

Sakaram Binder- A Bundle Of Contradictions

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ABSTRACT- Vijay Tendulkar's acclaimed work 'Sakaram Binder'- published in 1972 and banned in 1974, is a controversial play even in contemporary context. Typical of Tendulkar's style the play unravels in layers providing contrasting and contradictory revelation of characters. The protagonist (as we initially assume Sakaram to be) is a lower middle class brahmin who ran away from home at the age of eleven to escape from his cruel father's beatings. Fed up of being at the receiving end of his father's fault findings, young Sakaram is one among many Mumbai orphans who survive. His is not the rare rags to riches story but a mediocre street smart survivor who shrewdly manipulates social laws, ethics and charity to suit his needs. Though born in an upper caste family, Sakaram doesn't enjoy either education or money but makes a living as a book binder. The running away from home perhaps made this man averse to family bindings though he instructs his mistress to convert his house to a home. That can happen when there is a social and moral bonding between a man and a woman, which has not happened with the six women who lived and left on a contract basis. Sakaram brings abandoned women (there have been six so far) to his tiny shelter on the street, instructs them on cooking, cleaning and satisfying him. They cannot interact with anyone and can leave whenever they feel like. The charity worker image which initially the reader assumes of Sakaram very soon erases as we witness an uncouth womaniser who can still contentiously proclaim of paying his dues to God.

Keywords- Male chauvinism, Patriarchal society, marxism

Through Sakaram'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. Sakharam does not believe in the institution of marriage. So, he remains unmarried all through his life. However, he gives shelter to a helpless, deserted woman in the society, not with a view to improving her lot but to exploiting her further by fulfilling his sexual desire. It is a kind of contractual relationship based on mutual convenience. Wine and woman are his chief attractions. He has his own rules of the game, a special moral code, which he expects his temporary mistress to abide by. The play opens, when he brings Laxmi to his house, the seventh one in the series of his women or “temporary wives” if we call them so.

Laxmi is portrayed as an ideal Indian woman like Savitri in the mythological story.” Her husband has tortured her as she fails to conceive a child by him. Now, for her, Sakharam is her husband. She tries her best to fulfil his every need despite the fact that he even fails to understand her expectations and exploits her physically as well as psychologically. Sakharam’s association with Laxmi brings about some good changes in his life-style. He becomes devoutly religious, takes a regular bath, and transforms himself into a responsible “family man”. He himself notices these changes occurring in him but fails to attribute the credit to Laxmi. However, the playwright succeeds in convincingly showing, on her departure, the deep impact of Laxmi’s daily religious routine on Sakharam’s mind through his confession: “*There have been many women here, but this one left a mark before she went away.*” The relationship of Sakharam and Laxmi cannot last for a long period, as they are totally in contrast with each other. Laxmi is very sensitive, generous, calm, and tender-hearted. Sakharam is very aggressive, violent, and sensual. Laxmi fails to fulfil his excessive physical lust and Sakharam remains blind to her expectations. Both cannot satisfy each other either physically or psychologically. There is no sharing, no harmony in their relationship; their life is totally disrupted. At last, they part company, saying good-bye to each other in good humour and a very cordial manner.

On Laxmi’s departure, Sakharam brings Champa, the police Fauzdar Shinde’s wife, into his house. A foil to Laxmi, she is younger, slightly plumper, and better built. Her appearance, behaviour, dialogues, and even her name indicate that she is whimsical by nature. All good, desirable changes in Sakharam’s life come to an end with Champa’s arrival. A religious,

responsible “household man” transforms himself into a lewd, sensual drunkard. The difference between Laxmi and Champa is obvious. At the beginning, Laxmi appears embarrassed. Although she has been starving for a week, she remains quiet. When Sakharam lectures to Champa laying down his terms and conditions in his usual vein, she responds indifferently and asks him to prepare tea. Thus, she dispels his false notion: A woman has to attend the household chores. She never seems disturbed by Sakharam’s demands. On the contrary, she shocks him by frankly expressing her opinion about Daud, “He’s nice!” (p.159) Sakharam cannot appreciate this, but remains helpless. His conception about the sanctity of home ends with Champa’s arrival in his house. Outwardly, Champa appears gross and sensual, but she, too, is touchy and sensitive to some of the issues of life. She denies Sakharam to get into bed with her at the first night saying: “I don’t like it at all that man-woman stuff. I had my honour to save.” (162) However, in all helplessness and for the fulfilment of her bare needs such as food, clothing, and shelter- she has to yield to him and satisfy his physical lust. Laxmi accepts Sakharam almost as a husband and, therefore, submits herself to him willingly; Champa, on the other hand, accepts him merely as “her man” in sheer helplessness. She has no alternative but to share bed with him, but, for that, she has to reluctantly help herself with an alcoholic drink also. Nevertheless, in one corner of her mind, she feels that all men are equally bad; a man is, in her view, either a “corpse” or a “dog”. Champa is a rebel against male-dominated society. She does not accept conventional norms and values regarding manwoman relationship. No doubt, she is naive and sexy, but her mother and husband have been responsible for her being what she is. Laxmi returns to Sakharam, once again. Champa persuades him to give her shelter. However, the presence of Champa and Laxmi, at the same time and under the same roof, creates a psychological turmoil in Sakharam. He grows impotent. Laxmi develops an asexual relationship with Fauzdar Shinde while Champa develops a sexual association with Daud, since Sakharam can no longer sexually satisfy her. Though Laxmi finds nothing wrong with her association with Shinde, her moral sense is outraged by Champa’s affair with Daud, and she uses this opportunity to malign her rival. This brings out the latent hatred in Laxmi for Champa.

Getting his masculinity doubly hurt, Sakharam kills Champa in his rage. Thus, Laxmi, who outwardly appears to be generous and kind-hearted, turns out inwardly to be vicious or violent.

On Champa's murder, she shows more presence of mind than Sakharam. When the latter fails to carry out her instruction to bury Champa in the house, she herself takes up the shovel and does the grave-digging. Here, symbolically it seems to imply, "She buries not only Champa's dead body, but her uncivilized, barbaric, feminine desires also. Her power to fight injustice appears everlasting." It is observed that Laxmi successfully tones down Sakharam's sensuality, while Champa inflames it. The simultaneous presence of these two women together, who are foils to each other, disturbs him. It creates a psychological storm in his life. The lack of sexual potency on his own part and Champa's sexual association with Daud, his friend hurt Sakharam's ego acutely. As a result, he turns into a cold-blooded murderer. The role-shifting in him transforms the audience's feeling from apathy into antipathy (due to the cruelties he inflicts upon Laxmi) and back from antipathy into sympathy and pathos (due to his helplessness in covering up Champa's murder at his hands).

Victim-Victimiser Relationship- The play exemplifies the power struggle at the family level. The shifting of roles implicit in the Drama Triangle is clearly noticeable here. Sakharam is a foul-mouthed womanizer who pretends to be a saviour of women, but actually, he is just an egoistic epicure. He gives shelter to a woman, deserted by her husband, but she gets from Sakharam treatment worse than that from her husband. He wants his woman to slave day and night for him, and respect him, and satisfy him. He cares a fig for her on a personal level and throws her out, when there is left nothing womanly about her. Tendulkar, in this play, denudes both an individual and society. The play is Sakharam, leaves the house at the age of eleven due to the barbaric treatment of his father to him. Though he is born in a Brahmin family, he lives like "a Mahar, a dirty scavenger" (127) to show off his arrogance and powerlessness.

However, in his association with Champa later, he is transformed into a sensual drunkard. Laxmi's arrival for the second time creates a psychological turmoil in Sakharam, which leaves him impotent. Champa gives shelter to Laxmi but there is a streak of contempt in her treatment to the latter. The tender-hearted Laxmi cannot bear to see Champa as her rival in love, she uses the policy of "using a thorn to take out a thorn" (63). She informs Sakharam of Champa's illicit relationship with Daud. Sakharam cannot bear this and strangles Champa to death. Thus,

Sakharam's role shifts from Victim to Rescuer, from Rescuer to Persecutor and Laxmi's from Victim to Persecutor. Similarly, Champa's role shifts from the Victim to the Rescuer and back from the Rescuer to the Victim. Thus, Sakharam shifts from his role from Laxmi's master to her slave. Likewise, Laxmi too shifts her role---from that of Sakharam's slave to his master.

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