpetuated forms of oppression by turning women into categories which define what it means to be caste as women” (37).

It is evident that the representation of women in Indian literature and history is based on their image, discerned and maintained by males according to their own perceptions. When historical records are maintained due importance is given to the lives and work of males—swamis, teachers, and philosophers etc. On the contrary, people who take on the task of assuring the welfare of their families and women are rarely ever mentioned. Until very recently, men have been free to develop philosophies and movements, while women were forced into more limited roles preserving and protecting their loved ones. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan in her Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism (1993) states that the construction of women in terms of recognizable roles, images, models, and labels occurs in discourse in response to specific social imperatives even where it may be offered in terms of the universal and abstract rhetoric of women (123). The analysis of the female characters created in male literature is important because it provides role
models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable version of the ‘feminine’ and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. This can make the readers see what kind of role the women and men would have occupied in relation to each other. A scrutiny of the roles in which men place those fictional women, one can examine the “cultural ‘mind-set’ in men and women which perpetuates cultural inequality” (Barry 122).

Tendulkar becomes liberal to Rama in awarding her some individuality, as she shares her feelings with her brother-in-law, Rajaninath. She acknowledges the pain she has been enduring right from the beginning of her marital life. The cultural obligations have only amplified her helplessness, dragging her to the threshold of insanity. She confesses:

Every day, a new death. Every minute, a thousand, million deaths. A pain like million needles stuck in your heart. Blinding you, maddening you with pain... You cannot endure them. But you cannot pull them out. You cannot support them. But you cannot throw them away... A million, million needles like that, each second. Endless seconds like that, each day... So many years like this I’ve endured. So many. A lifetime...without one word! Not one tear. Not a single weakness. I didn’t complain. I didn’t show even displeasure... I am afraid that one day, I may lose control. For even one second. And then streams of blood will flow from my eyes. Shreds of my guts and fragments of my heart will fall from my mouth. Then nothing will remain. Nothing at all!... Those women long ago who used to commit sati, we’re all praise for them. They used to burn themselves alive—in loyalty to their dead husbands. But only once. Once they were burnt they escaped. But I, Bhaiya, in this living death of my wifehood—I commit sati every moment! I burn! I am consumed! (CPT 240-242)

Once she gathers all her strength and remonstrates decisively:

Let the world say what it wants. I don’t care! I mean, perhaps one should set oneself on fire. Or else give him something—I mean poison—something fatal—like bad women in stories and novels give to good men. So he will never get up again. So he will never again show me to any new swami, astrologer or healer. (CPT 242)
Unlike Nana Jog’s play *Bharati* in which a suffering young woman virtually bought by a rich, old man in the name of marriage, has a mental breakdown and loss of her speech permanently; the protagonist in Tendulkar’s play doesn’t sit silent (qtd. in Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 189). But in Indian cultural context, such protests are whipped heavily. An absolute surrender becomes inevitable. Rama capitulates in the same breath: If the joy of being a mother is not to be mine, then let me at least live as a good wife. I am weak. I am timid. Despicable. Useless. Quite, quite useless (*CPT* 242). At last, when Rama plans to settle all afresh and looks for a new home and new life, Ramakant smashes her very idea saying:

> Look here, Rama! In this house, we are not accustomed to listening to any smartness from women! No man in our family’s been a bloody hen-pecked husband, what? I know very well indeed what to do, what not to do. No need for a woman to teach me sense. (*CPT* 251)

Tendulkar drifts away from the traditional pattern of Indian womanhood, while creating his ‘bold’ character in Rama, as this extramarital affair for a woman is considered to be the ugliest face of womanhood in Indian society. The rules are different for men. Rama’s relationship with her brother-in-law is taken to be the most unsocial act on part of women. At last, the male partner succeeds in escaping himself, while she suffers alone for her act. She is made highly susceptible, magnanimous and good hearted by the author.

Through this presentation, the playwright stands with Rama as he is capable of deriving compassion from the audience/readers for this character. In her character, Tendulkar has painted a sympathetic picture of a woman, who is made to suffer, for her only wish is to be loved and honoured. With *Gidhade*, Tendulkar’s vision of the family has become more violent. Here, he has gone one step ahead to demonstrate the bestiality and monstrosity of people in a family, living in a nauseatingly consumerist world. The family of Ramakant, Umakant, Manik, their father and uncle and the illegitimate son of their father represent the decomposing state of the family, where even the outward facade of decency has evaporated and what remains to be seen is the naked play of desires to possess, own, gain money and destroy another human being (*M Pandit* 12).

These two plays discussed in this chapter are significantly comprehensive with questions of women’s symbolic beautification—their physical attributes and their
psychological fulfillment via motherhood. Lakshmi is thrown out of her house for her inability to provide an offspring, whereas Rama has to struggle hard by moving from one swami to another for the same, and ultimately she has to go to her brother-in-law in search of solace. Tendulkar’s representation of politics within the ambit of culture is undoubtedly stimulating in both the plays, whether it is destitute women in Sakharam Binder or underprivileged daughter-in-law Rama in The Vultures. Advocating the pluralistic notion of culture, Dr. Amartya Sen in his “How Culture Matters” asserts that culture brings social solidarity and association and profoundly influences the working of the society, including the care of its less fortunate members [women] as well as preservation and guardianship of common assets (qtd. in Rao and Walton 41). For him, rapid-fire cultural generalization can not only destabilize a clear understanding of the role of culture, but also serve as a device of sectarian prejudice, social bias, and even political despotism.

Tendulkar’s plays denote the trajectories of the society’s stance towards masculinity and femininity and culture that perpetuates gender ideology, thus encoding the social and cultural construction of gender. By creating a microcosm of violence in Indian family and society in dramatic terms, Tendulkar externalizes various points of conjuncture and disjuncture between individual and society. He projects women as victims of this power and violence simultaneously, raising questions about gender representations in cultural milieu that directly or indirectly exalt male authority and inspire men to develop a belief that they are mentally, physically and spiritually superior to women and carry forward perpetuation of gender subjectivity. In both the plays, destruction of females, outside and within home, results from anachronistic impositions of an ineffective and corrupt male will, embodied in Sakhraram in Sakharam Binder and Umakant and Ramakant in The Vultures. Historical and mythological ‘representations’ of women should be in accordance with contemporary secular and rational needs, instead of how it has been portrayed so far. In the contemporary global, modernistic, pluralistic and secular world, there is a need to look into the obsolete and illogical traditions and customs that require a complete refurbishing to provide women opportunities to stand in equality with men. The next chapter analyses the search for women’s individuality and identity and consequent politics.