POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Ain’t I a woman?

Sojourner Truth

I am too intelligent, too demanding, and too resourceful for anyone to be able to take charge of me entirely. No one knows me or loves me completely. I have only myself.

Simone de Beauvoir

Cogito ergo Sum (I think, therefore I am)

Rene Descartes

By using the expression cogito, Descartes puts emphasis on identity, as it is through this “I” alone that one can make a philosophical claim of recognizing and being recognized as the ‘self’ or claim to have an “identity”. Being at the center of meaning, a human being has the potential of thinking and raising doubts, thus making her existence reasonable. Her scientific and systematic approach towards everything leads her to the absolute truth. For a human being, there always comes a distinction of body and mind and after distrust of both, mind is given the upper hand. It is the mind that makes her conscious of her existence and asks her to recognize her ‘self’, her identity. Sojourner Truth (Isabella Baumfree), an African American abolitionist and women’s rights activist, in her extemporaneous speech—well known as “Ain’t I a Woman?” asks for her existence to be recognized as a woman, while Beauvoir claims her identity as an intelligent and thinking ‘self’.

An individual is enmeshed in a unique combination of social categories and social identities, thus making her concept of ‘self’ also unique. In the context of social structure, people name one another and thus invoke meanings in forms of expectations with regard to others’ and one’s own behavior. Identity can be classified on the basis of caste, nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, ‘identity’ is ‘the quality or condition of being the same; the absolute or essential sameness, oneness...individuality, personality...the condition of being identified in feeling, interest, etc.’ In Social Cognition: An Integrated Introduction, it is stated that identity originates from distinguishing me from the ‘other’, thus giving rise to two types of identities, i.e. personal identity, that refers to characteristics that we see in ourselves and that are strictly individual, for
instance the character traits; and social identity, an individual’s self-image that derives from the acknowledgement of belonging to a certain social group (Augoustinos, Walker and Donaghue 25).

According to McCall and Simmons, identity is a behavior influenced by self, whereas a role identity is “imaginative view (a person has) of himself as he likes to think of himself, being and acting as an occupant” of a particular social position (qtd. in Burke and Stets 39). This ‘self’ is reflexive, as it takes itself as an object and categorizes or classifies itself in relation to others. Concomitantly, identity is how people come to see themselves individually and as members of a particular group. At an individual level, a person asks himself who he is, and where he has come from. Social Identity, on the other hand, talks of one’s belonging to a particular social group. Amartya Sen in Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (2007) deliberates over the idea that human beings have numerous identities and traits such as nationality, race, religion, community and class, which form the basis of how they construct “identity” in particular framework and at certain junctures. An attachment to a particular group and perceiving things in interest of that group signifies a social identity. Identity, at an individual, social, or institutional level, is something that we are constantly constructing and conferring all through our lives, by interaction with others.

Identity as defined by Hogg and Abrams is the “concepts and recognition of people who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” whereas for Berger and Luckmann it is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world... [A] coherent identity incorporates within itself various internalized roles and attitudes (qtd. in Arora and Awasthy 229-30). Identity also emerges as a kind of ‘unsettled space’ or ‘an unresolved question’ in that space in a number of intersecting discourses. It is a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action...the logic of something like a ‘true self.’ Identity is a process; identity is split and is not a fixed point, but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the ‘other’ to oneself (Hall and du Gay 16).

Bucholtz and Hall define identity as something which is context-bound, indexically rooted in ideological structures, beliefs and values, always partial and discontinuous and perhaps more importantly, as “intersubjectively constructed
through several, often overlapping, complimentary relations” (qtd. in Angouri and Marra 5). There may be several identities of an individual as mentioned by P.J. Burke in his essay “Identity Change” and each of these identities subscribes to a different set of rules, depending on the group they associate with. For example, many of us hold multiple identities as a parent, a spouse, a child, a professional in a particular discipline, member of a religious body etc. Each of these identities has a set of normative behaviors that act as a standard for membership in that group. Moreover, it is acknowledged that individuals belong to varied groups and so take on a variety of identities, defined by their memberships in these groups. These identities, according to Milner, however, are not fixed but are rather “multifaceted in complex and contradictory ways; tied to social practice and interaction as flexible and contextually contingent resources; and tied to processes of differentiation from other identified groups” (qtd. in K Hall 41). One’s individual self can be compared to the normative actions of the group through the method of feedback and introspection. Warren argues that ‘ideologies have wide range of identity implications’ thus ‘providing moral framework for social relations and individual experience’ (qtd. in Stryker, Owens and White 98).

It becomes mandatory to understand how identity can be created or deformed when the self comes in contact with significant others. Apart from individual, on the social plane, one can observe a continuous politics of equal recognition. Both planes have been formed by the growing ideal of authenticity, and acknowledgment plays an indispensable part in the culture that has developing around this ideal. Identity is within discourse, within representation. It is constituted in part by representation. In Identity and Difference (1997), Woodward argues: “Representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and of who we are and these symbolic systems create the possibilities of what we are and what we can become. Representation as a cultural process establishes individual and collective identities” (14). Identity is a narrative of the self; it’s the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are. We impose a structure on it. The most important effect of this notion of ‘identity’ is the surreptitious return of difference. Identity is a game that ought to be played against difference and it is to be understood in relation to difference (Hall and du Gay 16).
Identity is interrelated to power and knowledge, as conceptualized by the postmodernists, who lay emphasis on the deconstruction of mythical representations. Thus instead of groups, individuals become significant. For Foucault, the individuals are more important than grand theories like class and gender. He declares that progress is relative and not always inevitable. In his essay, “The Subject and Power” he delivers the dual aspect of individualism: on the one hand, individualism is the right to be different, including everything that makes individuals truly individual, and on the other hand, the individual is anchored in a community life—and breaking this link forces the individual to back on himself, tying him to his own identity in a constraining way (211-12). Thus for Foucault, identity is build on an individual basis, but within a given social structure, the distancing of which could lead to a corresponding estrangement of identity—a diaspora theme.

This is in total contrast to what Stuart Hall has to say in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, “We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’, positioned” (qtd. in Woodward 51). In Questions of Cultural Identity (1996), Stuart Hall claims that contemporary societies are characterized by “fragmented and fractured identities; never singular, but multiply, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions”. He further illustrates that actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not who we are or where we came from but how we have been represented and how we might represent ourselves. Identities are thus constructed within, not outside representation and discourse and are produced in specific historical and institutional sites, by specific strategies emerging within the play of specific modalities of power (4). There is no representation of pre-existing essential self. Identity is rather dependent and not stable, as it depends on the exclusion of ‘other’. This notion is different and in opposition to identity politics, as, Edward Said in his essay “Between Worlds” writes:

Nothing seems less interesting than the narcissistic self-study that today passes in many places for identity politics, or ethnic studies, or affirmations of roots, cultural pride, drum-beating nationalism and so on. We have to defend people and identities threatened with extinction
or subordinated because they are considered inferior, but that is very different from aggrandizing a past invented for present reasons. (567)

In addition to the postmodern analysis, a psychoanalytical approach for an individual suggests how she thinks about herself, especially if identity at the personal level is taken into consideration. In *The Analysis of the Self* (1971), Kohut argues that the self constitutes a separate and super ordinate psychic structure formed from a matrix of self-representations, the narcissistic equivalent of the identification process. Similarly his or her social identity is determined by the way he or she is perceived by the others. Unlike Romantics, who demand individuals to be true to their inner nature, the psychoanalysts challenge the appeal by making individual complex, and showing the ways in which identity has to be attained. The upbringing and attitude of an individual, therefore, establishes her identity in a given set of conditions. Hegel moves away from self enclosed conception of identity, from an identity that is fundamentally the product of an autogenous process—to a conception of identity as dependent on recognition (qtd. in Alcoff 57). The individual defines himself, but he also needs “significant others” to acknowledge this definition.

Working on the Erik Erikson’s theory of psychoanalysis Sudhir Kakar in his article “The Psychological Origins” explicates: “Identity is used in the sense of person’s experience of self (sameness and continuity) in time and space which is contingent on its continued recognition and reinforcement by his or her significant social group” (*Culture* 16). Conversely, Lacanian theories of psychoanalysis put forward the notion of ‘lack’ implicit in the term identity—lack experienced while attempting to maintain continuity. Identity is constantly, interactively constructed on a micro level, where an individual’s identity is claimed, contested and re-constructed in interaction and in relation to the other participants (Scollon in Norris and Jones 183).

Identity politics proposes a particular agency—a self-conscious “collective agency.” These collectives deliberately coordinate action resulting in emergence of identities as the participants of the group knowingly develop defenses and offense, insulation, d:scrimination, competition, cooperation, persuasion and intimidation. Any alienation of human consciousness as believes Karl Marx is alienation of self-consciousness. This is just another way of saying that alienation affects identity and without identity, there is no self-consciousness. The question of identity becomes a question of self-fulfillment. One’s own identity can only be completely fulfilled if it is
acknowledged by others. Althusser opines that consciousness is constructed through ideology i.e. the belief, meanings and practices in which we think and act, exist in apparatuses which form the part of the State. Althusser’s central thesis is that all ideology interpolates concrete individuals as concrete subjects (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 301). Through the apparatus of recognition, every ideology directs individuals and recruits them with their identity. The negations and tensions defining the self, gender and collectivity are universal as each society deals inevitable truths of birth, life and the reality of the two sexes. Conformation to a particular identity is a requirement for political involvement. Identity politics further tries to amend this requirement as it by radically redefines the citizen.

Here in this chapter, emphasis shall be laid on the understanding of politics behind this concept of identity which for Jeffrey Escofier is a kind of “cultural politics”. It relies on the development of a culture creating asent formation of the self, to articulate collective identities, and to forge a sense of group loyalty. Identity politics implies manifold political activities and theorizing based in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. It thus attempts to attain empowerment, representation and recognition of social groups by asserting the very same markers that distinguished and differentiated them from the others and utilize those markers as an assertion of selfhood and identity based on difference rather than equality. Politics of identity emerges to defend the values and needs of stigmatized or oppressed communities from the enormous power of these homogenizing institutions (educational system and mass media) (Escoffier 191). There are certain signs that fix the identities of social groups around definitional absolutes. These signs are of language, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual preferences, caste positions, religion, tribe, race, etc. institutionalized in jargons, metaphors, stereotypes, and academic literature and reinforced through observation of an affirmative action.

The issue of identity is fundamental for women. In an effort to redefine the roles and expansion of arena of choices, women succeed in creating reverberations through the whole society. By striking at the very roots of historical subjugation, they not only necessitate a re-forming of gender roles and order but also of the social and political arrangement directing the culture, collectivity and self-definition. The upbringing of the women characters in this study exemplifies the way in which they behave with their peers within their society: “I am a woman, but my identity as a
woman is my unique way of being a woman in the culture in which I live” (Josselson 30).

In terms of Indian ideology, identity is taken to be an extension of culture shaping the ‘self’. Women are assumed to be passive and if they are publicly aggressive, it is considered that they are either acting pathologically or through ignorance or male control. In Indian context, besides culture, religion, myths and texts play an important role in framing the identity of women. The primordial myths provide women a stereotypical identity, reinforced by archetypes for ages. Shashi Deshpande in *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* (2003) observes the impact of these myths on the identity formation of women in particular:

> Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need them to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large rent in the fabric of our culture...In India, especially myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truth about themselves and about the human condition. (99)

Nevertheless, a woman’s individual self has been given very little recognition. Recognizing the need for this ‘self’ and ‘identity’, especially in the Indian context, Vijay Tendulkar presents the politics that often thwarts and obfuscates a woman’s multiple attempts at claiming or reclaiming this identity. The same Indian woman is portrayed in *Encounter in Umbugland* (1968) and *Kanyadaan* (1983); the two plays taken into account for analysis in this chapter. The former was originally written in Marathi, titled *Dambadwipcha Mukabala*, translated by Priya Adarkar; while the latter was translated by Gowri Ramnarayan. Tendulkar, in the former elucidated the development of Vijaya from an intractable, self-opinionated but politically inexperienced princess to an intelligent yet capricious ruler who formulates her own triumphant methods to subjugate her opponents. *Encounter in Umbugland*, on the one hand, is a political allegory, which presents a truthful picture of late sixties and seventies of Indian history. Princess Vijaya, the central character, daughter of Vichitravirya, with high ambition and indomitable will becomes aggressive and callous to her opponents. According to Manchi Sarat Babu, ‘Umbugland intensifies the idea of hypocrisy. Princess Vijaya stands for Prime Minister of India; Indira Gandhi...The play draws parallels between rule of Vijaya and that of Indira Gandhi’
The incident of encounter is reminiscent of Indira Gandhi’s 1971 regime and the characters resemble her ministry. The similarities between Vijaya and Indira Gandhi are easily discernible in the play, provided it is put to a close scrutiny. Confirming such portrayal, Tendulkar himself remarks: “I was ever able to begin writing my play only with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to have my characters first with me—though not all of them, the ones I needed to begin writing the play—living persons leading me into the thick of their lives where they would give me the theme” (CPT xxi).

The second play under discussion in this chapter, *Kanyadaan* (Gift of a Daughter 1983) has Jyoti at its center, a fragile link between upper and lower caste Hindus, who becomes a vessel in which caste ideologies pour their aspirations for power. She becomes the medium of propagation of the ideology of her father. There is a complete submission of this girl to the violence inflicted upon her, and she deliberately chooses to become an ideal Hindu Brahmin housewife to her Dalit husband, as for her, the husband’s home is her home. The sacrifice of her career and her mute acceptance of physical, psychological and sexual assault is one part of her fractured identity, which is imposed upon her by the conformist Indian culture. Nath, her father, the progressive social reformer, puts the entire responsibility for bringing about the transformation in society and claims that it is the duty of girls like Jyoti to bring out the hidden goodness and talent in Dalit men who have suffered humiliation for centuries. Dissidence of both Vijaya and Jyoti finds identification with the Marathi plays *Wada Chirebandi* and *Doongaji House* by Mahesh Elkunchwar and Cyrus Mistry respectively. As these plays show the patriarchal order being undermined by a subversive female will that deconstructs the identity between female virtue and family honor (Ranju’s flight to Bombay in former) or a liberated female’s will to reject male authority (Avan’s departure from home in latter) (qtd. in Dharwadekar 307).

Here, Jyoti does not question her father’s ideology, as she is more influenced by her father than her mother. Jyoti’s father is a Gandhian who encourages his daughter to marry someone not of their caste, but like any other traditional Indian father, he, too, encourages his daughter to go back to her husband. Carol Gilligan states that women are sensitive to the needs of others and play the role of a nurturer, caretaker and helpmate instead of paying heed to their own needs. But men neither value their love, care and concern nor reciprocate these values (2). Similarly Madhu
Kishwar opines that the mythical ideal woman is presented as a selfless giver, someone who gives endlessly, gracefully, smilingly, whatever the demand, however harmful to herself. She gives not just love, affection and ungrudging service but also, if need be, her health and ultimately her life at the altar of duty to her husband, children and rest of the family (48).

Feminists attempt to work with this construction of subjectivity (self-representation through the Cartesian subject). Simone de Beauvoir believes that the qualities associated with the concept of women are fabricated by a society that benefited from keeping women subordinate. It is not because of any natural and essential qualities inherent in a woman, rather it is the privileged position of men. For her if one of the two [human categories] is in some way privileged, has some advantage, this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep it in its subjection (93). Feminists working with equality model of identity consider men and women differently, thereby challenging the philosophical and political culture and arguing that inequality is an outcome of structural inequality inflicted on women. The exclusion of women from the construction of a subject that benefits only men is questioned by them. The followers of this model are also skeptical of the supposed neutrality of discourse, denying women equal education. They ask for freedom in political, economic and sexual fields as women are the victims of double standards in these areas. Firestone claims:

Unlike economic class, sex sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created differently, and not equally privileged...the biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution. (qtd. in Papadelos 50)

Identity politics incorporates dimensions of solidarity and empowerment, offering women a potential for an alliance and acting as a strong political force. In addition the political goals of this model could be realized with visible results. Liberal feminists, working for the equality of women, were significantly awarded in the field of work and education. Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) challenges the prevailing notions that God has created women as inferior to men; rather for her women are equal to men, with the same capacity to reason. For the radicals, men and women are alike and equal, since they both are human beings. A
woman’s identity is clearly marked by gender. In The Second Sex, Beauvoir advocates women to define themselves in their own way, and not only in relation to men.

Feminist theorization in India, however, has acknowledged the significance of understanding the processes by which women become the sites for the constitution of group identities. Mary John observes that the study of the colonial period proved to be such a crucial turning point for Indian feminist politics, in having made perceptibly visible a ‘cultural’ nationalism wherein the underbelly of every attempt towards identity has been a re-description of women of different classes (qtd. in Sangari and Vaid 24). Valentine Moghadam uses the term “identity politics” to refer to “discourses and movements organized around questions of religious, ethnic, and national identity” (ix). Here, the term ‘identity politics’ is overlaid with negative connotations impeding women’s access to her rights. An insistence is there on their rights only when their identity is separated from other identities. According to Moghadam, one answer to identity politics which seeks to control women is to disarticulate ‘woman’ from ‘culture’, deconstruct woman as symbol, reconstruct women as human beings, and problematize women’s rights as human rights (22). Michael Dusche, similarly, in his Identity Politics in India and Europe (2010) observes: “To justify exclusion, injustice and violence in dealings with the other, Identity politics resorts to or creates myths about the inherently inferior nature of the other and the naturalness of the self” (83).

This identity politics is given a critical view by Zoya Hasan, who states: “Identity assertions subordinate women’s material interests” (x). Women’s question representing one form of identity politics is confronted by the politics of other identity movements. Feminists believe that hardly any effort is made to address the woman’s question in proper perspective, to study the position of woman in the family, in the community and in society, or, to give her due space and place in the social order and the power structure. Instead, for them the woman is still crushed by male chauvinism and suppressed by patriarchy. Nancy Fraser asserts: “Identity politics is firmly established in an epistemology that assumes: all women were subordinated to all men in the same way and to the same degree; it had falsely universalized the specific situation of white, middle class heterosexual women and concealed their implication in hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality” (qtd. in Papadelos 52).
Reinforcing a binary view of gender relations, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* divides human beings into two clear-cut groups, women and men. For her gender is a fixed variable that shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. But women are supposed to have mythical classic virtues that define themselves by set of relationships, modes of conduct created by social, cultural constructs. There cannot be a deviation in their lives. At certain instances if Manusmriti has given defined role to a woman that had always been overlooked. The female stereotype has been reinforced again and again, thus expecting women to be an ideal woman. Carol Gilligan in her book *In a Different Voice* (1982) claims that women see themselves as dependent on others i.e. men for their identity, and justifies that the impact of cultural displacement is greater on women than men. Women require more time and courage to reinvent themselves in a new environment, because identity for them is not just a new ‘self’ but a ‘self’ connected to new ‘others’. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find in *The Madwoman in the Attic* “the woman’s quest for self-definition”(76) as the underlying plot of nineteenth-century writing by women, while Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* sees “self-discovery”, a search for identity (13).

The assimilation of various cultures form the identity of man, and this amalgamation adds another feature to identity formation of women. The nurturing mother can be independent and these contrasting cultural narratives shape the identities of Indian women giving a different view of identity and making them assertive and dominating. For Sudhir Kakar in *The Indians* (2007), the major factor determining the Indian identity is an ideology around personal and family relationships that is derived from the institution of the joint family (4). Here in the play, *Kanyadaan*, one can encounter a nuclear family, where the relationships of its members with one another advocate and confirm the observation made by Kakar. An analysis of Indian woman, especially the creation of women characters in literature, concepts of self-actualization, domesticity, occupation status and societal interface are all tangled and complementary features of women’s identity. This cultural influence on women works everywhere, and forms their identity, all over the world. The social position—defined by gender, class, and race; affects an individual’s perspectives on cultural institution and how an individual adheres to the ethics and interpretation that are promoted by rituals/customs/rites and other socially produced cultural forms.
“Kanyadaan”, the father’s gift of the daughter in marriage to a suitable groom, is a central ritual within the Hindu marriage ceremony, completed before the couples recite their wedding vows around the ceremonial fire. By offering their loyalty and obedience to deserving male guardians, women thus earn their respect and protection; the object of this reciprocity is to create the ideal family through which society may successfully perpetuate itself (A Dharwadker 286-87). In Tendulkar’s Kanyadaan, the domestic and social depiction of this ancient norm collides against existing social practices; its very purpose has been to subject patriarchal control, encoded gender roles, and caste distribution, to meticulous analysis. In Hindu religion the term ‘Kanyadaan’ has important significance as it is related to our custom and traditions. Under this ceremony, a girl is believed to perform all duties towards her husband, and is supposed to remain in her husband’s house till her death. This ritual is believed to uplift the status of father both in spiritual and social terms, and also potentially cleanse him of any wrong that he may have done in his entire life. For contemporary Hindu families Krishnan believes: “The Kanyadaan ceremony is serious, sentimental and significant. In fact, the man who has not given away his daughter in marriage is believed to be somewhat incomplete in spiritual sense” (qtd. in Shwalb and Lamb 73).

Jyoti stands parallel to the other powerful women characters like Savitri in Mohan Rakesh’s play Aadhe Adhure (Halfway House), Padmini in Girish Kamarad’s play Hayavadana (The Horse Faced One). In their battle against the man or in their search for completion they are not characterized as masculine in contrast to their western counterparts—Bernarda Alba in Federico Garcia Lorca’s play The House of Bernarda Alba, Mother Courage in Brecht’s play Mother Courage and her Children, and Shen Te in another Brecht’s play Good Woman of Setzuan—who are constrained to acquire and demonstrate male distinctiveness in order to state their independence. The feminists see many cultural discourses as impositions, pushing women and men into behaviour compatible with structures and institutions. The ceremony or custom of Kanyadaan which for an Indian woman is an important ritual would not let her leave her husband’s home whatever may be the circumstances thus shaping her personality. Tendulkar inquires the institution of marriage and this religious custom in his play Kanyadaan (the title itself is ironical) which is an important asset for the formation and construction of identity of an Indian woman. Here, Jyoti, the twenty-two year old daughter of Nath and Seva Deolalikar unveils her decision to marry Arun Athavale. Arun is a young aspiring writer and journalist from the Dalit community whom Jyoti
meets in a socialist discussion group. Jyoti’s declaration does not invite any real objection from family with slight reluctance by the mother who asks Jyoti to rethink her decision of marrying Arun.

Through the course of the play, we see that though Jyoti, the protagonist, has a voice, it is that of an obedient daughter, not of a protesting rebel. Seeing her submission, Ramesh Dhongade calls her “loose, hollow and lacking backbone” (qtd. in Wadikar 31). Identity is shaped either by recognition or its absence. As a result of misrecognition a person or group of people can suffer distortion, if their surroundings reciprocate a despicable picture of themselves. Charles Taylor in “The Politics of Recognition” states that non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (25). Nath, Jyoti’s father, is very happy saying: “But if my daughter decided to marry into high caste it would not have pleased me much” (CPT 504). The lexis of Nath clearly advocates his daughter to be considerate towards his stance thus trying to warp Jyoti’s persona. Geeta Sane’s novel Aviskar (1939) has the protagonist criticizing the glorification of the Indian culture depriving all autonomy to women. If [people] want to establish old Indian culture in its rightful place, the religious rituals prescribed for women, the ideals of slavishly devoted wife, and same chains of slavery will bind [their] necks...[women] would prefer to have human rights than be a goddess and installed on a pedestal (Das History 1911-1956 347-48). Jyoti has to break from this ideal of being not only a perfect wife but also a perfect daughter.

If Jyoti has decided to choose her life partner, she also has the mettle to declare the fact to her parents. Jyoti’s father does not oppose her decision rather invites her to discuss the issue of marriage. Though he apparently is sympathetic to her cause, yet when he tells his wife about it; his patriarchal power gets manifested, when he says:

Seva, our Jyoti here, she wants to tell us something. To us means, to you and to me. And we are simply never able to meet these poor children together. Therefore, this girl has taken an appointment with us today. Fifteen minutes. [To Jyoti] Only fifteen, right...? We will now talk to her. Sorry. We will listen to her...[to Jyoti] Right? Yes. So now [to Seva] Seva, please sit down calmly for fifteen minutes... First we listen to you, everything else afterwards. We do so much for the world,
and we don’t have time for our own children?! We should be ashamed to call ourselves [Jyoti’s] parents. (CPT 502-03)

On her part, Jyoti understands Arun only as an expressive poet, someone who is not bad at heart; but she doesn’t understand him as a person or an individual. Despite complaining for the specific nature of his complexity, she seeks to understand the complexity, which, she believes to be present in every human being. This is how she ends up colluding with the idea of “experimentation” of her father, in particular, and, thus becoming a hapless victim:

I don’t know much about him. The little I know of him is through his poems. He asked me, I said yes, quite spontaneously. To tell you the truth, I have been learning something of him only since then. Not only getting to know him, but also getting to know about him. And sometimes he shows such a different side, that it strikes me, I don’t know him at all. At times I feel I can trust him, but the very next instance I am left miles behind him. I ask myself—this thing that I want to do, is it the right thing...? I am afraid—then my own mind assures me that he is not bad at heart; by nature he is not vile. He is complex. Human beings are complex. It is possible that his complexity has been generated by his circumstances. I must understand that complexity. It is no use running away. Once I understand it, I can dispel that complexity. And even if I am not able to dispel it, it would no longer have the power to scare me. (CPT 525)

Though Jyoti belongs to an educated family, it can be presumed that she is unaware of the importance of marriage even at a marriageable age. She takes up the issue in a very casual manner as if it’s merely a case of testing herself against life. Her behaviour also suggests that she is rushing into marriage, overlooking the consequences. When she announces her marriage, her confounded confusion finally comes through: “I don’t even know if it is a matter of such importance or not. I am still unable to make up my mind...that is...I have decided to get married” (CPT 503). Even after she has made up her mind to get married, her hesitation and confusion continues. Her decision to get married is not an act of assertion, not even a hallmark of her identity, but is born out of her total incomprehension of Arun’s personality, his circumstances and his world.
Women’s identity-construction in relation to discourse sees them either as objects of male discourse or as subjects of their own. Identity and issues related to feminism due to their polemical nature make them open to endless arguments throughout history. Women writers therefore construct a sense of unified selfhood, a coherent and rational identity. They seek a "subjective identity", an effective agency, and a history for women. The status of a woman as the eternal victim contributes to the continuation of their stereotypical image as a subject devoid of agency. Feminism has a particular constituency (woman) and a particular goal (liberation). Carolyn Heilbrun in *Reinventing Womanhood* (1993) inadvertently illustrates some current confusion about female identity and claims that successful women are ‘male-identified’ but that it is a ‘failure' for a ‘woman to take her identity from her man’ (46).

Boys and girls are produced, according to Nancy Chodorow, not on the basis of anatomical difference between the sexes, as reflected in Freud’s theory of sexuality, but on the basis of object relationships and the cultural edification of family dynamics. The family introduced in the present play by Tendulkar corresponds to Chodorow’s idea of ‘personality formation’. Arun blames his attitude on his environment, as it is clear from his remarks: “What am I but a son of Scavengers. We don’t know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives” (CPT 540). On the other hand Nath remarks: “It is Jyoti’s duty to put all her strength in making it [marriage] work” (CPT 540). In this family, the stringent political engagements of the head somehow direct more influence of the mother on the two siblings on the surface level, but it is the father who clearly rules the house through his ideological implications as he encourages Jyoti: “I feel so proud of you. The training I gave you has not been in vain” (CPT 540).

Girls follow their mothers inadvertently and they are made to prepare for their conjugal knot and course of their future life. For a marital match in Indian context, proper queries are made and generally these questions are directed at the groom’s side. Such a practice points to the nonchalant attitude towards the feminine gender in traditional Indian culture. The mismatch of Jyoti and Arun in the present play corresponds to the contrasting upbringing of the duo. The mother is, however, worried about the future of her daughter and asks a number of questions from the boy prior to their marriage:
What does he do? Where does he live?... Where did he meet you?... His parents, what do they do?... How many children do they have?... What does his elder brother do?... The other brothers, what do they do?... There must be debts as well?... How long have you known him?... Is the boy intelligent?... What is he like as a person?... Is he trustworthy? (CPT 505-06)

The mother is quite anxious about her only daughter: “But your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it” (CPT 509). She also confirms to her daughter the obligation in marital contract for sticking to one’s decision throughout: “Saying something is easy, but doing it is very difficult... And later there is no chance for a woman to hide or to run away” (CPT 509). Though an independent and educated woman, Seva understands the inability of a woman to get away from the vicissitudes of marital institution. A woman is considered proper female in a society that represents the typical things a mother does and lives her life accordingly. She inculcates her traditionally recognized role through the institution of marriage and motherhood, social and biological actions that often occur independently of a personal identity crisis and that do not require its resolution. Adrienne Rich says: “In radical feminist ideology, the woman-identified woman fights patriarchal cultural conditioning so that she values herself and is loyal to other women” (659).

Seva, the mother, shows this loyalty to her daughter and is aware of cultural deformity which can foster the problem of identity crisis, causing problems in marital harmony. She is rational and pragmatic, whereas Jyoti and Nath are idealists. The mother does not correspond to the idea of Nath about the experiment of an inter-caste marriage. She opposes her husband by stating that males have different opinions about such matters and being the mother she forbids a stupid experiment with her only daughter:

Does it mean that my daughter’s life is to be used for an experiment? Is that what you are saying? You may have your views. I can’t accept them. I am her mother. If you ask me I will say that Jyoti can never be happy with that man... If you like take it from me in writing. (CPT 524)
On another occasion, when she comes to know that her pregnant daughter has been hit by her husband in the belly, she expresses her concern, saying: “In this mission, if she dies, if his wife dies, he can get another wife. But our daughter, if she dies...do we have another?” (CPT 544) As opposed to the father, who is mainly interested in conducting a “social experiment” and thus objectifying his daughter, it is the mother who humanizes her by extending emotional support to her, and by expressing genuine concern for her well-being.

The difference in men and women is emphasized by feminists who propound the distinctive identity of women as a group, focusing on the essential female characteristics making them essentially different and opposite to men. Masculinity defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment; male gender identity is threatened by intimacy, while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation (Gilligan 8). Jean Bethke Elshtain in Public Man, Private Woman (1981) challenges the idea that women can be like men, want to be like men or should be like men (252). Challenging the binaries of European structure, Gilligan reinforces feminine characteristics thus reinventing the sameness/difference debate. The epistemology of difference feminism is based on the issues of ‘identity’. Laura Downs in Comparative Studies in Society and History states that there is an assumption that merely being born into a set of constructed social, racial and gender categories endows one with reliable and meaningful knowledge of what it means to be the creature whose identity is bounded by those categories (qtd. in Papadelos 58).

This ideologically different dominant male in Jyoti’s father gets ready to experiment with his daughter, while agreeing at the proposal of this marriage in order to fulfill his political ambitions. In a patriarchal society, for V. Geetha, women have to struggle to be educated, to have property made over to them and to choose their partners in marriage. For men, these choices appear more given, less fraught and even flexible (5). Nath Deolalikar opts for this inter-caste match apprehensively only to become a witness to its collapse. He says:

Look, Seva, society can’t be transformed through words alone. We have to act as catalyst in this transformation. The old social reformers did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow
remarriage. Many of them actually married widows. Why did they do it...? That was also an experiment, a difficult experiment. But they dared to risk it. (CPT 524)

Tendulkar substantiates the implicit call made by Simone De Beauvoir to women to assert their autonomy in defining themselves against men. Economic independence in form of an employment is necessity for a woman, although it doesn’t determine and guarantee her personal emancipation. John Charvet in Feminism (1982) consolidates Beauvoir’s ideas: “The goal is not so much to claim that man has his rights. Nor to participate with men in a common socialist liberation, but to win her existence as free subject by defining her own identity, giving herself a past and creating for herself solidarity with other women” (100). It may be suggested that Seva does create solidarity with Jyoti, as, she alone understands the problems her daughter faces, not her father.

Jyoti, the decisive girl, the ‘new woman’, however, is very keen to experiment herself. She doesn’t believe in caste and wants to lead her life according to her own wishes. She is capable of deciding about her life, as she not only comes from a well-to-do family, but also joins a job, thereby becoming economically independent. Thus she is educated in the true sense of the word. She asserts: “I made a commitment and now I can’t run away...I will marry him...My decision is final” (CPT 525). At this juncture, her voice and her confidence amply prove that she is well aware of the decision she is making, and that it is not entirely her father’s decision that is imposed on her. Tendulkar has provided her that buoyancy. Jyoti’s assertion goes beyond the mother-daughter tie, as mentioned by Chodorow; rather it indicates the independent and self assured attitude of Seva, her mother.

By the same logic, Jyoti also thinks that since it was her own decision, her family shouldn’t be made to bear the brunt of its consequences. Even after her physical torture becomes a routine affair, she puts up with it, and she gives up, only once she finds that her parents are also being insulted and humiliated. Her father is called a eunuch, and her mother, a procuress, who supplies girls to socialist leaders from her Seva-Dal. Finally, when her patience snaps, she accuses her husband of making her mentally crippled, and returns to her parents’ home, with a resolve never to go back to him, ever. She declares:
He...he will not enter this house. Because... [With great effort] I have left him... I am not going back to him again....Never.....It’s... all...over....I must tell you, Bhai, I must. I am fed up with him. Fed up! Fed up!... I must learn to live without tears. I mustn’t even complain. It was I who made the decision, I have to find my own strength to bear this, alone. (CPT 535-36)

Protagonists like Jyoti are faced with a complicated labyrinth of power relationships they have internalized. As they negotiate these institutionalized networks of behavior, they face no-win situations, obey the dominant code and survive even if that demands serious self expurgation. On the contrary, if they disobey tradition, step outside the boundaries; they have to pay the ultimate price. The women defying traditional controls suffer fatal, social marginalization that gives them no community to turn to, nowhere to escape to, no space to which they can belong. Often social banishment is so absolute that these women are silenced either through violent death, or, are forced to retreat to their asylum. In fact, by delineating Jyoti’s condition in a particular manner, Tendulkar is trying to point out to us that in similar circumstances, women must offer resistance rather than retreat into their own shell. In an interview to Wadikar and Deshpande, Tendulkar acknowledges that women ought to be determined to liberate themselves (qtd. in Wadikar 151).

Jyoti’s husband, Arun, proves to be a wife-beater, drunkard and a thoroughly useless person. Nath, her father in an effort to save this marriage, proposes to the family members that the son-in-law be invited to stay with them in their house. For him whatever happens, must happen before their eyes, as he thinks, it may prove to be some kind of a deterrent (CPT 536). Only a typical patriarchal male could have possibly proposed a solution that her father ultimately suggests. A possible restraint on Arun’s behavior in presence of his family members attests to the fragility of his argument. In the due course, he even compels Jyoti to go out with her husband, for he firmly believes: “No man is fundamentally evil; he is good. He has certain propensities towards evil. They must be transformed, completely uprooted and destroyed. And then the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the good slumbering within man” (CPT 563). For him, the reformation of society needs certain sacrifices as maintained by the nation builders. The experiment of an inter-caste marriage is only one step towards such a social development and he wants to start it
from his own house, with an initiative from his daughter. He doesn’t want this experiment to fail, as he later reveals to us in his conversation with his wife:

Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! This dream which is struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust before our eyes! We will have to do something. We must save this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake... This is not just a question of our daughter’s life, Seva, this has...a far wider significance...this experiment is a very precious experiment. (CPT 537)

Jyoti settles unfalteringly for her marriage, despite the fact that towards the end of the play she discovers that she is trapped in it. She discovers that her husband has grown up watching the torture of his mother by his drunkard father. As Arun has internalized the dominating ways of his father, he extends the same treatment to his wife, Jyoti. In one particular instance in the play, he apologizes to Nath and Seva for his bad temper and ill-treatment of his wife, and starts finding faults with his own personality:

When have I claimed that I am civilized and cultured like you people? From childhood, I have seen my father come home drunk every day, and beat my mother half dead, seen her cry her heart out. Even now I hear the echoes of her broken sobs. No one was there to wipe her tears. My poor mother! She didn’t have a father like Bhai; nor a mother like you. (CPT 540)

After a long spell of disillusionment, revulsion and anguish, Jyoti refuses to reconcile herself to the baggage of tradition, customs and conventions. The same man who wouldn’t tire of singing hosannas to his son-in-law shows his utter contempt for him once his daughter lands up in the nursing home. The sociopolitical gritty idealism of Nath Deolalikar also gets a severe setback when he says: “I felt as though just his being here had polluted this living room, this house, this whole day. Seva, I feel like taking a bath. Wash everything...this furniture, this whole place! It has all become polluted, it’s all filthy. What a man I have got mixed up with, what a man!” (CPT 553) Jyoti is critical of her father over his ‘hireling speech’, and complains to him in a philosophical manner once she understands how life has come full circle for her. Victimized and battered by patriarchy, she ultimately leaves the territory of her father, his home. It is almost impossible for her to pull out of the promise she has made to
herself. The very values he instilled in his children, she tells him, now make it impossible for her to turn her back on Arun. But she also knows that she cannot survive in Arun’s world if she continues to inhabit her parents’ civilized sphere (A Dharwadker 288). Her powerlessness to revisit her paternal house also communicates the internalization of cultural values of Indian social system by a woman, which often compels her into becoming an alienated itinerant like Kamala Markandaya’s “The Nowhere Man” (1972). She clamours:

I don’t have the time, nor a cool head. I have to go and get on with the struggle. Come and watch Arun at night when he staggers home roaring drunk, if you have the guts. There is a savage beast in his eyes, his lips, his face...in every single limb... I have to accept him as he is, because I cannot reject him. (CPT 563-64)

Various feminists have argued that women in patriarchal societies are often induced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves. They internalize a picture of their own inferiority, so that even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they may be incapable of taking advantage of the new opportunities (Taylor 25). But, here, Jyoti attributes her failure to defend herself against Arun to her father’s teachings:

The truth is, you knew very well that man and his inherent nature are never really two different things. Both are one, and inseparable. Either you accept it in totality, or you reject it if you can. Very often you don’t have a choice. Putting man’s beastliness to sleep and awakening the godhead within is an absurd notion. You made me waste twenty years of my life before I could discover this. I had to learn it through my own experience. (CPT 563)

And like her mother, she too criticizes her father for the so-called experimentation:

You taught us those poems which said: ‘I march with utter faith in goal’... This drug [ideology] has entered and mingled with our blood. The poison has numbed our entire consciousness. We cannot run away. To save one’s self by running away may be the smart thing to do, and other people may get away with this kind of cleverness, but even if running away was the general rule of conduct, we shall continue to
recite ‘March on, Oh soldier!’ and continue to lose our lives as guinea pigs in the experiment. (CPT 565)

Home is the place where all the values and initial lessons in life-education are imparted to children, and these impressions often play a contributory role in shaping the personality/behavioural patterns of the children, too. Dealing with the formation of ideology and its effect on individuals Althusser argues: “It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable,’ squeezed between the family state apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology in its pure state” (155-56). Jyoti follows this very configuration, and lives a life of illusion, imposed by Nath as he wants to make his home an experimental laboratory for democracy. For him, home is a microcosm of the political world—indeed of the nation—where by resorting periodically to the language of parliamentary process, legal rights, resolutions and rules of order, he can claim to uphold democracy vigorously. His political control gets exhibited as he says: “Democracy outside and dictatorship in the home—we don’t know these two-timing tricks” (CPT 500). The realistic expose of life is not made known to Jyoti, thereby forcing her into a situation where her dreams often clash with reality, especially when she becomes a victim of violence inflicted by her so-called educated husband.

The streaks of independent thought or assertion or protest which were not so clearly visible in the beginning, find their place towards the end of the play. This happens once Tendulkar begins to challenge the limits of the social and patriarchal structure that forces a woman into succumbing to family and societal pressure. Ibsen’s Nora, a young lady and a mother of three is often referred to as ‘squirrel’ by her husband, but she doesn’t protest. In An Economic and Social History of England, Trevor May exemplifies how a typical family structure tends to seek legitimacy for itself. She says:

The roles of husband and wife, as indeed of children and servants, were strictly delineated, and all were assured of their place in a hierarchal structure. The undisputed head was the husband […] Wives were subordinated (legally as well as socially) to their husbands, as were children to their parents. In the idealized version, all were happy
in their allotted place, but in reality the home could subject its members to insufferable pressures. (204)

This description communicates the situation portrayed in *Kanyadaan*, where Nath experiments with his idealized version, and Arun unleashes his own prolonged suppression and suffering on his wife, Jyoti, by abusing her. But Jyoti’s realization and protest pose a question to the dominating father, who wants her to start life afresh, and to think it all over again. Shailja B. Wadikar believes that the play *Kanyadaan* depicts the senseless wastage of Jyoti in translating her father’s dreams or idealistic values into reality. She exhibits total apathy to her brother and mother for their rational arguments, and follows her father’s path of idealism though her own individual ‘self’ is inclined towards the same decision. This father-daughter relationship reveals how idealism manifesting itself in the freedom of thought and action becomes the cause of misery (Wadikar 79). It clearly shows that the ‘internalization’ of patriarchal structure doesn’t allow Jyoti to question the wisdom and ethics of her own decisions. Jyoti is willing to put up with a marital life of misery and humiliation, and chooses not to walk out on her husband:

You think about it, I have to stop thinking and learn to live. I think a lot. Suffer a lot. Not from the blows [of husband], but from my thoughts, I cannot bear them much longer...forgive me, *Bhai*, I said things I shouldn’t have. But I couldn’t help it. I was deeply offended by your hypocrisy. I thought: why did this man have to inject and drug us every day with truth and goodness? And if he can get away from it as well, what right had he to close all our options? (CPT 565)

Women are a colonized category, subject to the hegemony of the ‘male-order’ and denied access to the centers of power. These marginalized others are assigned a collective, subordinate non-identity in order to authenticate the superior, privileged subjectivity of the dominant category. The denial and denigration of individuality through homogenizing, universalizing processes are recognized as marginalizing strategies and hence resisted by those categorized as the ‘others’. They stake a claim to an identity that transcends the marginality of otherness. The self-identification that they endeavour to accomplish is also a mode of self-differentiation; for the difference that sets them apart as ‘other’ is equally valid and valuable. While breaking ties with the family, Jyoti reminds her father that she is following his principles into practice,
which reverses the very notion of marriage and *Kanyadaan*. In *Theatres of Independence*, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker states that the ritual meaning of ‘*Kanyadaan*’ undergoes a double reversal [as in the play] the father condemns his daughter to something far worse than death by giving her away thoughtlessly “to a man who has no good qualities, but it is the daughter who reminds him of the irrevocable nature of the gift” (289).

If Jyoti had remained fragile, she would have crumbled under the weight of the circumstances and joined her parents. But she refuses to come to the house of her father, and says:

> No. When I come here I begin to hate my world. I want to ignore that truth which I have come to perceive, though rather late in life. I want to become blind once again. Hereafter I have to live in that world, which is mine... [pausing] and die there. Say sorry to Ma. Tell her none of you should come to my house...this is my order. (CPT 566)

At last, Jyoti refuses to go back to her father’s home. It is her way of avenging her father who brought her up to believe that no man is evil, that some instincts within a man could be evil subject to correction and modification. Wadikar states: “*Kanyadaan* may be seen as an indirect comment on the evil consequences of father’s obsession with idealism and husband’s obsession with caste consciousness” (3). Towards the end of the play, Jyoti comes to identify her futile ‘self’ in the ordained patriarchal structure, though in a house different from her father’s, it is that of her husband:

> I have my husband. I am not a widow. Even if I become one I shan’t knock at your door. I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devlalikar now, I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger...don’t touch me. Fly from my shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable values.

>[Jyoti goes away. The latch clicks as the door bangs shut.] (CPT 566)

According to Davis, when Ibsen’s heroine of *A Doll’s House* left her home and family ‘to think things out’ for herself and ‘get things clear’ the noise of door slamming behind her is said to have reverberated in the whole of Europe. Tendulkar’s Jyoti slams the door of her father’s house in all probability to find solutions. The playwright has done his work by sowing seeds of protest in Jyoti, and her rejection of
her father’s values and disproportionate idealism. Ibsen’s Nora, a promising heroic figure becomes ‘a threat for the family’s bourgeois equilibrium’ for borrowing money, is barred from her children and marital bed. Nora then seriously begins to question the authority and values of those who control women’s lot (qtd. in Tancred-Sheriff 218-19). Nora’s husband Torvald is a ‘good’ match by nineteenth century standards as Nath, Jyoti’s father who is shown to be a ‘perfect’ father figure with democratic ideals in twentieth century. Nora rejects her husband’s notion of marriage whereas Jyoti rejects her father’s superficial idealism, values and education, both establishing identity away from and within home respectively. Saroj Vasaria in *Manushi* is emphatic about the stance contemporary women should choose:

The ideals, ethics, and morality heaped on women since time immemorial are suffocating and killing. The adjectives used to praise us have become oppressive. Calling us loving, they have locked us in the closed room of culture…they have handcuffed us with modesty and chained our feet with loyalty, so that far from running, we have not been able even to walk. Now we must refuse to be Sitas. By becoming a Sita and submitting to the fire ordeal, woman loses her identity. This fire ordeal is imposed on women today in every city, every home…We can be fearless since we have no models. (qtd. in Katrak 156)

Tendulkar’s play explores the potential of a woman’s struggle for self realization and self definition, her quest for identity, equality and transcendence and her dissent against domination regarding all the aspects of social life. India’s movement for independence brought women into political activism, and generated an infinite number of female politicians. In this context, the constitution of India framed after independence, pledged equality before the law imparting voting rights to women. In the post independent era women came to the forefront both qualitatively and quantitatively. The constitutional amendments enabled women to inherit property and a separate portfolio under ministries for women and child development was institutionalized. Simultaneously the laws against female foeticide, domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace were framed and implemented to further boost the position of women in the society.

This might have been a major factor influencing Tendulkar to write *Encounter in Umbagland*, the next play, proposed to discuss for analysis. In this particular play,
he gives a picture of a self-governing, judicious, intelligent and a strong woman, with a distinct identity of her own. By giving her voice and power, he eventually challenges the orthodox cultural image of woman. The narrative of *Encounter in Umbugland* (1967) describes how women as a subaltern group subvert the power structures that deny them space by transforming themselves into power generating and transmitting communities. Arundhati Banerjee rightly articulates: “Despite the distancing achieved through creation of the fictitious milieu, it is easy to identify characters with political figures, who held ministerial positions during those years... And, of course, the indomitable princess Vijaya, herself the daughter of the autocratic king... who devises her own (successful) methods of vanquishing her enemies” (xi).

Reading this play as a political allegory, N.S. Dharan has established a direct parallel between the protagonist Vijaya and former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The tussle for power and influence between Indira Gandhi and the Syndicate in the Party is the tussle Vijaya faces with her ministers. Indira Gandhi had been elevated to her office by a group of regional Congress leaders Kamaraj, Nijalingappa, S K Patil, Atulya Ghosh, and Sanjiva Reddy collectively known as the ‘syndicate’. The decline of Congress was evident in its poor performance in the general elections of 1967. Mrs. Gandhi was now sure that the party needed a major overhaul. She began to assert her independence, especially on the economic policy, where she had started charting a leftward course. Her suggestion of nominating the veteran Dalit leader, Jagjivan Ram for the presidential post was shot down and she asked that they postpone a decision to allow more time for arriving at a consensus. She first forced Morarji Desai out of the cabinet, and then nationalized banks. She also went ahead and filed the nomination for Sanjiva Reddy, though she refrained from issuing a whip to Congress MPs. A self-willed politically inexperienced Indira Gandhi changed into an intelligent victorious ruler and served as the Prime Minister of India for two consecutive terms. Vijaya, here, identically devastates plans of her ministers and settles the issue of a regional tribe.

*Encounter in Umbugland* also invites comparison with Bernard Shaw’s *The Apple Cart: A Political Extravaganza* (1928), where the English king Magnus outwits Prime Minister Proteus and his cabinet that seeks to strip monarchy of its remaining political influence. In the preface of this play, Shaw remarks: “I had written a comedy in which a King defeats an attempt by his popularly elected Prime Minister to deprive
him of the right to influence public-opinion through the press and the platform: in short, to reduce him to a cipher. The King’s reply is that rather than be a cipher, he will abandon his throne and take his obviously very rosy chance of becoming a popularly elected Prime Minister himself” (7).

Vijaya is an exception as she is the product of an aristocratic family, and being of a royal blood, she has had a far more privileged upbringing as compared to that of the common householders. Vijaya stands in stark contrast to other female characters of Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, “as the play depicting Vijaya’s triumph signals the inauguration of Women’s Empowerment decade” (Wadikar 5). Princess Vijaya, like Jyoti of Kanyadaan, Indu of Roots and Shadows (1983) of Shashi Deshpande and Isabel Archer of Henry James in The Portrait of a Lady (1881) is also the ‘new woman’ a term popularized by American writer Henry James and historian Ruth Bordin, referring to women who exercise control over their own lives, be it personal, social, or economic. The new woman pushes the limits set by male-dominated society characterizing especially American expatriates living in Europe: women of affluence and sensitivity, who despite or perhaps because of their wealth exhibited an independent spirit and were accustomed to acting on their own. The term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives […] personal, social, or economic. She asserts her independence, is rebellious, rational, guided by reason (Bordin and Anderson 2).

Princess Vijaya is represented as a riposte against the social construct of a stratified order, as she generates an entirely new concept of the estate, one in which men and women are companions, equal partners, and have equal ability to rule. This representation stands in contrast to Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi, a subversive play, though it challenges the basic concept of the early modern marriage, a marriage in which the woman was completely objectified, used only to serve the business or physical needs of the man. Despite her royal position, the protagonist does not get the approval from her relatives. Vijaya controls her own mind, as she refuses to cow down to the impositions of her cabinet, and while exercising her power, she demands respect from her ministers to ensure that she is acknowledged, validated and has a definite, recognizable identity. Her act of sitting on the throne is revolutionary in nature, as it challenges prevalent social customs. The governing men find it virtually impossible to come to terms with a woman monarch like Vijaya. The Princess’
supremacy is the cause of their intimidation, an insult to the accepted patriarchal notions, and the final picture—of Karkashirsha, Vratyasom, Pishtakeshi—reassures that none of the male characters has the ability to control the state or consider it to be their moral right to do so. In an attempt to erase or contain the power, especially in a context where a woman is not accepted in a dominating position, Vijaya focuses exclusively on the ‘traditional’ male questions of governance and inheritance.

With a distinct approach towards life, her own identity, Vijaya rejects the customs and refuses to attend the birthday of her father, saying: “I won’t go there today at all! I don’t want to become a diplomatic convention for father’s birthday. I am not a pigeon, Prannarayan. I can think” (CPT 271). The patriarchal male turns situations to his advantage leaving women to battle for their existence. The application of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a method of reciprocal modification among certain actions. Power relations form the foundation of social networks. “Power”, for Foucault, “is not a commodity or a possession of an individual, a group or class, rather it circulates through the social body,....in which all are caught” (qtd. in Smart 79). Vichitravirya, the king demonstrates his masculine authority by appointing a painter to highlight him in all glory. On this occasion, he deliberates over the meaning of ‘power’ in his own design, saying:

We have experienced it for the past sixty years. Power is a crown of thorns. Power is a sword hanging over you! Power is the bread you eat at the stake! Power means responsibility! Power means problems and painful decisions. There is no headache like power. There is no trouble like power. We are always saying that we would not wish even our enemies to be punished with power. (CPT 279)

All the ministers are keen on ruling the kingdom themselves, but when they are unable to decide on a single representative unanimously, they begin to project Vijaya as the real heir and the natural ruler of the kingdom, after the king. It offers direct parallel with the situation that developed in India after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister. At that time, the ministers were unable to nominate the next Prime Minister. Eventually, they had agreed on the name of Indira Gandhi for this coveted position, though they knew very well that she lacked the
necessary credentials. When the ministers in the play are conspiring to choose the ruler unsuccessfully, it is Vijaya who intrudes into their room:

VIJAYA. I-I- mistook the room— I’m sorry...

[All of them stand up, just looking at her, and forgetting their conversation.]

VRATYASOM. Pishtakeshi! Found at last!

VIJAYA. Who?

VRATYASOM. Found our compromise!

VIJAYA [confused], W—what?

VRATYASOM. Meet our new leader! [Vijaya shrinks.] His Majesty’s heir! This one in front, five of us behind! She will be the ruler, we’ll be the rulers! An excellent plan till we agree on a firm decision!

[All slowly encircle Vijaya. They are looking her up and down. She stands in their midst like a startled hare.] (CPT 293)

In the beginning of her political career, Vijaya seems to be contemptuous and is indifferent towards the kind of position bestowed upon her. This, too, offers striking similarity with Indira Gandhi, who also was a reluctant leader in the initial stages of her political journey. Vijaya is even tired of long oath-taking processes in the court and interrupts one of the guests after observing his breathlessness. She tells Prannarayan:

I’m tired. How unending it all was! To start with, the ceremony just wouldn’t get to my oath-taking. The speech of welcome, the recital of hymns, the minister’s speeches—and do you know how long the oath of accession or whatever you call it, was? Just saying it before me, made the chief justice quite breathless. I said to him, “never mind, grandpa, you can tell me the rest tomorrow if you like,” and there was such a guffaw from the assembly! Why do these oaths at court have to be so long. Prannarayan? (CPT 295)

Vijaya’s authority is revealed when she disapproves of the height of the throne at the time of her coronation: “This is too high for me! Cut its legs a bit!” (CPT 296) The ministers dissuade her from doing so, referring to the royal custom but they do
not succeed in their efforts. When the attendant Prannarayan tries to make her understand the sanctity of the throne, she wonders why one must sit on it. And if a king can sit on it for his sacredness, then they should take her as the king and her orders of cutting the legs of the throne should be obeyed. She is adamant about changing the obsolete customs of royal family, enunciating her own identity:

VIJAYA. Just show me where these customs are written down. I’ll just read them and see.

... 

Prannarayan, since those ancestors were men—and old at that!—they couldn’t even have had occasions to play hopscotch. What do you think? (CPT 297)

There are certain codes for aristocratic rulers, and the defiance of these codes could threaten the sustenance of the system. The aristocratic customs do not allow their members to socialize with the common folks. These customs or ‘culture’ form the fundamentals of one’s identity. In one sense, culture is, indeed, the product of human work and thought. For one region it includes everything the inhabitants think and do. Cultural differences are, so to say, synonymous with diverse political problems than does an analysis in terms of identities. With a variation in cultures, misunderstandings normally surface on account of ignorance of each others’ value system, social practices and beliefs. Consequently conflicts arise. Catherine Thankamma in the article “The Women Patriarchy Created” believes: “A woman who has economic power [as] princess Vijaya has in Encounter in Umbugland—can circumvent patriarchy to a great extent” (43). On certain occasions, families such as hers do observe various royal customs. On her father’s birthday, Vijaya asks Prannarayan, her attendant, to set the pigeons free. The intelligent attendant, however, calls this convention to be a form of political hypocrisy, and states: “Even freedom [of pigeons] itself can be a diplomatic convention. Let us go, Princess. You must get ready to give your father ceremonial congratulations on this day” (CPT 271).

During her initial advancement for the throne, Vijaya is least bothered about these codes. Though she is reminded of such codes time and again, yet Princess Vijaya, an adolescent, doesn’t want to give up her freedom:
VIJAYA. I don’t think I can manage it. I feel like dancing, laughing and singing. I feel like playing and running about! Sometimes, Prannarayan, I even feel like shouting loudly without any reason.

PRANNARAYAN. With all due respect to piety and health, this is just human nature! But it doesn’t do for a ruler to be human. He has to be superhuman, or divine. (CPT 298)

While distinguishing high and elite culture from the common or popular or mass culture, John Fiske theorizes the concept of distance—distance between an individual and cultural production he consumes—as a key marker of difference between high and low culture. High culture promotes de-contextualized, de-politicized readings of cultural objects, because it constructs culture as a sphere of disinterested beauty insulated from the social processes. Popular culture, in contrast, is ‘concretely contextual’ (qtd. in Schonle 26). The people who follow high and elite culture are also conscious about their language, besides being different from the people of common culture in the ways already specified. Vijaya is given lessons in the language of authority by the attendant Prannarayan: “And remember one thing. Insult them, but don’t wound their egos. And diplomatic language! (CPT 299)

Language is strongly intertwined with culture and identity. Though basically language is meant for communication, but at a deeper level, it is an apparatus for identity construction. Kaplan declares: “It is through acquisition of language that we become human and social beings; the words we speak situate us in our gender and class. Through language, we come to know who we are” (72). In his The Sociolinguistics of Society, Fasold states the second use of language is that of defining the social situation and the language is used to make a statement about one’s own identity, about oneself in relation to the listener, and to define the situation in which language itself is being used (ix). The language a speaker uses is decoded by others, which allows them to read the identity of the speaker. The information communicated about the speaker’s identity informs the interlocutor on how to behave towards the speaker, based on a decoding of the exact information regarding the identity that has been displayed. Thornborrow in ‘Language and Identity’ claims that “one of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people’s views of who we are, is through our use of language” (qtd. in Thomas and Wareing 121).
Vijaya’s personality divulges her inner toughness immediately after her coronation. She leaves everyone speechless with her daft, outspoken behavior. At the very onset of her imperial journey, she rebukes the cabinet with authority:

The cabinet has broken the protocol of court by omitting to bow to us. We are the queen of this land… It is the custom that people of royal station should remember the value of their high rank. Three generations of ancestors have kept that custom. This is history. This was made by my ancestors.

[The cabinet is dumbfounded. Prannarayan is dumb.]

As from today, we are Her Most Virtuous Majesty, the Queen of Umbagland.

[The cabinet is tense. They mutter to each other. Vijaya is watching them out of the corner of her eye.] (CPT 301)

History tells us that eunuchs became important figures in politics even without holding important offices: especially those eunuchs who were personal attendants of emperors—such as the chamberlains of the later Roman Empire—could acquire influence by virtue of their physical proximity to and intimacy with the ruler (Smith 200). In his creation of the character of Prannarayan, Tendulkar seems to have been inspired by the role and importance of a eunuch in royal families, as had been the worldwide custom historically. Prannarayan finds approximation with Mardian, the eunuch in Cleopatra (Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra) and Staurakios and Aetios, the leading ministers of Byzantine empress Irene (Smith 200). Here in the play, Prannarayan, the omnipotent intellectual, states to Vijaya that the law of the forest is the law of this earth where there is always a struggle for power. Prannarayan’s function in the play is the same as that of sutradhara or a chorus. As such, he is presented as a detached observer and neutral, patient commentator. It is through his comments that the audience becomes aware of the ugliness and futility of the power game and it is through his eyes that the playwright brings forth the central concern of corrupting power in the play (Wadikar 23). Vijaya’s anger is also pacified by this faithful attendant, as he makes her aware of the legitimate meaning of the term ‘politics’ itself:
PRANNARAYAN. To hiss when you are stung is one kind of behavior. To bluster when you are stung is a politician behavior.

VIJAYA. I’m the queen. How dare that useless old monkey teach me the customs?

... 

PRANNARAYAN. One should take stock of the situation—give some advantages, and get some. Politics means sweetly-smiling enmity and the experience of sacrifice. A show of sacrifice is always profitable in politics. (CPT 306)

He believes that everybody is involved in the struggle of power and authority. The victim of today will become the victimizer of tomorrow. In another play Saktharam Binder, Tendulkar has portrayed the character of Lakshmi in this very category, who becomes a victimizer towards the end of the play, and forces Saktharam into becoming a murderer. Princess Vijaya becomes the ruler because of this struggle for power amongst the greedy ministers who are unable to come to terms with each other’s selfish motives:

To absorb strength from the bright light and endure through the night of ghosts: that is the law of the forest. Night follows day; a new, light filled day follows night. This is the forest’s daily truth. Nothing in this forest is unprotected; nor is anything fully protected; that is the secret of its ways. In the forest each one is the devoured, and each the devourer. He, who is hunted, if he escapes and lives, becomes the hunter. Nothing here is permanent, nothing everlasting. No one is forever the conqueror, or forever conquered. This forest is paramount. (CPT 307)

Going far beyond the demands of her feminine self, Vijaya works in her own distinctive style, and with a great deal of self-determination. She refuses to follow the plans of her ministry, as she stops her car in the middle of Kadamba settlement, without worrying, in the least, about her security and safety. She even goes to the tribal huts to meet the women and children without intimating the ministers. Adding to their worries, she kisses the children in the settlement, takes something to eat, and
asks for the families of the men killed or imprisoned, and finally makes a speech. A set of feminists propose that for purposes of identity formation, girls are more inclined towards their mothers, and in due course of time, they develop similar traits in their personality, becoming delicate and emotional. The mother-infant relationship creates a dynamic of identification in which only girls adopt the personality, characteristically associated with mothering. In *Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow argues that a girl forms her gender identity positively by becoming like the mother, with whom she begins life in a symbiotic merger so that she may pleasurably re-create the mother-infant symbiosis when she herself becomes a mother. Throughout women's lives, the self is defined through social relationships; issues of fusion and merger of the self with others are significant, and ego and body boundaries remain flexible (qtd. in Gardiner 352). One’s upbringing determines the way one develops his or her personality. While analyzing impact of the parents on personality formation of a child in the family structure, Chodorow observes: “mothers are and have been the child’s primary caretaker, socializer, and inner object; fathers are secondary objects for boys and girls” (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 470).

The readers remain unaware of the role of Vijaya’s mother in her upbringing, since her mother is not even introduced in the play. Still one can observe the feminine inclination in Vijaya’s personality. She doesn’t find any solace or affection with her father; but instead develops closeness with eunuch, Prannarayan, her attendant. She develops her unassailable position under his tutelage. On the one hand, she assures an impartial and personal enquiry into the riots, and on the other, a function organized by the industrialists’ association has to be cancelled, as she avoids this function. Vratyasom forcibly spits out his frustration:

> It doesn’t seem according to our earlier expectations. She is not prepared to confine herself prudently to the framework we have prepared for her. Let us put it in unvarnished terms. We placed her on the throne, and now she wants to plant one foot firmly on it, and the other on us! (*CPT* 312)

The successful completion of her first year of rule as announced by the pen bearers, the journalists, dashes all the hopes of hypocritical ministers. She conquers the corrupt practices of the ministers. Tendulkar lashes out at the prevalent
sycophancy among the contemporary ragbag of politicians. Granville Barker’s *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905) satirizes the corruption in family business, whereas in the present play corruption is in the political system. In terms of her authoritarian ways, Tendulkar’s Vijaya easily invites comparison with Girish Karnad’s historical character, Muhammad Tughlaq, in his play *Tughlaq* (1964). Tughlaq is suspicious of the motives of the people close to him [as] the number of imposters, betrayers, rebels and treacherous people around him never lent him any real support (qtd. in Tandon 76). Vijaya moves much ahead of this overambitious ruler, as surrounded with people of similar nature, she effectively rules the kingdom effectively, with her feminine concern for the tribal people intact. She fills the vacuum left behind by her late father, as she manages to keep the price index firmly under control, fixes the production, fights the epidemic in the state, increases the employment opportunities, reduces the infant mortality rate and fulfills all her promises. All this happens without opposition to her rule. She further takes a political decision to uplift a tribe and declares:

> For past several days, as you know, I have been preparing a plan for the uplift of the Kadamba tribe. Now I have got the plan exactly as I want it. I am very pleased with myself today- I am very happy! If this plan of myself comes into operation, then in the next five years this original tribe of our island will become economically stable and self-supporting.... Prannarayan, I have seen them. They came and stood before my car to commit suicide. Women, children, the young, the old, all. With heads held high, as if they were saying, with no conceit, kill us. I made the driver stop the car. I got down. I mingled with them, I stayed with them, I ate with them. These people are incredible. They are just skin and bone, their bellies have sunk against their spines, their ribs stick out, their hair and beards are long and unkempt, they don’t have enough clothes to cover themselves. But their eyes, Prannarayan, their eyes like explosions of light! Their necks are straight. Their heads won’t bow before anyone. Their words are measured....I stayed with them, but they didn’t ask anything of me. They gave to me instead. They made me take. As if they were the kings and I the suppliant. I was tortured by their misery, my eyes swam with tears. But their eyes didn’t blink for a second. Prannarayan, I am going to save this glory of
the island. I am going to cherish it. Going to give it the right to live a life of respect. (CPT 316)

Men and women are different from each other, as men are supposed to work outside and arrange for livelihood, while women are responsible for the inner world of home. Men here are shown to provide the worldly knowledge while women are given the job of taking care of things and looking after the old and disabled. Men and women work in tandem. Here in the play, the conversation between Vijaya and Prannarayan discloses the same ideology. Devoid of sexual identification, Prannarayan, the eunuch, understands the mundane affairs minutely and dispassionately:

VIJAYA. No, no! Sometimes I think of you as my mother. Prannarayan, how can a man be such a mother to anyone?

PRANNARAYAN. By not being a man.

VIJAYA. But at some moments you seem more manly than any man. No one else could give me the intimate knowledge of the world you sometimes so cruelly give. At such times I get very very angry with you—and I like you.

PRANNARAYAN. At such times, I count myself fortunate.

VIJAYA. Very often your words are those of a man, but your viewpoint is a mother’s.

...

PRANNARAYAN. I don’t remember it at all. It’s best not to think about it. I am as I am, and I will remain so. A man to the touch, but a woman in appearance. A being of flesh and blood, and yet a shadow. Besides, it has its advantages. Like a bat hanging from a branch, I get an upside down but complete view of the world. And the funny thing is, that from this upside down position, one sees the truth of the world the right way up. (CPT 316-17)

Women symbolize the ethnic and national identity, and it becomes a specific role of women to propagate and nurture their cultural norms. The gender-based
marginalization implies that such women, reduced to ‘other’ by a patriarchal society, try to recreate their identities in a ‘third-space’ in which they carve their own niche. The society has trapped the true self of women by imposing an idealized role upon them and by creating the feminine principle in nature. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias declare: “Women are participants in ethnic and national process in a number of specific ways: as biological reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic or national groups; as key actors in the transmissions of the community’s values; as markers of ethnic or national distinctiveness; and as active participants in national struggles” (qtd. in Miller and Wilford 13). The protagonist Vijaya is determined and self-assured about her decisions. She vows for the same self control and conviction for her future political plans as well and says: “This [Kadamba] plan will raise my stature on the island. I will get the credit for achieving what has never been achieved before. This plan will make everyone understand that I am not just my father’s daughter, not a puppet ruler. From now on I plan to rule in earnest” (CPT 317).

When ministers show dissent and criticize the tribal plan, she steps out of her feminine stance (as she is hurt with Karkashirsha calling the tribal people filthy) and disarms them with her characteristic wit. She doesn’t allow the ministers to disturb the atmosphere or the protocol of the court:

VIJAYA. They are filthy because we have kept them so.

VRATYASOM. [to Pishtakeshi]. I myself have a bath every day.

VIJAYA. For cleanliness you need certain amenities. Sometimes in an entire settlement of the Kadambas there is not a single lavatory; can you imagine it?

PISHTAKESHI. Before I became a minister, the place where I stayed had only one lavatory for every three families.

VIJAYA. Pishtakeshi, what is one lavatory for three families compared with no lavatory at all in an entire settlement?

... 

[Pishtakeshi starts to cough.]
[A little angrily] Pishtakeshi, you can go out till your cough is better, if
you wish.

[Pishtakeshi rises and goes towards the door, coughing.]

... KARKASHIRSHA. I regard a cough as a natural reflex beyond human
control-

VIJAYA [losing her poise]. I don’t mind but will you please shut up!

(CPT 322)

She is convinced about the implementation of this Kadamba plan. She
instantly starts working on her plans. The level of confidence that develops with time
again conveys the significance and impact of the environment shaping her response. It
was her royal upbringing that infused her with strength and determination to
implement her plan:

As soon as the ministers have signed the plan, it is my desire to take
immediate steps to have it put into operation. If it is not accepted, I-I
will consider it a challenge to my honor. If this happens, we cannot
ignore the adverse consequences that may possibly result. I feel sure
that the plan will be approved.... As soon as the ministers have signed
the plan, it is my desire to take immediate steps to have it put into
operation. The pens are over there (CPT 324).

Anger, often recognized as a masculine trait, is present in Vijaya’s personality,
too, and may be perceived as a consequence of her social environment rather than her
gender. Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir do emphasize the role of social
environment in the process of personality formation. Judith Butler states: “Gender
ought not to be construed as a stable identity. A locus of agency from which various
acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an
exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Gender 191). The queen grows
up in her surroundings, seeing the attitude of opportunistic males, and develops anger
against them. Vijaya gets disappointed with the ministers (a tendency of male), since
they don’t approve of her plan. She criticizes the entire race of men for their apathy
and indifference towards human-beings, other than their own social group. Her ire is
discernible in a tete-a-tete with Prannarayan:

VIJAYA. Why are men so wicked, so low, so horrible, so mean, so miserly? Why?

PRANNARAYAN. Because they are.

VIJAYA. But why are they?

PRANNARAYAN. Because they are men.

VIJAYA. It’s disgusting! It’s horrible!

PRANNARAYAN. It is.

VIJAYA. This has to be wiped out! Prannarayan, my blood is just boiling! (CPT 325)

However, Vijaya doesn’t wait for the cabinets’ nod, rather she starts working
on her plan and sends intimation to the ministers in this regard, thus pushing them into
gloom and depression. Tendulkar has portrayed her personality in such a way that it
sets her up as an exemplum for the women, the world over:

VRATYASOM. This is humiliation for the cabinet.

KARKASHIRSHA. Insolence!

...

ARANYAKETU. This is a grave blow to me!

VRATYASOM. This is a rebellion on the part of that bitch!

KARKASHIRSHA. This is high treason.

PISHTAKESHI. Does she think she can throw our opposition out with
the rubbish?

...

KARKASHIRSHA. We are only informed about it after the fact! (CPT 331)

Vijaya is truly audacious, and least scared of the consequences of this treason
on part of the ministry. She shows the strength in her stance, and doesn’t worry for
her own death as she declares to her attendant: “Prannarayan, if the crowd that gathers round the palace today catches hold of me and kills me, what will happen then?” (CPT 344) She talks candidly of her feelings about life, and her inclination to uplift the people of the state:

I don’t just want to live, I want to rule as well! I want to rule a hundred years, a thousand years. I want to thumb my nose at these ministers, and give my Umbagland whatever shape I wish. Who are these old dodderers to stop me? I am young! I have hardly begun my work! There are so many problems, so many dilemmas and obstacles and wants. Umbagland has to develop yet! If I’m not here, how will it? If I am not on the throne, what will these useless old men do to the island? I must look after everything, do everything myself. I will have to do it. [Taking aim and throwing at the demon’s face on the wall] I’ll do everything! Let these ministers come! Let their mob come! Let it happen! Some final decisions will be taken today, Prannarayan. Today is my supreme test! (CPT 345)

Towards the end of the play, Act III scene IV allows Vijaya’s subversive attempts at ruler ship as a corrective to an existing system that is imaged as morally corrupt, embodied in the ‘patriarchal cabinet’. Towards the end of the play, she successfully ruins the plan of the ministers who thereafter groan and beseech for their own life. They have instigated and planted their own people in the mob and hide themselves inside the palace. Vijaya highlights her triumph:

As soon as we went for them, our people, incited against us, demanded our life. Three times. In a loud voice. One or two stones were thrown in our direction…. Then we shouted, “Enough of this foolishness! First stand still and be quiet!”...It was all silence. ...We swore at the crowd. There was a rattle of applause. We scolded the crowd. They began to cheer. We asked the crowd to explain themselves. The crowd hung their head and stood silent…. We said that we’ll strive for the welfare for our people…. We said, taxation is hereby abolished. Yet they were silent. We said, “We shall institute a public enquiry into the private property of our ministers, who have today gone against the interest of
the people.” At that, the crowd brightened up. We said, “Those ministers who are found guilty will be severely punished.” The crowd brightened up still further. We shouted, “Down with the cabinet.” The crowd shouted it back louder than us. (CPT 353)

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed various social movements that aimed at transforming established value systems, ideas and cultural institutions, and brought major social changes. Feminism challenged the prevalent ideology by developing alternative articulations of subjectivities with which to empower and recreate women’s identities in positive ways. In his preface to Nirvasit (1946), a book that talks about this transformation in the role of women, Ilachandra Joshi remarks:

The August movement and the world war and the Bengal Famine- all these acted as catalytic agents in the transformation of the women: the retributive energy of middle class women suppressed for centuries suddenly exploded with tremendous power. Suddenly she appeared not as a mother, or wife, or daughter but like the warrior goddesses with axe and spear in her arms. (qtd. in Das History 1911-1956 345)

Vijay Tendulkar’s portrayal of women in these two plays definitely pushes them centre stage, be it Vijaya or Jyoti. These two women characters are shown in an altogether different light. Jyoti initially appears to be somewhat shaky, even passive, as she seems to lack the confidence to justify her stance. The ideological implication of her father has so conditioned her mind that her father’s decision becomes her decision. In course of the play, she develops into an independent and decisive woman. In the play Kanyadaan, Tendulkar’s main focus is on how gender, caste and patriarchy collude to work against the self-definition of a woman, until she decides to take charge of her own situation and circumstances. In Encounter in Umbugland, Vijaya manages to put up stiff resistance to the machinations of the patriarchal order and comes up trumps. Though she is born into a royal family, all the advantages of her birth, status and identity do not necessary prepare her to face the kind of conspiracies her ministers’ hatch. It is, in fact, her perspicacity and self-determination that leads her towards strength and supremacy. She proves to be a better administrator than her father. While resisting the male hegemony on the political turf, she dashes all the aspirations of the power-hungry ministers. Both the women, therefore, prove
themselves equal to the task of self-emancipation, though they have to overcome a number of hostile, political and ideological practices in their wayward journey towards identity formation. In an effort to give voice to Jyoti and a much stronger voice to Vijaya, Tendulkar effectively challenges and undermines the complex web of patriarchal politics that often divides and oppresses women through skewed identity constructions. By enabling his women to grow far beyond the shadows of the men who surround them, Tendulkar has not only succeeded in deconstructing the conventional patriarchal codes, but also created dramatic space for the articulation and assertion of women on their own terms, rather than those enunciated by men.