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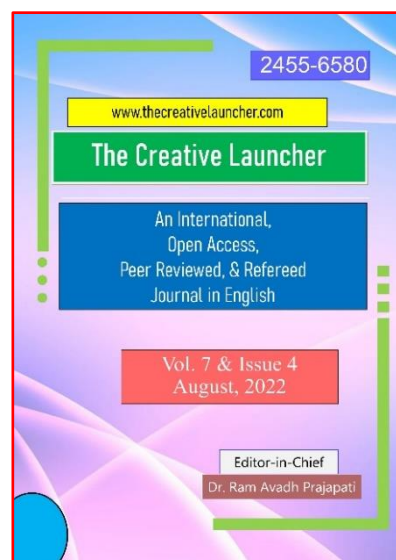
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Research Article



Sakharam Binder: A Narrative of Intrigues and Idiosyncrasies Eventuating in Devastation

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Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar has been one of the biggest names of Marathi theatre. His drama has been the representation of stark realities and human misfortunes arising out of the human flaws. He gave theatre a completely new perspective. Most of his plays have foregrounded issues which were previously withheld from any stage representation. His focus has chiefly been on representing the plight of women of Indian society at the hands of the male chauvinists. Moreover, the males in his works have usually been the domineering set who have commodified or objectified women in some way or the other, but this play *Sakharam Binder*,

has a very distinctive theme. This play runs on two explicit themes of idiosyncrasy and intriguing. This is one of those plays where it becomes substantially important to understand the changing human relationships eventually ensuing in the climax. This paper therefore throws much light on the characters and their idiosyncrasies and intrigues which make it contemplative for the readers and the audience to judge who is to be blamed more.

Keywords: Idiosyncrasies, Intrigues, Human Relationships, Live in Relationships, Conditional Living, Interdependence, Male Chauvinism

Vijay Tendulkar, is one of the strongest and hard-hitting writers of his time. His works gained recognition more because he raised compelling issues from lives around which embraced bitter reality and grim truth. The content he caters to the world is usually grave and brutal. He is famously known to foreground the unspoken and absolutely unconventional issues of common folk. In several interviews he has acknowledged how his themes are the dramatized versions of realities picked up from life around him. Thakar quotes his interview with Sumit Saxena in the following words where Tendulkar himself has said,

I have not written about the hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle-class family and I have seen the brutal ways of life by keeping my eyes open. My work has come from within me, as an outcome of my observation of the world in which I live. If they want to entertain and make merry, fine go ahead, but I can't do it, I have to speak the truth.

Tendulkar has given Marathi and Indian drama a completely different perspective. His works, his socio cultural and literary involvements and his holistic contribution to the world of theatre have earned him felicitations such as the Maharashtra State Government Award, the Sangeet Natak Academy Award, the Film Fare Award, the Padmabhushan Award, the Katha Chudamani Award and so many others. Tendulkar amalgamated reality and theatre so precisely that it his dramas became platforms for depicting social realities and gateways to reach out to people through theatre. He was deeply influenced by many playwrights about whom he says in an interview, "I was very much influenced by the writing of D.B. Mokashi, Shivaram Vashikar and the films like *Manus* and *Kunku* produced by Prabhat Film Production Company and the Western playwrights like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams" (Deshpande, 33).

Tendulkar has been an avant-garde writer. He has been the Angry Young Man of the Marathi theatre. Many of his plays have often dealt in themes which ran much ahead of their age. *Mitrachi Goshta*, is one of his many plays which violates the social norms set up by the society because it deals in the theme of lesbianism. *Srimant*, another play radically talks about a woman's conviction on being a single mother. His plays *Kamala* on the theme of flesh trade but also on power and subordination, *Silence! The Court is in Session* on forced infanticide due to illegitimacy, etc. all these plays resonate of radicalism.

Likewise, most of his works broke the laws of conventionalism and boldly introduced to the Marathi theatre concepts no more camouflaged in morality and tradition. He has brutally picked up life in its most degenerated form and has exposed it to the world completely unfiltered and raw. Joseph observes,

Being a very sensitive writer, he observes the social, political, cultural and moral degeneration of contemporary society and presents it in his plays with thorough detachment and clinical dispassion. In his plays he deals with the themes of love, sex, marriage, violence, gender inequality, social inequality, power games, alienation and individual isolation. While exploring the depths of human life and its complexities he does not fail to expose the hypocrisy, promiscuity and emptiness of value systems found in the traditional Indian middle-class society. (3)

A common and general theme of many of his plays has been patriarchy and male domination. When we talk of his kind of representation of male power, we usually mean the extremely dominating males who exercise or try to exercise complete control on all women and on the weak in general. Their existence falls into danger if they are ruled or managed by a woman. Moreover, their attitude completely rests on the ideology of using women for pleasure and needs. They are typical representation of male chauvinists. This paper talks about one such male representation in one of the famous works, *Sakharam Binder* by Tendulkar. Tendulkar's women are dominated, exploited, enslaved and tortured yet there is something in them that they remain to be stronger than men. His female representations are so powerfully projected that they change the entire course of action such that in spite of being weak and surrendered his women characters are much stronger and more prominent than their male counterparts. *Sakharam Binder* is constructed on powerful intrigues and idiosyncrasies at different stages and by different people and it becomes difficult to conclude who is more intriguing and idiosyncratic out of all.

Sakharam Binder, is one of those plays which is conceptualized on themes much ahead of their times. It is based on a unique live in relationship in which the fundamental remains to be a forcefully conditioned though open relationship. It is an insight into male preferences and power over female needs and necessities. Taking up the theme of a quid pro quo deal of livelihood based on priorities and necessities, the play shook the audience. It challenged the institution of marriage and shattered their conventional beliefs of a pious married life. Just as Ibsen's Nora completely discarded the age-old norms of being obedient and enslaved wife and created an uproar in the society by leaving her husband unlike the customary of the time, likewise, *Sakharam Binder* jolted the social norms of marriage by representing a live in relationship. It was even regarded as a propaganda of a promiscuous relationship by many but on a grave contemplation, it is the misuse of power and position. The plot falters between who must be blamed and who must be exonerated.

Sakharam works as a book binder. He has no faith in the institution of marriage. He brings the left out women of other men to serve his purpose of keeping his house, performing

the daily household chores and also meeting out his sexual requirements. He brought many women in series to his house under the condition of strict compliance of the rules laid by him and not conforming to those meant they could leave his house vacating the place for another woman. Since women destitution has been very common in our society and Sakharam is very much aware of this, he is sure that he would easily be provided with some or the other woman. Therefore, he lays some very inhuman conditions before all women if they wish to stay with him or he tells them to leave or he would throw them out if they fail to obey him.

SAKHARAM. You'll get two square meals. Two saris to start with and then one every year....I won't hear any complaints later. I like everything in order here. Won't put up with the slipshod ways. If you are careless, I'll show you the door I'm the master here. I don't care if they treat me like dirt outside. (125)

These are the basic conditions briefed to Laxmi or to any other woman who entered his house. But these aren't limited to this. He continues,

SAKHARAM. Maybe I'm a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper. Why maybe? I am all that. And I drink. But I must be respected in my own house. ... In this house what I say goes. Understand? The others must obey, that's all. (126)

Sakharam is a unique creation of Tendulkar. He has been a victim of parental domestic violence in his childhood and therefore he ran away from his house. He wanted to escape the thrashings given to him by his father. 'Through Sakharam's character, Tendulkar exposes the masochism of the lower middle-class male. Due to the ill treatment meted out to him by his father, he flees away from home. The bitter experiences he had in his life leave him rough and tough and foul-mouthed. (Wadikar, 2)

Sakharam is ruthless. He is violent, harsh and foul mouthed. He ran from his house to skip attacks of violence rendered on him but he beats all women of his house without giving even the slightest consideration to their situations and physiologies. He ran away while yet a child to skip what he is catering to the women in his life, now, when he is a grown up, sensible enough to know the validity of such things.

Sakharam is a very different character altogether. He is not conservative in his friendship with his best friend Dawood, a Muslim by religion. Neither is he a quintessential husband kind of a man. He openly rebukes the falsehood in the institution of marriage as witnessed by him. When he speaks of the sixth woman who died lately and whose last rites were performed by him, he testifies how Indian women worship their husbands even when they are brutal to the extent of throwing their wives out of their homes. He says of her,

SAKHARAM. ...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 fellow who's out to kill them--- he's a God! The man who saves them---he's just a man! (127-128)

But the man who criticizes all husbands, does even worse to the women he keeps, apparently not realizing about his contribution in tyrannizing them. He believes that providing food, clothing and shelter is more than enough for a cast off woman. Had it not been for his

magnanimity, the woman or rather the women would have lived like whores. “Outwardly, Sakharam pretends that he is a savior of women, but inwardly he is a dumping ground 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” (Wadikar, 5).

Tendulkar’s Sakharam is a completely different kind of a man. At times he is thoughtful while at the other times he makes it evident that he is just any other male chauvinist, only limited to himself. He is idiosyncratic but his idiosyncrasy attains prominence when he is provoked.

The complexity of the entire plot rests on the fact that *Sakharam Binder* is not about an individual. The play works on the theme of inter relative forces that constantly entangle to make matters trivial. Sakharam has his own philosophy of life. Ashok Desai comments, “He tries to work out independent philosophy of life, with no sense of false obligation” (7) but his philosophy is solely meant to give him pleasure and satisfaction. Any consideration beyond that stands null and void because he lives only for himself. The complication springs up when his philosophy falls otherwise on the women he brings as his bonded live in partners ironically in a relationship which according to Sakharam is absolutely free and optional. Very determined he states that it is the choice of the women to stay with him or leave but he will never change. This character of Sakharam is quintessentially of a masculinist. He disagrees to bend down even if it costs him his peace. All he needs is someone to pay him blind obeisance and servility. He brings in Laxmi after six other women who are no longer a part of his domestic space. He just can’t resist his temptation of physical pleasures and simultaneously he gets a docile and helpless maid who will do anything he demands. He demands total subservience in return for shelter and food and claims to be true to God. His declaration of his kind of honesty is a very noticeable characteristic of this man. He does whatever he wants to in the name of being honest to God.

SAKHARAM. ...I’ve done every kind of thing. But never a dishonest act in my whole life. I told you. I womanize. I’m a drunkard and I’m ready to announce that to the whole world. Sure... with my hand on my heart. All the women I’ve been to, the number of times I’ve visited them. ...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! ...Damn them all! Don’t have the guts to do a thing openly! ...what’s there to hide? And from whom? From our Father? (126-127)

Tendulkar is remarkable in his representation of raw and real characters. Most of his characters observe either domination or subordination. They are likely to be distinct and powerful in some or the other way. Even the most destitute character created by him is very powerful and appealing to the audience but his creation of a male protagonist dominating a female is the reality he has observed in society. There is tension, anger, lust, survival and complexity in the

portrayal of his characters. C. Coelho identifies, "In his portrayal of human relations and tensions, Tendulkar depicts the violent tendency of egotistical man and equally self-centered society. He liberated Marathi stage from the tyranny of conventional theatre with its mild doses of social and political satire for purpose of pure entertainment. It shows that Tendulkar has shown different types of themes in his plays but the theme of human relationship is very complicated" (Coelho, 6).

Sakharam Binder revolves around three characters. The three acts of the play throw light on the three versatile levels of relationship among the three characters. The first Act is all about the beginning and end of a live in between Sakharam and Laxmi where Sakharam dominates. The second act focuses on the docility of Sakharam before Champa and the third Act finally speaks about the victory of Laxmi over the other two. The opening act introduces us with Hardy's Henchard like character in the form of Sakharam. Just as Henchard refuses to compromise with his innate character in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, we find a certain resemblance between him and Sakharam who refuses to do the same even though he has to do away with the woman he has sheltered. But with the arrival of Champa in the next act we lose the true Sakharam. There is tremendous change in his character which has sunk for the worse. His lust, sexual appetite and womanizing reach its zenith and he loses every bit of his whatever little good he had for the 'itch' he had always talked about. The Sakharam with Laxmi is quite different than the Sakharam living with Champa. The only trait of his original self with both women remains to be his weakness for women. Even after all thrashings and torture, Laxmi had tried to better Sakharam but Champa seems to have stronger influence over him without actually trying to deliberately influence him.

In the beginning of Act two, we get to notice the original Sakharam. He instructs Champa as he had instructed Laxmi. But there is something very different about her that works like a spell on him and also on Dawood, his friend. His conversation with Champa fails to be as harsh and authoritarian as it had been with other women specially Laxmi.

SAKHARAM. In this house the woman must behave properly. She must treat me due respect.

CHAMPA. Yes. Go and see if there's anything to eat. There's been nothing in this belly since yesterday. ...

SAKHARAM. While you're staying with me, you don't need to be scared of anybody. ...

CHAMPA. Scared? Who, me? And scared of whom? My husband? What can he do to me? (157)

With every dialogue delivered by Champa, we notice Sakharam getting more and more enamored to her. Champa is unlike all the other women Sakharam had lived with. Right from the minute she starts speaking, she gains power over Sakharam and with her inclusion in Sakharam's life, Sakharam stoops miserably. His recognition as a powerful man falls off and he becomes subservient to Champa.

This play is very distinct in one aspect. Tendulkar draws the storyline very skillfully presenting to us an absolute change in the situation with same context. But what is specifically perceptible about the play is, the unanticipated transformation of every prominent character in the play. Never can one imagine to see the Sakharam of Act one transform into Sakharam of act two. The sternness, severity and sadism of this man vanishes when Champa enters his life and he re transforms when Laxmi re enters his life. Champa calms him and Laxmi infuriates him. Similarly, Laxmi who hardly spoke out of fear becomes vocal in Act one and declares to leave Sakharam's house which Sakharam takes seriously and without missing an opportunity of sending her away to her nephew, tells her and sends her away. Her transformation of being vocal from submissive is the real reason behind the transformation episodes of other characters in the play. Later in the play we get to see just another unforeseen change in her which is most instrumental in designing the climax of the play. Her exit is followed by Champa's entry which is in turn responsible for the change in Sakharam. But there are two more very intense transformations one of Champa's shift of interest from Sakharam to Dawood and second change takes place in Dawood who deceives his friend Sakharam for Champa. The entire play is a sail of transformations of character but what remains to be the centripetal force is the regaining of the original character of Sakharam by the final act.

This play rests on two major themes besides patriarchy and female subjugation. One is the idiosyncrasy of Sakharam discussed at length above and the other very important theme is the intriguing in it. Laxmi returns to Sakharam but he disapproves of her return. He is adamant to not have her back There is yet another transformation in his character after he finds her back in his house. The protagonist Sakharam, the titular Sakharam, the epitome of idiosyncrasy is back and this is where Tendulkar exposes all the intriguing and lays all his characters bare. The final act of the play is a revelation of the mindsets of all characters. Their perception gives momentum to the events which follow and finally culminate in the win and lose situation.

The third act is the where there is an upsurge of complications beginning from Laxmi's second time entry. The minute she is back in the house, circumstances alter and the state of affairs undergo complete deterioration thereafter. We had seen the pious, religious and a homely woman in her initially. She changed Sakharam for the better and this had been acknowledged by Sakharam himself. But something we can conclude of Laxmi, she is not as innocent and dullard as she was considered to be in the first act. She stayed with Sakharam for about one year and twenty-one days but by the finish of first act we find her challenging Sakharam, and rebuking him much unlike what she was supposed to do under his patronage. The one who had proclaimed to be the master of the house suddenly felt his position in danger. Laxmi's pestering by the end of the first act does not go well with Sakharam who instinctively decides to send her away to her out of his life and succeeds in transporting her to her nephew in Amalner. It was only because Laxmi was self desirous of running away from the brutality of this man that she accedes to his plan but this woman comes back in his life knowing that he

was the best option for her in her miserable days. How can such a woman be exonerated from intriguing. She comes back and fortunately for her the very outspoken Champa takes her into Sakharam's house considering her plight then. She also feels relieved to have an aid for her household chores. Everything here is decided by the two women in Sakharam's absence. This is a jolt to him by the two women whom he had very clearly instructed that he is the master of the house.

CHAMPA. What do you plan to do now?

LAXMI. How can I plan?

CHAMPA. That's true. Since there's nowhere you can go, you'll stay here I suppose.

LAXMI. That's what I thought...

CHAMPA. (after a pause). Come in. I'll make a cup of tea(178-179)

Sakharam's power and authority are openly challenged by both Laxmi and Champa. Whatever follows next is a consequence to this decision made by the ladies. At this point, Sakharam seems to be most gullible of all. He has always had an overpowering personality but with the advent of Champa in his life, things changed and he succumbed to her in exchange for the sexual pleasures. It is here that things slowly went out of control for Sakharam who was so lost in his promiscuous life that he never realized that his dominance had become fragile. This is where the intriguing comes into play.

Laxmi always looked innocent. How she talked to the ant and the crow etc. created an impression of her being very naïve and unpretentious. Moreover, her conversation and her actions in the presence of others who meant instrumental to her also create a picture of her being simple, credulous, religious, pious and above all ingenuous. But there is a sudden shift of the character in her when she reappears in Sakharam's life. Champa gives her a quid pro quo shelter for help but Laxmi knows how to turn situations for her benefit. She promises to not be a 'bother' to Champa.

CHAMPA. (after some thought). You look after the house and I'll look after him. Anyway, I can't cope with both. You stay alive and I stay alive, too.

LAXMI. (very grateful). Yes. I-I'll tell him. I promise not to be a bother. ... (181)

Champa saves her from Sakharam's wrath. He nearly kills her when Champa intervenes and saves her. Sakharam does not want her back at all but he has to yield to Champa's insistence on keeping her. Champa is least bothered by her presence. She lives as she wants to without being much troubled by what others think of her. But when it comes to keeping relations with Dawood, she is quite secretive about it. Laxmi keeps an eye on her and soon comes to know about the conspiracies Champa is hatching under Sakharam's roof. This is the most ironical point in the play, when we find intrigues of various kinds. Champa has secretively maintained a relation with Sakharam's confidant, Dawood. Sakharam who has always projected himself as the master of the house is completely kept in dark about this affair whereas Laxmi, the refugee knows it all. Laxmi entertains Champa's husband in her absence which is again kept hidden from Sakharam and Champa but Champa gets to know it somehow. So, in a way the women

are more involved in conspiring against not only each other but Sakharam as well. They have intrigued him in order to keep themselves secure and provided. Both the women are equally responsible for cheating Sakharam but now since both know about the other's conspiracies, there begins a battle of survival and it is here that we discover the cunningness of Laxmi who provokes Sakharam into murdering Champa. The two women plan the intrigues. They intrigue against Sakharam and each other. But the most appalling intriguer is none other than his friend, his confidant Dawood who connives with Champa into developing a licentious relationship right under the nose of Sakharam.

Sakharam has always considered himself to be the strongest in his house. He has kept several women in his house on the condition of keeping himself and the women provided materialistically but he was always raucous. Champa completely altered the scenario. Her presence in the house worked like a spell on Sakharam who compromised with her raw behavior and non-conformation towards conventionalism. He tolerated her non compliance of his commands. Yet there has always been something distinct about him. For example, he cannot bear anyone dominate or dictate him. He lives the way he wants to. His past has had associations which were predominantly ruled by him. His friendship with Dawood is a testimony to his being nonconformist and independent. Dawood is the only person in his life with whom he shares a very non profitable and selfless bond. He squabbles with Laxmi over him many a times. Sakharam doesn't change for anybody. He remains to be what he innately is. Just a short phase of his life which is eclipsed by Champa, is where we notice him deviate with his original self but the revelation by Laxmi about the promiscuous relationship between Dawood and Champa brings him back to who he originally was.

The overview of the play clarifies how the innate character of Sakharam remains unchanged. There is but one section in the play where he manages to subside his originality and it is just there that he falters. He may be a loud, angry young man, a dominating macho, a pioneer of free living, yet there is one thing prominent, he is still the same Sakharam for his friend Dawood. On the other side all his present close associations only intrigue and deceive him. He trusts nearly each of them specially his friend Dawood, but none reciprocate his veracity and it is here that he falls a victim alongside Champa who deliberately dupes Sakharam and bears his wrath on revelation of her illicit relation with Dawood.

Overall, the play Sakharam Binder is a complete network of idiosyncrasies and intrigues. All major characters contribute in the climax. There is none who can be exonerated of all blame and it is because of the contribution of each that devastation ensues at the end of the play. Unlike many other literary pieces by Tendulkar there is not a single character who can be exemplified or idolized yet the dramatic effect created by the human follies in each cannot be ignored. Rather they appear even more natural, human and closer to reality. Tendulkar has meticulously portrayed a rough yet precise picture of human tendencies and basic characteristics of human nature which are most likely to alter with situations. None of his characters are flawless and that is what makes his drama real, genuine and truly appealing.

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