
Man-Woman Relationship in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*

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Abstract

This paper examines Vijay Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder*, which explores the complexities of human nature, societal hypocrisy, and the dynamics of man-woman relationships. The protagonist, Sakharam, rejects traditional morality and the institution of marriage, instead forming contractual relationships with abandoned women, Laxmi and Champa. While he outwardly portrays himself as a saviour, Sakharam is revealed to be a deeply flawed individual driven by lust, violence, and egotism. The contrasting personalities of Laxmi, a submissive and religious woman, and Champa, a rebellious and assertive figure, highlight the duality in Sakharam's character and his inability to reconcile his contempt for societal norms with his own oppressive behavior.

Keywords: Hypocrisy, Morality, Oppression, Duality and Patriarchy

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most notable playwrights of contemporary Indian drama. He is known to be a turbulent and a controversial dramatist who gave the Marathi drama a nationwide recognition. Originally writing in Marathi, his plays are made available in translated versions. His plays *Shantata! Court Chaloo Ahe* (*Silence! The Court is in Session*), *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Sakharam Binder* created a storm in the society. Tendulkar stands as the vanguard of the avant-garde theatre that developed as a movement separate from the mainstream. Dissatisfied with the decadent professional theatre that characterized the thirties and forties; he gave the theatre a new form and experimented with all its aspects including content, acting, décor and audience communication.

From depicting characters of bold women of the middle-class society in his earlier two plays, Tendulkar moved onto those belonging to the lower middle-class society in his play entitled *Sakharam Binder*.

In his plays, the oppressive mechanism of power is revealed through the exploitation of woman. Tendulkar's mission was not ethical but social and psychological. He was aware of his role as an artist and as a sensitive human being. The conservative people are stunned by the complex, problematic nature of Tendulkar's plays as he successfully tries to destroy outdated piety and stereotyped beliefs. While dealing with the problems, reality is projected in all its vulgar and naked form. It is difficult to accept and appreciate the incident or event, but it is as real as inevitable. So, audience leaves the theatre with a disturbed mind. It is in this sense that Tendulkar can be seen as an iconoclast, who intends to bring about a silent, gradual change in people's attitude towards life and its problems. The play *Sakharam Binder* explores complexities of human nature. Through the character of Sakharam and those of the two women Laxmi and Champa, Tendulkar reaches into the depth of physical lust and violence in human being. The play consists of three acts: The first act depicts the relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam, the second one, that of Champa-Sakharam, and the last one, that of Laxmi-Sakharam-Champa. Sakharam, the protagonist, is at the axle of the situation. Laxmi considers Champa as her rival in Sakharam's love; the one is a foil to the other.

Outwardly, Sakharam pretends that he is a saviour of women, but inwardly he is a reservoir of all that is bad in society, so far as man-woman relationship is concerned. Although he criticizes married life, he develops such a relationship, which is worse for the woman who suffers more with Sakharam than with her husband before. He brings the deserted, miserable woman to his house not to improve her lot but to serve his needs. And he is ready to throw her out when there remains nothing womanly about her. Although he understands and supports a rebellious woman; he wants his woman to slave for him day and night, to respect his wishes, and to satisfy his lust. He lashes out at his women and the world at large explicitly and implicitly at himself. He does not care for the world but wants the world, particularly his women to care for him. The want of love has generated a kind of fierceness in his temperament. As a result, he turns into a masochist who seeks pleasure in inflicting pains and miseries on others. Apparently, Sakharam's anger appears incoherent but it can be understood as the

symptom of a positive trait of a character in search of his identity. The harsh treatment given by his father, and his running away from home to escape from suffering are responsible factors for the sense of instability that he exhibits throughout. Like the protagonist of an avant-garde play, he shows himself cut off from society by rejecting the accepted cultural norms and established moral values.

The play *Sakharam Binder* is translated by Kumud Mehta and Shanta Gokhale. The central action in the play takes place in the house of Sakharam Binder. The house is situated in the alleys of small district town. It is a small house with two rooms and a kitchen and the shouts of children are heard in the background. Like the background of expressionistic play, the noise of the shouting of children and the topsy turvy setting of the house work as an appropriate background to stir the rage of Sakharam. In the very first statement his outrageous shouts with several interrogations, provide a penetrating insight into the fragmented psyche where the holistic images create no impressions on him. He survives in his own mental spaces exclusively isolated from the external forces. Sakharam is aggressive and egoist who forms the conditions of self survival beyond the limitations of personal relationship. He adopts non-conformist attitude and of his own that floats from his consciousness. His unfathomed contempt for the institution of marriage, abhorrence of personal relationship and unorganized life style proclaims a world where human values have been shattered and individual seems to have lost his harmony with the environment. The representation of the chain of events incarnated in the character of Sakharam has come close to Tendulkar's observation that in drama, 'theme' does not decide the structure of the play but it is the character that determines the nature and structure of the play.

Sakharam stands for private morality against the expectations of public morality. He possesses exceptional strength of will to accept and assert his own pattern of life. For Sakharam, Lakshmi's subjugation is not the matter of personal vengeance but it is the challenge to the whole society where people maintain double standards and can't reveal the truths of their lives. It is a mockery of the false morality. Sakharam's contempt is directed not so much against Laxmi, as it has been directed against the hypocrisy of society. With contemptuous rage he remarks, "... in this bloody place,

the men are all the same. They slink out at night, on the sly. And they put on an act all the time. They'd like us to believe that they're an innocent lot" (126). The following confession gives an insight into his agony born out of childhood insecurity and his anarchical authority works as a mechanism for self preservation. He generalizes human predicament in context of his own life conditions. He exhorts:

We're not saints, we're men. I tell you, worship and prayer can't satisfy the itch. If you want a thing, well you've got to have it! What's there to hide? And from whom? From our father (127).

Sakharam possesses the discontent that the structure of society did not permit him the right of happy survival. His recollections of his painful childhood experiences, transforms the emotions of contempt into sympathy and pity. Regarding his own beastly appearance and undesirable ways, he admits, "I've been like this right from birth. Born naked. I was. My mother used to say, the brat's shameless. He's a Mahar born in a Brahmin home. And if I was, who is to blame? It wasn't my doing" (127). He accepts his identity as a 'dirty scavenger' and left his home at the age of eleven. All these facts narrated by Sakharam in contrast of the earlier stubbornness gives an insight into the fractured consciousness of Sakharam. At this juncture, the mingling of social and psychological factors prepare a strong dramatic situation in the play *Sakharam Binder* and it helps to develop emotional link between the sensibility of the protagonist and the sensibility of audience.

In *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar develops dramatic situation through unconventional ways of the protagonist. Sakharam used to keep woman without marriage. Lakshmi in contrast of stubbornness of Sakharam appears as an ideal image of Indian womanhood dedicated to her religion and moral responsibilities. Immediately, after coming to Sakharam's house, she makes search for Gods and Goddesses. Looking at her craze for idols, he expresses the craziness of his previous woman who used to worship her husband as 'God'. He ridicules how feminine sensibility in India is butchered in the name of traditions. The social irony is implicit in her observation, "the fellow who's

opt to kill them—his God! The chap who saves them—his just a man” (128).

The presence of Dawood Miyan, the friend of Sakharam helps to add dramatic conflict in the play *Sakharam Binder*. It helps to maintain a balance of the contradictory elements integrated in the nature of Sakharam. It is seen that Sakharam is not a morally corrupt man but a hypersensitive individual who fails to cope up with the hypocrisy of society. Sakharam shares his mind with Dawood Miyan:

I tell you Miyan, those fellows—they can't father a brat and they take it all out on their wives. Beat her , kick her every single minute of the day. They're an impotent lot! For them the women's just dirt, that's all...” (129).

In Sakharam’s scheme of contractual relationship, there is no question of subjugation and domination. Sakharam Binder admits that the institution of marriage is a great hazard for self survival. He condemns the traditional roles of husband and wife in which the betrayal is implied. He comments:

Come to think of it. Women they’re a clever lot. It’s only when a woman gets married that she goes wrong. She begins to feel; “Now I have got my man.” But the husband is a proper swine! He ties her down; he doesn’t get tied down himself! He flirts around again—a free bind—As far as I am concerned. I don’t believe in double talk. (130)

Tendulkar through Sakharam tries to establish a more dynamic and flexible vision of personal relationship in which socio-economic security is not the ultimate destination. The honest and unconventional relationship adopted by Sakharam seems to be a more desirable option to resolve the conflict born out of gender discrimination.

Sakharam exhibits his own desires and choices of food but within his own limitations permit Lakshmi liberty to make her own choices. He does not like to have rice but orders her to find out rice in the tin. The character of Sakharam is conceived to expose the hypocrisy of society. He is a misogynist or a torturer but against a

system that can't ensure freedom and dignity to an individual. He exhibits his resentment against that patriarchal social structure in which woman was commanded to worship her husband, her God and had to bear all injustice done to her. Sakharam realizes the misery of Lakshmi's life. He does not impose his choice on her but ridicules the hypocrisy of the system that is inhuman and absurd. He declares:

What's wrong? Oh, all right, I won't ask you. The whole lot of you! All alike where this one thing concerned: Mention your husband's name and your eyes being to brim over with tears. He kicks you out of the house; he is out to squeeze the life out of you. But your God. You ought to worship a God like that with shoes and slippers (13).

The scene IV of act first of *Sakharam Binder* in which Lakshmi in a state of mental privacy looking at mouse falls in a wild laughter has deep surrealistic value. She talks with the mouse and in order to project her internal contempt and rage tries to implicit tortures on the mouse. She dictates, "Get away from here. Get away. Don't I tell you to move off? Pawing me all the time go on. Don't come anywhere near me. Can't you hear?"(136).In this episode Lakshmi's exhibition of authority, suppressed rage and recourse to violence are in contrast of the silence and submissiveness accepted by her in the earlier scenes. It becomes a symbolic challenge to the authority of Sakharam. In Lakshmi's boisterous laughter, Sakharam perceives the images of his own humiliation and the negation of authority. His consciousness seems to be trapped in her laughter. In this action of Lakshmi, he tries to search out some deeper implications of the unrevealed self of Lakshmi. First, he is irritated and confused but subsequently he realizes that such irrational behaviour is an expression of persistent suppression.

Sakharam believes that he is magnanimous when he gives the women in his life permission to leave, whenever they wish. Fidelity for him means that he brings home a successor, only when the earlier one has left. Tendulkar's play is about this self-proclaimed hedonistic man and of the drama that sets in when he brings first Lakshmi and later Champa into his home. In *Sakhararn Binder*, the immediate appearance of Dawood after the reference of 'scorpion' indicates that it might be a cause of disharmony between Sakharam and Champa. Through Champa, Tendulkar represents a foil of Lakshmi. Champa enjoys the aesthetics of feminine rule and instead of being a

subaltern, she becomes a ruler. The gender determined social roles changes. Instead of carrying the autonomy of Sakharam, she declares, "Yes go and see if there's anything to eat. There's been nothing in this belly since yesterday" (157). She establishes her own authority and thwarts his illusions regarding femininity. Champa appears as a rebel who can curb the intentions of her oppressors. In her resentment and filthy comments, she challenges the illusions of the institution of marriage and with a bold attempt, she declares, "Scared! Who me? And scared of whom? My husband! What can he do to me? If I'd stayed with him longer. I'd have shown that corpse what I can do! But I got fixed up"(157). Champa with her fearlessness changes the established authority and adopts a nonconformist attitude. Instead of preparing the tea herself, Champa orders Sakharam to prepare tea. The ironical and sarcastical tone implied in the approach of, Champa contributes to enhance the social criticism in the play. The authority of Champa makes Sakharam to loose control over himself. Champa even does not hesitate to change her clothes in the presence of Dawood. In his encounter with Lakshmi, Sakharam tried to prove himself a radical person who does not conform to established ideology. In his encounter with Champa it becomes evident that he survives with the traditional gender specific roles. He is certain that woman has to survive within the periphery of household with the tributes of passivity and dedication, devoted to cooking and management of household. Earlier he establishes his honesty and expresses his resentment against the double talks of social conducts. Champa is a greater radicalist and denies his authority and criticizes his male chauvinism. She retorts, "Rule, is this a school or a court or something." Champa's ease in her arguments in contrast of rage and contempt of Sakharam seems ridiculous but it is quite effective for stage presentation. Like Sakharam, she makes use of abusive language for her previous husband. She calls him "swine". These expressions undoubtedly reveal her strength of spirit but it becomes a challenge to the ego of Sakharam.

In the III scene it is revealed that Champa disobeys the authority of Sakharam and enjoys her own freedom being in the company of Dawood. This idea of sexual freedom created a terror in her heart. She still lives under the illusion that Sakharam is like a God to her. She identifies herself with the interest of Sakharam. In the character of Lakshmi, Tendulkar makes search for the real

ideal of Indian womanhood. She accepts, “If I have to be kicked, let him kick me; if I have to die; let me lie on his lap—in full glory like a married woman. How could she do it to him?” (187). The appearance of Champa’s husband and Lakshmi’s sympathy for him brings dramatic relief in the play. However, Lakshmi’s sympathy for him only intensifies the contempt of Champa. In her ideology there was no turning back. Champa protects Lakshmi but she is contemptuous about her, “Don’t ever forgive her God. She’s evil.” By the end of the play in scene V act VI, Tendulkar reflects on the idea of female jealousy. Both of them Lakshmi and Champa want to empower the soul of Sakharam in their own way. Champa exhorts that Lakshmi is going to take away his manhood and she tries to create a breach in the relationship of Sakharam and Champa. In the darkness of night, Sakharam under the fit of rage and contempt kills Champa. The end of the play *Sakharam Binder* is a bit depressing and it creates chaos and nothingness. The last scene in which Lakshmi manages the burial of the body of Champa to save Sakharam from crime and guilt leaves several questions unanswered. The hasty end of the play with the triumph of evil exhibited by Lakshmi suggests that evil is an integral part of human self. Each individual survives with his own private morality and principles in which he does not want to live and survive with others.

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