Introduction
In The Vultures Vijay Tendulkar displays on the stage, the unmitigated violence arising from greed and immorality. It portrays the domestic violence caused by greed. The selfishness and greed of human beings are the main issues of the play. The characters in the play are ever ready to cheat one another to get more money. The eternal battle between good and evil features strongly in his plays. Evil is sometimes manifested directly. Evil people in Tendulkar’s plays are selfish, self-centered and incapable of love. They are frequently hypocrites. The vulturine nature dominates the relations of middle class family in The Vultures. The play is an extremely powerful tale of brutal violence and terrible greed. The play shocked them, as Tendulkar used the language which was not normally used on the stage. In the play Rama and Rajaninath are the characters representing ‘good’ in the play, which the other characters representing ‘evil’ do not hesitate to kill one another for money.

2 Mutual interactions
The play Vultures is intensely morbid in the portrayal of its character and action. It exposes greed, violence, selfishness, sensuality and wickedness inherent in human nature through mutual interactions of the members of the family. All the members of the family except Rama and Rajaninath are leading a kind of life that is comparable to that of vultures only. They inherit the baser qualities from their
father who cheats his own brother in business and acquires prosperity and affluence. Thus, the sons and the daughter follow the footsteps of their father. They all belong to a flock of vultures.

Ramakant, Umakant and Manik are like their father, always ready to cheat one another and resort to extract more money. They do not hesitate to seek each other’s lives to get a larger share of their father’s property. Each one is suspicious of the other and loses the real treasure of life that is, peace of mind. Manik’s statement bears evidence to it. For she says to her sister-in-law Rama. “So, I should leave it (the door) open? Should I? So you can come and strangle me, all of you? It’s because I take care that I’ve survived in this house”.

3 Evil inherent in human character

Ramakant and Umakant beat their father when he refuses to give them information about his secret account in a bank. When they could not get money from their sister’s lover, the Raja of Hondur, they manoeuvre to abort her child in anguish by beating her inhumanly. Towards the end of the play, Manik successfully tries to abort the babe in the womb of her sister-in-law to avenge the wrong done to her by her brothers. The actions of the character i.e., the beating up of Hari Pitale by his sons, the forced abortion of Manik’s and Rama’s babes by Ramakant and Umakant and by Manik respectively, the hatred that the members of the family have for each other “underline the fundamental evil inherent in human character”.

In the tragedies of Shakespeare the hero is responsible for his own ruin, so we feel pity for him. But in Tendulkar’s play The Vultures the characters are essentially bad, without having a single good quality. Still, we feel sympathy for them, rather than terror, as all these characters appear to be the victims of their own wickedness or viciousness. In their increasing efforts to inflict miseries on others, they make their lives more miserable.

The Vultures shocked the conservative people with its naturalistic display of cupidity, sex and violence. It shows how the capitalistic values destroy human love and relations. Hari Pitale cheats his own brother in business and earns great wealth. His children – Ramakant, Umakant and Manik – inherit his egocentric nature. For money, they do hesitate to kill one another. Manik expresses her fear of being killed to her sister-in-law while telling her why the door of the room is shut.

“So I should leave it open, should I? So you can come and strangle me, all of you? It’s because I take care that I’ve survived in the house! Think it’s human beings who live here? The door was shut says she!” She later gives an instance to support her fear, “When I had typhoid last year, far from looking after me, you’d all plotted to put poison in medicine!” (208). Hari Pitale also expresses his disgust for his selfish children. “If I die, it’ll be a release! They’re all waiting for it. But I’m your own father, after all. If I die I’ll sit on your chest! I won’t let enjoy a rupee of it. I earned it all. Now, these wolves, these bullies!”.

4 Blackmailing

Ramakant, Umakant and Manik torture their own father in the name of a fake fight among themselves. They succeed in getting the bank balance of their father and spend it on liquor and other luxuries. Ramakant and Umakant try to blackmail the lover of their own pregnant sister. They break her leg in order to prevent her from intimating her lover about their blackmailing. When they learn about her lover’s death, they kick on her belly hard and abort her foetus. Rajaninath, the natural son of Hari Pitale and Rama, the wife of Ramakant, are the only doves in that house of vultures. Frightened by his own legitimate sons, Hari Pitale requests Rajaninath to help him to teach lessons to his sons a lesson. Rama feels more than vexed with her husband who becomes impotent with excessive drinking and who takes her to several doctors and saints. So, while pouring out agony, she says to Rajaninath:
“It’s not the fault of doctors, of learned men, of saints and sages! It’s not even my fault! This womb’s healthy and sound, I swear it! I was born to become a mother. This soil’s rich. It’s hungry. But the seed won’t take root. If the seeds’ soaked in poison, if it’s weak, feeble lifeless, devoid of virtue-then why blame the soil?”

5 Character And Chorus

He makes love to her and she yields to him as if she were under a spell. She, thus becomes pregnant. Her husband is happy about his wife’s pregnancy. She feels suffocated in a house of vultures and begs him to consider the change of their residence. But he rejects to see the wisdom of her request owing to his male chauvinism and cupidity. Finally he aborts the foetus of his wife with physical violence when Umakant tells him that his wife committed adultery with Rajaninath. Rajaninath is a poet and comments on the incidents and people. Thus he, like Pranarayan in Encounter in Umbland, functions both as a character and chorus. The play shows how the greed for money in the capitalistic society makes people cruel, inhuman and loveless.

The play Silence! The Court is in Session earns Vijay Tendulkar a place among the leading Indian playwrights in the late sixties. G.M.Kulkarni, a Marathi critic, observes: Tendulkar succeeds in setting a ‘new form’ by using the new, modern folk, and classical elements simultaneously in his plays. This can be particularly noticed in his plays after the successful presentation of Silence! The Court is in Session (G.M.Kulkarni, “Natakkar Vijay Tendulkar, E.K.Jinkane, Harne Satyakacha, Dec, 1971, 38, translated by the investigator herself). The play Silence! The Court is in Session is based on a real incident. The stimulus comes from an amateur group on its way to stage a mock trial in village near Bombay. This play comes as a turning point in Tendulkar’s career. It is a “play within a play” or a “play in the form of a rehearsal”. In it, Tendulkar has raised several questions about love, sex, and moral values present in the society. To expose the hollowness of the middle class morality and dual standards of society, he makes ample use of irony, satire pathos and mock element. The success of the play lies in its universality. The questions raised by Benare, the central character of the play, exist in all ages and societies. Benare is projected as a rebel against the established values of the basically orthodox society. So, in a sense, she may be seen as Tendulkar’s projection of a “New Woman” in the Indian context.

6 Materiality, Infanticide & Defeatism Of The Unsuccessful

The action of the play revolves round the character of Leela Benare. She is a lady artist and teacher. She is frank and open. Very often we are aware of the two worlds in the society. The first world is what we see on the surface (appearance), and the second world is the truth that lies underneath (reality). The world of appearance shows that ‘seems’ to be true, whereas the world of reality shows what actually is true. Learning to distinguish between these two, and not being fooled by outer show, is often what makes the difference between a happy and an unhappy life us. Vanity and pride make people look at the world through a distorting lens, seeing it falsely. Benare exposes the hypocrisy of people and laughs at their faults. The other unhappy members expose her personal life in the same of mock trial. In this play, ‘good is shown defenseless against evil’. Benare cannot stop her humiliation, despite being good and innocent. The members in the mock-trial do not find fault with Prof. Damle who is the real culprit and who caused the misery in her life. The inhuman attitude of other characters in the play exposes the human nature. The audience feels sorry for Benare, who loves life so much, feels utterly helpless. Leela Benare is presented as a female protagonist and her role eclipses the roles of her male counterparts. In love, she is cheated twice; first by her maternal uncle and late by Prof. Damle, her loving-companion. However, in the first event, the guilt passes unnoticed and
hence unpolished. But, in the other one, she is caught in a trap, through the cruel game cunningly arranged by her companions, for her love-affair has already been exposed by her pregnancy.

Each time Benare is disillusioned by her male-companions for they love first her body and not he mind. Thinking of Prof. Damle as an “intelligent god” (118), she is sexually involved in a love affair with him. But he too, like her previous lover, is interested in her love just physically. Having fulfilled his sexual love, he turns away, leaving her to suffer her fate in the so-called modern society. Each time, Benare’s counterparts successfully manoeuvre to victimize her, since she has no backing and support. She is forced to live a lonely, solitary life. So, it is easy for them to treat her as though she were a use and throw object. The tragedy of her life does not end with this only. Miss. Benare becomes an object of ridicule among her companions who pose that they are the upholders of moral values of society. Benare is, therefore, made a scapegoat. She is ill-treated by her colleagues. She suffers at their hands for the offence she has not committed. That is why she does not accept the punishment meted out to her “infanticide” (actually, foeticide).

G.P. Deshpande in his article entitled “Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe”, states: The play “Silence! The Court is in Session” is highly symbolic in nature. During the court proceedings of the mock-trial, such animals as dogs, a hen, etc. enter the hall. These animals symbolize a complicated situation of innocent, simple, and straight forward women like Miss Benare (i.e. the hen) by cruel persons with dual personality (i.e. the dogs). So, the pursuit of the hen by the dogs symbolically represents Miss. Benare’s inhuman hunt by her fellow companions” (G.P. Deshpande, “Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe: Kahi Vichar”, Satyakartha, 1972, 23). Violence that characterizes most of Tendulkar’s plays makes its appearance felt in this play also. Through the torture of a helpless woman, Tendulkar throws light on the sadist tendencies of the middle-class people. All other characters except Samant fail to achieve the various aims they have in their respective lives, Mr. and Mrs. Kadhikar remain childless, Ponkshe fails to be a scientist, Sukhatme to be a successful lawyer, Karnik to be an actor, and Rokde to gain an independent existence. The dramatist indicates that the defeatism of the unsuccessful, frustrated men forces them to seek vicious pleasure in inflicting miseries on others, particularly those who are simple and innocent. Benare’s rhetorical soliloquy, at the end of the play, suggests that truth always gets suppressed in the proceedings of court, the fountain of justice. That is why Benare’s objections seem to have been drowned by the judge’s cry of silence and the banging of the gavel during the court proceedings. Her tragedy reveals that too much of innocence is unpardonable even in the so-called cultured society. Innocence is punished and cruelty is set free and quite ironically, the play concludes with the words: “The show must go on” (120)

7 Strength, Weaknesses & Bitter Experience

In the play Sakharam Binder, Tendulkar once again as in ‘Vultures’ explores violence and sexual lust, deep-rooted in human nature, while projecting the complexity of human nature and human character. Each character in the play is the combination of strength and weakness, good and evil. Sakharam, the protagonist of the play appears crude, aggressive, and violent. But, in his association with Laxmi, he displays tendencies of having been a religious and family loving man. As soon as Champa enters his life all the desisted changes enters his life, all the desired changes evaporate and he is shown as transformed into a sensual drunkard with perverted thoughts of sexual enjoyment. Laxmi, once the embodiment of ideal Indian woman, tender, religious and self-effacing, now turns out to be wicked and vicious when Champa becomes her rival in love. After Champa’s murder, she shows greater presence of mind than Sakharam. Champa who is apparently aggressive and violent like Sakharam, has a good deal of sympathy for Laxmi when the latter refreshes to give her a shelter.
Sakharam, the book-binder is an outcaste, having a Brahmin father and a Mahar mother. Due to the constant, inhuman beating of his father, he leaves his home at the age of eleven. Alienated from his family, he never called his own father, father. He was “like the son of a wretched Mahar, a scavenger to his mother. “I grew up like a cactus-out in the open” (II, VII) he says there is a streak of vengeance in his character against men in general and women in particular. He is given to treating women as disposable commodities. He picks up women, cast –off wives, brings them home, to slave off with him. The bitter experiences of life harden him and make him violent. The frustrated household life in his childhood crushes his tender feeling and leaves him a rough and tough guy growing like a desert cactus that stands the onslaughts of strong weather.

Having no belief in the institution of marriage, Sakharam remains a bachelor. But he makes a contractual arrangement based on mutual convenience with a woman in all her helplessness. Laxmi is the seventh in the series of such helpless women. She brings a miserable change in his life but that relationship lasts for a short period. Sakharam tells Laxmi that the women he procured for himself had their own eccentricities. The women who preceded her used to drink a lot of tea, the one before went in for gods. Another woman used to worship her husband’s shirt. She did so for two years. Then she had tuberculosis and died in the hospital “hugging his shirt to herself” (I, i). He exclaims to Laxmi that for all women “The fellow who is out to kill them he’s god! The chap who saves them-he’s just a man! I, i)”. He calls husbands an impotent lot, who can’t father a brat; but beat and kick their wives. He says: it is a good thing that he is not a husband. He assures Laxmi that “Once a person crosses this threshold, she belongs here. When she leaves this house, It’s all over between us -------- But ----- I give her a sari, a choli and fifty rupees plus a ticket to where she wants to go” (I,i). As Champa later tells Laxmi, “he really takes his money’s worth out of a woman (III,i).

Laxmi’s objection to join Daud, Sakharam’s muslim friend, in the prayer of Lord Ganapati annoys Sakharam and makes him violent. He beats her inhumanly. The result is that she leaves him instantly. Later, Champa enters Sakharam’s life. The entire good things end with her arrival, he grows more violent, aggressive, and full of sexual passion. Still the playwright successfully manages to show intermittently goodness and sensitivity that are parts of his nature. His playing mridanga, his rejection of Champa’s touch on the morning of Dasarata festival, for she does not have a bath , his feeling that Laxmi is far different from the previous women in life-all these are examples in the case. These aspects of nature reveal that Sakharam is the victim not of his inherent weaknesses such as his viciousness, wickedness etc. but of bitter experiences in his life.

Laxmi was driven out by her husband because they had no children. She is brought home at the outset of the play by Sakharam. Though not born a Brahmin, she has Brahmin ways, unlike Brahmin –born Sakharam who is like a Mahar. Even before she came to Sakharam, she had already been battered and beaten thoroughly into a docile, religious-minded woman. She tells Champa, the eighth woman of Sakharam, later : ”I’ve always been that (religious). Right from the time I was a child. My faith is what gave me strength when life was hard. Another woman would have killed herself. I went on living (III ,i). While she was pressing Sakharam’s legs, he asks: ‘Your husband’s name?'”, (I, ii) and only silence is her answer.

“Have you eaten?” She shakes her head by way of answer. Under threat she exclaims, “It is Chaturti day. And in any case I was not hungry” (I, i). She has been without food for days, and is used to it like a typical Indian wife. Sakharam wastes no time in fetching Champa, a full-blooded rebel like himself; but a woman-rebel at that, who is essentially disadvantaged. Very soon, she gains control of the house and its master. She deserted her husband, a fouzdar who was sacked “because a pistol was stolen from the station” (II, i).
Shortly, Laxmi and her husband who calls himself Fouzdar Shinde are gravitated towards Sakharam’s house; the husband of an irrepressible infatuation to Champa and Laxmi thrown out this time from her nephew’s house on the charge of stealing has no to nowhere else to go.

### 8 Women Themselves Are Responsible

Laxmi is sensitive, loyal, hard working and Champa is violent aggressive and disloyal etc. Laxmi enters Sakharam’s life as her husband tortures her for she cannot bear a child from him. But the situation is not far different in her new home. She faces constant humiliation, severe beating and excessive physical bust. Sakharam too refuses to give her a shelter on her return to him later. If she is willing to bear any amount of suffering with Sakharam, the question arises as to why she should not do so with her husband. She lives in Sakharam’s house with a firm determination to die on his lap though she is ill-treated and ill-used by Champa. She claims for herself virtue and loyalty but finds nothing wrong about her relationship with an unknown man, Fouzdar Shinde. Laxmi confronts nothing less than a hell in Sakharam’s house. She informs Sakharam of Champa’s intimate association with Daud. In a way, she is responsible for Champa’s murder. So it is difficult to accept her as a generous and tender-hearted woman. Here, the playwright seems to suggest that women themselves are responsible at times, for their plight to a large extent. Vasant Palshikar describes the two women in contrast thus:

“Laxmi’s conservation with the insects and crows symbolically indicates her dissatisfaction with sexual passion. Her gleeful laughter, while she is speaking with the animals, incites sexual lust. Champa’s physical beauty, her lovely appearance, inflame Sakharam’s sexual hunger. Laxmi’s behavior, gestures, facial movements, and verbal expressions attract Sakharam towards her. Outwardly, she appears submissive, helpless and docile but actually, she is ambitious, determined, possessive and dictatorial” (Vasant Palshikar, “Sakharam Binder”, Pratishthan, May, 1973, 13-14)

Champa’s violence is not without reasons. Her mother shows utter disregard and carelessness for her. She sells her even before she attains maturity. Later, again, the inhuman treatment she gets from her husband makes her coarse, violent and aggressive. However, she shows sympathy to Laxmi and gives her shelter. Similarly, she refuses to have intercourse with Sakharam at first night. She is touchy and insensitive to some of the issues of life. All these situations throw light on her real nature and hearing. The deterministic overtones of her life, like those of Sakharam’s are more perceptible and, hence, cannot be overlooked or brushed aside on the ground of morality. Thus in the play Sakharam Binder, Tendulkar presents life in all its ugliness and crudity. Such a naked reality, despite the fact that it is inevitable, is still difficult to believe.

### 9 Conclusion

To sum up, the plays of Tendulkar explore effectively the themes of love, sex, sensuality, lust for power, violence, man-woman relationship, matrimonial relationship, human relationship, and exploitation and oppression of women in the society. Let us discuss these in detail in the succeeding chapters of the thesis.

### References


