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Research Article



Social and Sexual Exploitation of Women in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar's dramatic piece, *Sakharam Binder*, stands out as a critical examination of the sociocultural paradigms that perpetuate the exploitation of women. This article delves into the multiple layers of oppression and discrimination faced by the female protagonists and situates the play within the broader context of postcolonial Indian society. Tendulkar, through his audacious characters and narratives, throws light on the deep-rooted patriarchal norms that dictate female subjugation. The central figure, Sakharam Binder, is both a product and

propagator of these entrenched societal beliefs. As a man who provides shelter to destitute women in exchange for domestic and sexual services, Sakharam becomes the embodiment of male entitlement and dominance. The women in his life, including Laxmi and Champa, become representative of the countless women whose identities are stifled by a male-centric worldview. Laxmi, the submissive, and Champa, the defiant, are instrumental in demonstrating the spectrum of female experiences under the weight of patriarchal constructs. While Laxmi's meek surrender highlights the internalization of patriarchal values, Champa's rebellion underscores the dire consequences women face when challenging the status quo. Tendulkar masterfully juxtaposes these characters to critique the ways in which society polices and punishes deviance from gendered expectations. The spatial dynamics within Sakharam's house serve as a potent metaphor for the wider societal space where women are confined, controlled, and commodified. The narrative underscores how economic dependency and cultural conditioning become tools of subjugation, forcing women into cycles of exploitation. Tendulkar's sharp, unflinching portrayal of the social and sexual exploitation of women demands introspection and reform, making the play a significant contribution to postcolonial Indian literature and feminist discourse. The play provides the various themes and concerns related the middle-class psyche.

Keywords: Social Exploitation, Sexual Exploitation, Middle Class, Violence, Protest, Cultural conditioning, Subjugation, Relationship

Sakharam Binder is considered one of the representative plays of Marathi Theatre. When the play was published in 1972, it created a sensation in the sophisticated middle-class society because of its open treatment of the live-in-relationship and its criticism on the prevailing violence and cruelty against women in the civilized middle-class society. When it was first time performed it was opposed by the critics and the people of the society because of its open treatment of sex and violence which forces the censor board to ban this play for some time. "The play explores the complexity of the frustrated and directionless young generation in the post-independence India" (Wadikar, 98).

Sakharam Binder, a play of three acts contains 29 scenes. The first act contains twelve scenes which revolve around Sakharam and Laxmi interpolated by another character Dawood Miyan who is the friend of Sakharam. The Second act contains ten scenes in which new characters Champa and her husband Fouzedar Shinde are introduced. The third act contains seven scenes where the play takes new turn with a new appearance of Laxmi at whose instance Sakharam murders Champa because of her illicit relationship with Darawod Miyan. This act

also gives the other side of the character of Laxmi who was very submissive earlier suddenly became a part of the murder of Champa and helps him to bury her dead body.

In the play, *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar, consciously or unconsciously, highlights the social and sexual exploitation of women in the middle class Indian society where women are always remains in the receiving end. He criticizes the Indian middle class society where women are worshipped as a goddess but on other hand they have been treated as a sex object. He fully criticizes the middle class society which is full of violence and cruelty, social and sexual exploitation, frustration and annihilation, expresses their frustration on women because they are the weaker sex in the society. *Sakharam Binder* is a fine example where Tendulkar exposes the exploitation of women in our middle class society. Sakharam who is the protagonist of the play, gives the shelter to the women who are homeless and alone and have a live-in-relationship with them. Laxmi is the seventh women who take shelter in his house who appears in act one. Laxmi who has been thrown out of the house, does not give birth to a child. She is exploited by her husband and society because she does not have a child. Sakharam who gives shelter to her, is a very hypocrite man because one side he criticizes the husband of Laxmi on other hand, he practices the same thing with the women like Laxmi whom he gives shelter. Laxmi is the seventh women who took shelter in his house. Sakharam is a man of dual personality as he protested the way society works and gives the shelter to those women who are exploited by the institution of marriage. He criticized the institution of marriage which forces the women to live in pathetic condition. Even he criticizes those women who used to worship her husband who was out to kill her. He says about the women who lived in the house before Laxmi.

She used to worship her husband's shirt. The man was out to kill her but as far as she was concerned, he was God! The chap who saves them- he's just a man. She worshipped his shirt for two full years. . . she died there hugging his shirt to herself. (*Sakharam Binder*, 127-28)

Sakharam shows those women that he is well-wisher to them and criticizes their husbands and their family members who "eat her, kick her every single minute of the day. They are an impotent lot! For them woman's just dirt, that's all" (*Sakharam Binder*, 129). But on the other side, he exploits them and uses them for his sexual gratification. He calls himself a rascal, womanizer a pauper, a dirty scavenger who does not like the way society works. He does not believe in religion is clearly seen his friendship with Dawood. "He is not scared of God or God's father" (126) because religion is something which divides the people. In the play when the Ganesh pooja was going on in the house of Sakharam, Laxmi stops Dawood to sing aarti because he is a Muslim. But Sakharam does not like her view and beats her mercilessly.

Sakharam, a revolutionary Brahmin, rejects the moral and social values. Just opposite to his own act, he condemns the religion and its social traditions which allow people to exploit women. He shelters those women who are thrown out of their families and by their husbands. He has his own terms and conditions in his house. He forces them to work as a household worker and uses them for his sexual gratification. He utters:

May be I am a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper. Why may be? I am all that. . . . In this bloody world men are all the same. They slink out at night, on the sly. And they put on an act all the time. They would like us to believe that they are an innocent lot! 'You hold your tongue and I'll hold mine!' Damn them all! What is there to hide? And from whom? From our father? ... I know that I am foul-mouthed. I have been like this right from birth. Born naked, I was. My mother used to say, he's Mahar born in Brahmin home. . . (126-127)

Tendulkar tries to criticize, the moral values, social values and tradition which bounds women in the boundaries of the four walls of the house and forces them to live in a pathetic condition. He also criticized the marriage institution and the morality of the man-women sexual relationships which are based on the conservative notions. Why man is superior to woman? Why the society does not run with the equal standard for both man and woman? Why there is discrimination on the name of the colour? All these social norms, traditions, and stereotypes are created by those who are in power. Sakharam Binder criticises all the social norms and traditions. He criticises the marriage institution, its purity and impurity and tries to create his own concepts of man women relationship which is totally based on his self-satisfaction.

When Laxmi enters in his house, she is shown very submissive who bears out all the tortures done by Sakharam. He makes her awake at the time of the night and tells her to laugh aloud. When she was unable to bear out she protested against him. She says:

You think I am afraid to tell you? How much more can a person bear? It is a year now since I entered this house. I have not had a single day's rest. Whether I am sick or whether it is a festal day. Nothing but work, work; work all the time. You torture me the whole day, you torture me at night. I'll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end. (146)

Though Laxmi remain submissive in the starting of the play but at the end of the act one she became somehow protective and takes action against him. Finally she decided to leave the place and to live with her nephew.

The next women Champa who enters his house, is not submissive like Laxmi, she is outspoken, bold and fearless. When Shinde (Champ's husband) comes to meet Champa, she beats him, kicks him, and abuses him. Champa was torched by her drunkard husband. Now she leaves his house and come to stay with Sakharam, gets the chance to avenge. She violently

revolted against her husband, “Look! What you have done to him! He is your husband. Haven’t you a heart?” (167). Chapa’s furious reply is self explanatory: “No! I don’t have heart. He chewed it up long ago. He brought me from my mother, even before I’d become woman. He married me when I didn’t even know what marriage really meant. He’d tortured me at night. He branded me, and stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things. I ran away. He brought me back and stuffed chilli powder into that god awful place, where it hurts most. That bloody pimp! What’s left of my heart now? He tore lumps out of it, he did. He drank my blood. Get up you pig. I’ll stuff some chilli powder in to you now!” (167).

Champa was tortured, abused and beaten by her drunkard husband. Champa’s reaction was the outcome of that social and sexual exploitation which she has faced in her married life. She even denies accepting him a human being and kicks him like a dog. Dawood and Sakharam are astonished by her revolutionary revolt against her husband as they never expected the reaction of Champa in this way.

As Champa don’t have any support she is exploited by Sakharam. He forces her to have a sexual relationship with him because she has taken a shelter in his house. Her soul and body was exploited by him. Sometimes Sakharam is also afraid from her when she tries to revolt against him. She is not been able to resist against his wishes as she doesn’t have any support. Tendulkar asserted in one of his lectures: “I was never able to begin writing my play only with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to have my characters first with me” (10). Women like Champa can be seen in the society frequently. Who are exploited by the society and the people like Sakharam.

Champa is represented as a bold and rebellious lady who shocks to Sakharam and Dawood. Her attitude changes because she had a horrible married life. Her drunkard husband uses to beat her, abuse her, curse her, and exploits her socially and sexually. That is the reason she criticizes all the males as vultures and traitors who always wants to use the body of a lady for the sake of their sexual gratification. Whenever Sakharam wants to have sexual relationship, she denies him. But when he forces her, she is ready to have only under the intoxication. She says: “Shut up. I’ll give it to you. All of it. Just hand me the bottle.... Just Few minutes more. Then you can take me. Do what you like with me” (169).

Champa’s behaviour makes Sakharam speechless. He has never seen such a woman. Champa appears as a stubborn woman with tendencies to assert her freedom rather aggressively. These traits of her temperament and attitude decide her relationship with Sakharam and thus influence the course of events in the play. Her violent clash with strong headed and egotistical Sakharam and its catastrophic consequences, therefore, appear to be perfectly natural. Sakharam couldn’t fix his mind in the work. He thought all day about last

night's sex with Champa. He comes home early from the work to have sex with Champa. Champa was eating. She resists again but he again threatens her that she should obey her demand other wise he would he'll thrash life out of her. He threatens her to drive her out. And if so then she will have to live life like bitch. There is no way for Champa. She again surrenders but in order to relieve her pain. In order to desensitize herself she drinks and tells him: "I'll give it to you." Fun for anyone who comes along... A dog... A corpse even..." (171).

Sakharam exploits her to have sexual relationship with him because he has given the shelter to her. She remains like a corpse during the intercourse that shows that it was the These are the instances of sexual exploitation of Champa, Laxmi and the other women who took shelter in the house of Sakharam.

Tendulkar also criticizes those men who represent themselves religious but on the side they exploit women socially and sexually. Champa criticises the attitude of these kinds of men like Sakharam. Tendulkar calls it a sexual radicalism of Sakharam. On the day of Dashera when Champa is drunk totally, he is irritated from her. But he was unable to say anything to her because he is in her control.

Tendulkar represents the deceitful man- women relationship in family and other social units. "Tendulkar not only portrays the bleak reality of human institution which is characterized by the suppression of truth.... the play exposes the greater hypocrisy in man-women relationships in the matrix of institution of marriage" (Davulappally, 96).

In the third act Laxmi comes back to the house of Sakharam but he denies to accept her in his house and beats her and kicks her. But she forbade leaving his house and accepts and accepts him as unwedded husband. When Sakharam forces to get her out of the house. She was protected by Champa. "Champa Shows kindness and generosity when she convinces Sakharam to give shelter to Laxmi, a potential rival" (Banerjee, 578).

The arrival of Laxmi leaves Sakharam in a trauma. He was unable to decide where to go. He started behaving as an impotent because he was not been able to give organism pleasure to anyone of them. Champa makes a relationship with him only in the drunken condition and Laxmi can get the pleasure even with conversing with ant. The frustration of Sakharam reaches to the height when he decided to throw Laxmi out of the house, she informs him about the physical relationship of Champa and Dawood. This is a great blow on the male chauvinism of Sakharam. In the fist of anger, he kills Champa. Though she was not his wife, he has given her a shelter in his house. Laxmi has also become a part in his crime though she was supported by Champa when she was beaten by Sakharam Binder in the beginning of third act. It is Laxmi who gives him solace that what he has done is not a sin. He has killed a sinner. She helps him to dig the grave and hide and burry Champa's dead body. Laxmi, who appears as calm,

generous and soft-hearted personality, at last we found in her a cold-blooded violent planner. Thorough out of the play Tendulkar Shows those women are exploited socially on the name of tradition and rules and regulations of the society. They have been exploited the sexually by their husbands and the people like Sakharam Binder who always take the advantage of the women like Laxmi and Campa who have been executed by their families and society. Tendulkar says, “We are living in a country, which has strong rigid conventions of ‘Dharma’ and hence violence is deeply rooted within the society” (14).

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