

Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*: Naturalistic Expression of Lust and Violence

Dr. Bharati S. Patnaik

Associate Professor
Department of English
Sitabai Arts, Com & Sci College,
Akola (M.S.)

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar, a versatile dramatist has touched different storm raising issues and has portrayed realistically the multi-faceted problems of our Indian society. His plays set as a mirror to the burning issues of the society. He considers violence as a basic need of human life. According to him, sex is one side of the coin and violence is the other side. Violence has different forms and expressions which include physical, verbal, political, psychological and sexual. Vijay Tendulkar's 'Sakharam Binder' presents panoramic picture of all these hues and expression of violence. In it the dramatist has explored physical lust and violence in an astonishing manner. His main concern is that violence and lust are the basic instincts of human beings. The paper deals with these expressions of violence and lust in Sakharam Binder. This controversial play may also be considered as a case study in domestic violence, particularly in live-in- relationship.

Keywords: Violence, lust, sexual, verbal, physical, society, traditional.

India's most important contemporary dramatist Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Dharamvir Bharati, Vijay Tendulkar are well known names today across the nation and beyond. In the post –independence Indian Drama, Vijay Tendulkar has been credited to have brought a sea change in the world of theatre. He has ruled Marathi theatre for the last five decades. His experimentation with the socially controversial themes jolted the orthodox Marathi theatre years ago. The author of controversial works like Vultures, Ghasiram Kotwal, Silence! the Court is session, and Sakharam Binder, Tendulkar was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 1984. His fifty plus years writing and journalistic career has contributed richly to the world of theatre, literature and films. In all his plays, Vijay Tendulkar is concern with the middle-class

individual set against the backdrop of a hostile society. Man's fight for survival, the varied moralities by which people live, the social position of women, the covert or overt violence in human beings are his abiding concerns. His plays express his deep concern for society. He did not choose the subject of his plays or wrote with a view to their commercial success. He dealt with the themes that genuinely interested him and were vital i.e the several ills the Indian society was beset with. Tendulkar himself asserted in one of his lectures – "I was never able to begin writing my play with an idea or a theme in mind. I had to make my characters first with me. He further adds – "These characters as 'living persons', led me into the thick of their lives."

Sakharam Binder is Tendulkar's most intimately naturalistic play. In it he has explored physical lust and violence in astonishing objective manner. Tendulkar's main concern is that violence and lust are the basic instincts of human beings. The play takes us into different kind of world where there is no hypocrisy, no immorality, but instead a total freedom of thought and action. The play introduces this theme in an exceedingly stultifying manner. There is a chunk of life with all its ugliness and crudity which is more than a shock to refined and prudish middle-class audience. *Sakharam*, the protagonist of the play is a book-binder by profession. He appears crude, aggressive and violent. The notable fact is that Tendulkar shows all offensiveness and ugliness through the character of *Sakharam* who is Brahmin by caste. This caste is considered to be the most honoured caste of the society, but *Sakharam* denies following moral and religious values of his caste and society and on the contrary becomes the part of violence. 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 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". (Tendulkar,172). The bitter experiences of life harden him and makes him violent. Having no belief in the institution of marriage, he remains bachelor. He criticizes traditional marriage and husbands and express his views about them:

"Its good thing I'm not a husband--. you get everything you want and yet you're not lied down. If you have had enough The game is over.... that's a cheap way of fixing all your appetites. He further says – Its only when a woman gets married that she goes wrong. She begins to feel- Now I've got my man! But the husband.... he is a proper swine! He lies her down; he doesn't get lied down himself.... I don't believe in double talk" (Tendulkar,129,130)

He makes a contractual arrangement based on mutual convenience with a woman in all her helplessness. This clearly shows his ill-temperament toward women as well as the society. He brings rejected, neglected and homeless women and give them shelter. But does not keep them with him for so long. He exploits them sexually to fulfill his physical needs and treats them as servants. His conversation with his friend Dawood shows his inhuman nature:

“While it lasts, she has a roof over her head, and you get home cooked food. That’s cheap way of fixing all your appetites.” (Tendulkar,129)

Laxmi is the seventh in the series of such helpless woman. She is driven out by her husband because she doesn’t beget a child. 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. In Sakharam’s home, the situation is not far different as her earlier place. She faces constant humiliation, severe beating and excessive physical lust. Tendulkar has been in the forefront in highlighting gender-based violence in the domestic sphere. He considers violence as a basic need of human. According to him sex is also one side of a coin and violence is the other side. Domestic violence against women is an age-old phenomenon. Women are always considered to be weak, vulnerable and in a position to be exploited. Violence has long been accepted as something that happens to a woman. It is a violence perpetrated in the domestic relation by a male abuser against the female counterpart. It is found in many forms- physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, economic, mental, spiritual etc. The Online Encyclopedia Britannica (OEB) defines it as any abuse – including physical, emotional, sexual or financial – between partners often living in the same household. The term is often used specifically to designate physical assaults upon women by their male counterparts. Based on International Law such as U N Declaration on Violence against women and a moral code, the Indian law ‘The Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act,2005’ defines domestic violence as any ‘act, omission or commission or conduct, that harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life, limb or well being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economical abuse.

Vijay Tendulkar is one Indian playwright who has observed the prevalence of different types of violence and crime perpetrated against women in the space under the domestic roof. When Laxmi is brought home, Sakharam tells her in clear cut terms about the rules of cohabiting

with him. She is informed that his writ will rule large in all matters and any deviation will result in her exit from the relationship. The model code of conduct she has to follow includes serving him as a wife and maintaining the house in proper order. She has to remain isolated from society and cannot meet neighbors or leave the house unless the work is of urgent nature. Furthermore, she cannot admit anyone to the house in his absence. She has a limited choice and rights in his house. Thus, she becomes an object of sexual enjoyment for him and it is her duty to satisfy his sexual appetite and to perform his household duties. The more brutal example of physical force appears in the play when Laxmi is beaten by a belt at the occasion of Ganesh Puja. Laxmi objects Dawood's participation in Hindu Puja, because he is a Muslim. Sakharam gets angry at her reaction to such extent that he "flings the aarti thing down". (Tendulkar,144). Then Sakharam slaps her in the face with such violent intensity that she writhes in pain. Her wrath increases with such violent intensity that he rains blow after blows on her fragile body. He takes off his belt and beats her like an animal. She suddenly bursts out and reacts to her oppression as she says:

"How much more can a person beat? It is a year now since I entered this house. I haven't had a single day's rest. Whether I'm sick or whether it's a festal day. Nothing but work, work, All the time. You torture me whole day, you torture me at night? I'll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end? (Tendulkar,146)

We find in this situation that without the ability to sustain themselves economically, women are forced to stay in abusive relationships and are not able to free from violence. Lack of legal knowledge and unsupportive parents fail them in seeking maintenance from their former husbands. So, prospect of economic security drive them to accept the bizarre terms and conditions of cohabitating with them. Sakharam's physical assault on Laxmi is again seen when she returns to his house after two months. He refuses to admit her as her place is already been taken by another woman, Champa. Laxmi clings to his feet and begs for permission to stay under his roof but he blows on her with brutal ferocity. Had Champa not intervened, things may have turned worse.

Champa is an extremely provocative woman. She is first victimized by her parents and later by her husband, Faujar Shinde who is a policeman by profession and who tortures her physically. She expresses her opinion:

“He (Faujdar) brought me from my mother even before I’ become a woman. He married me when I didn’t even know what marriage meant. He’d torture 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.” (Tendulkar,167)

But the harsh suffering of her life makes her strong and bold. She is now not ready to tolerate anything in her life. She lives her life according to her own will. As compared to Laxmi, she is entirely different woman. She is more beautiful and fascinating than her. Like Sakharam, she is also least bothered about tradition, moral and social values. Sakharam is captivated by her bodily contours and her free laughs. She is a kind of antithesis to laxmi. She hardly listens to what Sakharam says while giving instructions. She feels uncomfortable in Sakharams little home. Her words are indigestible for him. He is helpless in her case. She talks about her husband in a filthy and derogatory terms. Her violent behavior can be seen when her husband Faujdar comes to take her back from Sakharams house. She gets angry and kicks him with full strength and hits him on his face that makes his mouth bleed and shouts “Get up, you pig. I’ll stuff some chilli into you now. (Tendulkar,167)

All this comes as a shock to Sakharam who always criticizes traditional husbands for their cruelty. Tendulkar has depicted Champa as a woman who is capable of protecting herself and her body in a male dominated society. She is addicted to tea, tobacco, pan and cheap liquor – something that does not suit a woman. Thus, Champa differs from the traditional woman like Laxmi in various ways. In the words of Vasant Palshikar – “Laxmi conversation with the insects and crows symbolically indicates her dissatisfaction with sexual passion. Her gleeful laughter, while she is speaking with animals, incites sexual lust. Champa’s physical beauty and her lovely appearance inflame Sakharam’s sexual hunger. Laxmi’s behavior, gestures, facial movement and verbal expressions attract Sakharam towards her. Outwardly, she appears submissive, helpless and docile but actually, she is ambitious, determined, possessive and dictatorial.”

Champa does not easily surrender her body to anyone not even to her master, Sakharam. She surrenders herself to Sakharam only when she is completely unconscious- drunk. This behavior of Champa helps her to create an atmosphere where even a male like Sakharam feels dominated. Sakharam is so possessed by the insecurity that he no longer digests Champa’s admiration of Dawood. N. S Dhawan points out that – “Tendulkar probes into man- woman

relationship in this play. Sakharam falls because of his appetite to satisfy which he goes to extreme. His ill-treatment of Laxmi and his helpless slavery to Champa are proofs of this fact. Inwardly, he is a coward. Though he condemns gods for his hard life, he has innate faith in them. He tries to cover up his cowardice, helplessness and above all his loneliness behind a mask of aggressive, boastfulness and animal behavior." Sakharam's inhuman behaviour with women is well indicated by the fact that six women have lived and left him. He is so practical that after his sexual lust is fulfilled, he throws them away. As Maya Pandit comments: "But the contractual arrangement between him and woman he keeps represent a replica of the arrangement in marriage. Here all the romance and glamour evaporate under the terrible scrutiny of Tendulkar's critical eye."

A distinguishing feature of Tendulkar's plays is his preoccupation with the portrayal of the dark side of life. The atmosphere of violence and cruelty characterizes Tendulkar's plays. So, many aspects of violence are deconstructed by Tendulkar in this play. The impact of violence on the each and every characters life and society is remarkably presented and its expressions differ from person to person. Sakharam is shown as aggressive, violent who beats, shouts, and abuses Laxmi and other helpless women, while Laxmi is presented to show subtle violence. Outwardly, she seems to be obedient, committed and religious woman but at the end, she plays a violent role. She discloses Champa's affair with Dawood and provokes Sakharam to kill Champa. Tendulkar believes in the permanent presence of animal in man along with all the basic animal instincts. He shows that human beings behave just like animals under the impact of lust, greed and self-interest. Tendulkar admits that violence cannot be driven out from society as well as from the mind of people as he himself asserts: "Unlike communist, I don't think that violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that the human being is born with. Not that's bad. Without violence man would be turned into a vegetable."

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