

Gender and Power Politics in Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder

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Abstract

The play, *Sakharam Binder*, written by Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar, the most prolific but controversial Marathi dramatist, reflects a unique amalgamation of topicality and timelessness. It dramatizes Indian middle class society's deep – seated, unchecked, and malignant depravity and perversity. Tendulkar brilliantly depicted human intrapersonal connections in the distant past as well as in today's socio – political environment by diving deeply into their complexities. Sakharam Binder, the protagonist of the play, refuses the conventional but artificial orthodox and polished value system and attempts to develop his own life philosophy. Sakharam's battle against socio – psychological elements reveals the bare exhibition of inflexible conventions, ugliness and the dissolution of human self. Vijay Tendulkar succeeds in exposing the societal turpitude and holocaust in which the caste gender heritage has its own province to worsen the situation. Because of the importance of this heritage, it leaves its impression on the inner landscape of the human mind and causes chaos in their lives. Personal and societal spheres in reality, Manusmriti's laws on the one

hand, distinguish between the twine – born caste and woman and shudras. On the other hand as a result, women and shudras have equal status. They are both regarded as second class citizen. This caste gender heritage is linked to a group of bifurcates traits.

Keywords: Gender, Power, Caste, Politics, Woman.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* begins with the arrival of Sakharam and a lady Laxmi. In the title of the play and a cursory reading of the opening few pages imply the play's ramification based on caste and gender. The play, *Sakharam Binder* despite the play's feminine focus, the protagonist is male, implying in modern society, there is a patriarchal hegemonic power structure. Sakharam is a bookbinder. He does not work in a high caste occupation; conversely, he does menial work such as binding books. But one's varna and his choice of employment are not the same things. His for existence might be a mundane job. Brahmins were revered in ancient India permitted to do various menial occupations when the matter of survival arose at them. At the same time, there are several cases of Brahmins ruling as kings. Sakharam's job has one redeeming feature: he is a chevalier. At the very least, his vocation is linked to books, which are the repository of knowledge. So title of the play indicates but does not prove his high or low Varna.

He lives "old red-tiled home, the kind of one sees in the alleyways of small district towns" aside from his menial job (*Sakharam Binder* 125). He is a foul-mouthed individual who enjoys using obscene and filthy words. He says, "You think us dancing naked round here? Move on; get the hell out of here! I'll shine your bottoms for you. I'm warning you, the whole lot of you! Now, get out!" (SB 125). Sakharam is dressed merely and has a salt and pepper beard on his chin, "a dhoti, a granny shirt, a jacket . . . and chappals" (SB 125). He accepts that people treat him "like dirt outside". He proudly proclaims "he is not scared of God or God's father! (SB 125). All of these characteristics about his upbringing, looks, and

temperament imply that he cannot possibly be the highest caste in the system. This conflict over his caste is exacerbated by his out spoken declaration:

I've been like this right from birth. Born naked, I was. My mother used to say, the brat's shameless. He is a Mahar born in Brahmin home. And if I was, who is blame? It was not my doing . . . (SB 127).¹

Vijay Tendulkar purposefully chose a higher caste protagonist, Sakharam, who openly criticises the caste rules. God, religion, and moralities associated with manwoman sexual relationships according to his upper caste's rules have no bearing on his behaviour or philosophy of life. Sakharam's conceptual statement implies that the dramatist is the propagator of a basic caste system vision. No one's birth, but one's worth and style of life determined one's Varna in ancient times. Vijay Tendulkar isn't the only one who promotes the Varna system concept through Sakharam; it's also backed up by ancient and modern religious books and theories. When we examine Sakharam's character in the context of these beliefs, we can see that he is a Brahmin by birth yet belongs to the lowest Varna due to his Karmas. Because of his unconventional and non-religious ways of life, a confirmed Shudra, according to one of the ancient theories, it is one's Samaskara or Karma, not ancestry that determines his Varna and Sakharam. The great epic Mahabharata emphasises that birth ancestry, sacrament, or study alone cannot determine whether a person is a Brahmin; only character or behaviour may do so. Mahatama Gandhi, a modern-day thinker and reformer, thinks that an individual's Karmic account and behaviour determine his Varna. Gandhiji writes:

“One of the most fundamental characteristics of a Varna is that, while it is decided by birth, it can only be maintained by fulfilling its requirements. Those who fail to do so forfeit their title to Varna. A person born in one Varna but displaying the primary traits of another is considered to be from the second Varna”.. (qtd. In Mondal 1)²

Although he opposes the marriage system, his norms are identical to those of the marriage system. The only difference is that in a marriage bond, a male is expected to follow cultural conventions in order to care for his wife and children. It makes no difference whether he is cuffed or not. Sakharam declares that he will not be bound due of his open honesty. However, she is legally married or not, the woman of his household will be obligated to undertake all of the obligations of a traditional wife. As a result, Sakharam is not free of Brahmanical patriarchal morality when it comes to women's gender roles. Sakharam's house is a patriarchal system that demands everything from women without tying males in exchange. Vijay Tendulkar eliminates marriage from the picture to highlight the stark truth of this socially sanctioned institution. Sanctification is merely a veil to conceal the fact that marriage is nothing more than a platform for the expression of patriarchal sadistic impulses in which women are not permitted to raise children, her voice, to ask questions, to go out or to talk to other man. Sudha Rai points out:

Tendulkar pins the so-called proponents of a caste-free society and egalitarianism on the pinhead of a powerful deconstructive moment, exposing their flaws... Tendulkar defines the deconstructive moment as one in which individuals choose to stand by their own values of humanity/womanhood rather than succumb to institutional manipulative methods. (103)³

Tendulkar, in a letter, claims that the play *Sakharam Binder* deals with a serious theme which at certain points refers to 'Sex'. He regards the ban on the performance of it as *unfavorable to the development of serious writing in theatre*. It is really unfortunate to denounce a script as pornographic, vulgar, exciting or permissive. Moreover adultery, extra-marital relationships and incest have been celebrated subjects in drama ever since Oedipus and Electra. Objections to *Sakharam Binder* might cause a temporary stir resulting in mass inquisitiveness on the part of audiences and readers. *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and *Lolita* were

the most controversial creations of their times and underwent a similar stir. A play, *Sakharam Binder*, is about out-castes who form their social islands which are dramatically discovered to be too weak to stand the stormy pressure of traditions, conventions, relationships, and man-made moral values. Sakharam is an out caste, living his own kind of life, of course with perverted tastes.

Sakharam's seventh woman, Laxmi, appears to fit into this socially acceptable frame of a decent woman and a good wife, having absorbed all of the patriarchal ideals. As a result, Sakharam's code of behaviour has no effect on her. She is certain that patriarchy's requirements cannot be met solely through sexual acts. She knows it is only by serving her master that she can think to rule over him. She believes, like Prakriti's mother in the play *Chandalika*, "You are a woman; by serving you must worship, and by serving you must govern,"¹ (Tagore 210). Laxmi begins to dominate Sakharam's Shudrism by employing her Brahmanism as an easily accessible tool.

Sakharam is inadequate on two fronts, according to Laxmi, who has lived through the harsh reality of man-woman relationships. Sakharam reveals his personal anguish at the fact that he has never had a woman in his life who has ever treated him as if he were God. Firstly, Sakharam proclaims to be the ruler but not position of master or swami and husband. Secondly, he fails to recognize with the idea, never be able to govern over a woman unless follows religion. Laxmi is a religious and well known how to turn God a patriarch like Sakharam and make him into helpful and caring husband. However, the same faiths teach that a woman might use her regard for her husband as a weapon to domesticate him like a tame animal. Without a doubt, all world faiths are patriarchal and aid men in subjugating women. Though man utilised a woman's need for a house to confine her, she understands the dynamics of wild animal domestication and chaotic human life. Sakharam is unaware, however, that even before patriarchal civilization emerged, women had figured out how to

domesticate life. He is well aware that offering a house to a woman can easily trap her. Laxmi understands, can use her own confinement as empowering, creative force, and confine her husband in about the same house. Therefore, Laxmi begins Pooja with God and thus, the life of Sakharam affects some positive way. A man who is unconcerned about social norms begins to develop into a family man. Sakharam, unconsciously joyful, has been denied the status of Swami or God of the Woman. During the “Brahminization” of Sakharam, Laxmi understands that his aberrant appetite must be suppressed in order for him to be transformed into a devout family man. Sakharam becomes irritated and retorts, "You're all wonderful! When it comes to this one issue, we're all the same. Your eyes well up with tears the moment your husband's name is mentioned. He evicts you from your home and is out to suffocate you. However, he is the God of your people. With shoes and slippers, you should worship a god like that! He needs to be publicly whipped. Isn't it amazing how powerful God is?"⁴ (SB, 133).

Sakharam's confession about his former partner, on the other hand, proves that he was a total failure in his relationship. *I gave her the last sip of water*, Sakharam admits, "*but the name on her lips was her husband's.*"⁵ (SB 135). Sakharam, on the other hand, quickly grows tired with Laxmi's religious practices. Sakharam gets hit by Laxmi, a cunning manipulator, when and where it hurts the one most. Sakharam has failed to satisfy her and make her laugh in her wilderness; he realizes that despite his arousing sexual activities. Sakharam is transformed by Laxmi from a renegade to a kind man who is a 'enthusiastic' believer in her God and her methods of worship. Sakharam stands between his world and hers, and installing lord Ganesha for the first time in house. Laxmi behaves as a Hindu religious wife. Sakharam's friend Dawood who is a Muslim and he helps to her for light the lamp on 'Pooja' but she denied, and not joined to 'aarti' of Ganesha. Sakharam drinks under the light of aarti in front of Ganesha. However, Laxmi's suffering and defiance in the face of Sakharam's

approaches is a clear statement that she is not a sex object to be used by him according to his whims. Sakharam notices that Laxmi is encroaching in the exploratory zone he has developed. The only way he thinks to control her is to sexually gratify her. Laxmi comes and says suddenly:

“Do you think I'm frightened to tell you the truth? Is there a limit to how much a person can take? It's been a year since I moved into this place. I haven't gotten any sleep in days. Whether I'm sick or it's a special occasion. Work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, and work you torment me all day, and you torment me at night. I'll die one of these days, and that'll be the end of it”⁶ (SB 146).

The basic contradiction in Sakharam's character and situation comes to the fore with the entry of Champa in the second act. Laxmi is given up by her husband and Champa has come on her husband, and she is young, better than Laxmi by body structure. Champa, immediately, comes and begins to dominate the manly self of Sakharam with her female beauty. Comment of Sudhir Kakkar on *Ek Chadar Mali Si* writes for Champa *Female sexuality is very much a utilitarian affair whose chief value lies in its capacity to redress a lopsided distribution of power between sexes*¹ (49). She contests males' right to use abusive language. Champa develops a non-conformist mentality and confronts Sakharam's power with her boldness. Sakharam warns her *in this house the woman must always talk with caution. I'm not going to stand for filthy language*⁷. She responds by saying him, “I have never prepared tea in my life”⁸. Sakharam knew to her that he belongs to the family to tobacco and alcoholic beverages. Sakharam's regulations are not only disregarded with apathy, but they are also ridiculed individually. Sakharam becomes aware of gender stereotypes after his interaction with Champa. Sakharam wants to present himself as a rebel who defies conventional dogma in his contacts to Laxmi. Champa is more radical and declares his autonomy by talking, “Rule! Is this a school or court or something?”⁹. Sakharam

had no idea how tough it would be to appreciate the aesthetics of this enticing mistress's beauty.

Champa's violent attack on her husband, which she attacks like a possessed woman, is another surprise. Sakharam reveals his shock, "How do you describe yourself as a woman? What have you done to him? He's your husband, right? You don't have a heart, do you?"¹⁰ (SB 167). Not only that, but he was telling Laxmi that these so-called gods should be worshipped by kicking them in the face with their shoes in public. He lacks the courage to openly defend Champa when she kicks, abuses, and calls her husband an impotent corpse. His attitude reveals him to be either a guy of double standards or a resurrected Brahmanism. So she drinks and places the bottle on Sakharam's lips once more. Champa tries difficult to sustain her composure, but she loses her cool and tosses the dish away. The plate whirls and clatters incessantly, showing her aggressive demeanor. She possesses the most powerful sensuous weapon, which she employs according to her needs and circumstances. Champa, who was skilled at identifying male flaws, was fully aware that Sakharam lacked the confidence to throw her out of the house. Champa, on the other hand, is fully aware of these ruses and understands how to deal with these 'corpses' and 'dogs.' All religious attempts to subdue Champa's sexuality were in vain. Sakharam matures into a God-fearing, socially conscious individual. He immediately sets the portrait of God and begins praying.

The end of act second in *Sakharam Binder*, Sakharam and Champa are look complimentary to one another. Champa turns Sakharam, a religious and conscientious homeowner, into a lustful drunk. Eventually, Laxmi returns, adamant that she will live and die at Sakharam's residence: *I'll stay here now." And here's where you'll die, too. I'm not ready to leave. "I'm going to live and die here."*¹¹ (SB 176). The shelter of a house is more vital to this destitute and defenseless woman than the shelter of respect. Sakharam's house becomes a site whereby multilateral symbiotic relationships collide and collide with the

coming of Laxmi. Laxmi is given permanent residence in Sakharam's family thanks to the benevolence of this ordinarily cold-hearted woman. Champa is unconcerned with Laxmi's physical supremacy. Champa's willingness to let Laxmi live with her could be motivated by self-interest, or she could have picked up a cool business-like mentality from Sakharam. "Stay," she advises. You take care of the house, and I will take care of him. In any case, I can't deal with both. "You stay alive, and so will I."¹² (SB 181). Both women agree to coexist in Sakharam's residence, where Laxmi will handle the low skilled jobs while Champa will cater to Sakharam's sexual hunger. Both interrogatives highlight women's plight in patriarchal societies.

Sakharam had previously believed that he could be the dictatorial ruler of his home since the women he takes home are so wretched that they would never leave. He recognises that his influence as a decision-maker is eroding. Champa and Laxmi's need-based contract, which was arranged without Sakharam's authorization, is a direct challenge to his power. Sakharam is perplexed by Laxmi's story that she died with her head on his lap. However, Laxmi's return, as well as Champa's choice to allow her to live in Sakharam's residence, poses a danger to his power. He tries to brutally beat Laxmi, but Champa gets in the way and opposes him, "Hit me"¹³ (SB 183). Champa becomes Sakharam's enemy for all of Sakharam's wrongdoings towards Laxmi and other women. Laxmi, who believes strongly in religion and the sanctity of traditional marital bonds, is confronted by extremist Champa, who makes her realise she is missing on both counts. Champa and Sakharam both die as a result of Laxmi's comeback. Laxmi continues, "Religious rites—in the presence of gods and Brahmins—unite you to your husband,"¹⁴ (180).

Sakharam Binder is a fascinating study to the relationship between man and woman. It dissects the morbid, squalid aspects of human life against a bizarre backdrop of Plebeian society. Here, Tendulkar's love for the macabre and the obsession with sex and violence as

an integral part of human nature and relationships receive a vitriolic expression. The brutal objectivity and crudity with which he depicts the triangular relationship between Sakharam and his two mistresses, Laxmi and Champa, sometimes borders on a sort of revelry into the Philistinism in literature. The eponymous hero abhors marriage as an institution and believes in contractual cohabitation without rites. His passion is to bring to his den wives deserted by their husbands or who have walked out on them. What Sakharam the patron of *symbiotic* polygamy, demands from his mistresses, is absolute submission along with domestic comfort and physical gratification? The wretched women are turned into his slaves in his kitchen as well as in his bed. They also promptly dismissed from his haven on the slightest offence.

The life of Sakharam, in *Sakharam Binder*, receives a huge jolt after the intrusion of his seventh and eight women, Laxmi and Champa respectively, into his household. These two women represent two polarities of feminine response towards this sensual patriarch. Laxmi oozes the eternal “oomph” of a traditional Indian woman with her god-fearing religious, docile nature and her unflinching devotion towards her husband, no matter how great a tyrant he is. When she is thrown out of her house by her husband on her failure to give birth to a child and is rescued by Sakharam, she accepts the vicissitudes of life without any protest. She clutches Sakharam as her only option to survive and begins to worship her “Saviour”. She demonstrates the patterns of thinking instilled in women by the patriarchal tradition. But Champa is a boiling cauldron of fierce revolt that guts down all the men around her, irrespective of her protector or annihilator. She is a woman who has walked on her alcoholic husband as a strong rebuff to his cruelty perpetrated upon her. In her, Vijay Tendulkar points out that marriage is an institution in which sexual relationship for a woman is possible only if the self is forgotten in the stupor of alcohol, pleasure is possible only through inflicting pain on the others and *self-awareness* is nothing but the mute and moron-like acceptance of inhuman subordination or supremacy. The wild, wayward, vivacious and defiant Champa’s

final surrender to Sakharam, after considerable resistance, signifies a kind of *compromise* or *payment* for what she has been provided by him: food, clothe, and shelter.

Laxmi's previous experiences have taught her that she can only do so with the help of three patriarchal symbols: Dawood, Shinde, and Sakharam. Laxmi tries to enter the patriarchal realm of Sakharam after proving her dominance against Champa. Laxmi accepts Dawood who is a friend of Sakharam by addressing him *Dawood bhavjee*. Shinde is the next male in Sakharam's realm, with whom Laxmi has a sexual relationship. Sakharam's inner struggle is exacerbated by Laxmi's religious stance, which leads to a rising sense of frailty. Champa and Dawood, on the other hand, begin to form a new connection. Champa seeks to satisfy her sexual thirst with Dawood after being frustrated with Sakharam's phoney potency. As an outcome, Champa begins to refuse Sakharam's sexual approaches, and Laxmi bears the brunt of the guilt. She tells:

“As long as you were a man, I wasn't bothered. I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to accept you right now... Even with all that drink inside me, I can't handle it any longer. If you are unable to attend, please let us know as soon as possible. Go ahead and take a nap. These previous few days I haven't been able to make it. You become chilled when you hear something from the kitchen. 'Champa—Champa—' you're not a man—not since she came,' whether that's true or not. You've been reduced to a helpless ninny. I don't think I'd be brave enough to confront her first. You become a worm-like corpse”¹⁵(SB 193).

When an enraged Sakharam plans to evict Laxmi from his home, Laxmi knows that her own life is in jeopardy. Therefore she dismisses Champa's kindness and reveals the secret of Champa's sexual contacts with Dawood—a secret Laxmi had carefully concealed in order playing a trump card at a crucial juncture. Sakharam, enraged by Champa's sexual contacts with Dawood, resorts to the only option he has: physical violence. He murders Champa in

frenzy because he is enraged and disoriented. Sakharam is too shocked to contemplate after Champa's murder. Laxmi recognises this as an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and seizes it. Sakharam should bury Champa's body in the kitchen, which was her domain. When Laxmi takes charge of the issue, we see a new Laxmi emerge. The play *Sakharam Binder* takes a gruesome turn when an ecstatic, hysterical Laxmi viciously eggs on the murderer to cover up the killing of Champa, her rival in the triangular relationship. It is a pity that Laxmi who accepts and upholds patriarchal value system, loathes Champa for betraying her husband Sakharam and sees her death as a divine retribution. Such blind belief in an oppressive system appears even more stifling; than Champa's gross fornication and vulgarity.

Conclusion

The play, vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*, ends with Sakharam's pride shattered. The bitter critic of marriage as an institution is proved, at the end, to be a puny male chauvinist. Though he detested the tyrannical husbands he himself is no better than them. He made sarcastic remarks about the wives' loyalty to their despotic husbands but he himself demands utmost obedience from his mistresses. He represents double standards of patriarchy. By helping the women in distress, this pseudo-misogynist indirectly subjected them to a kind of prostitution. The myth of his working class secularism is exploded as the sexual jealousy in him wells up only when Champa shares her bed with Dawood, a Muslim. The metamorphosis of Laxmi, within the very territory of the patriarchal framework, from a meek to a murderous lady who performs religious rites and homicide with considerable aplomb, deflates the ego-centric male power in the play. It seems that the sex-oriented patriarch gives way to a meticulous and conservative matriarch (who has ironically internalized oppression perpetrated by patriarchy) to rule his little 'philanthropic' polygamous monarchy. The play gives a note "Night reigns"¹⁶ (SB 198), in the guise of Laxmi, she represents the final victory of phoney religiosity and unthinking conventionality. Because of their non-conformity and

anti-Brahmanism, Champa and Sakharam were bound to be killed and Sakharam to be defeated. Laxmi's life, Champa's assassination, and Sakharam's defeat all affirm the orthodox and traditional Hindu society's success. Sakharam finds peace and solace in Laxmi's arms, and Champa finds her place in death. Both the rebel and the assassin fail in their brave endeavors.

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