

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S SAKHARAM BINDER.

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Abstract :

Modern Indian drama has been remarkably enriched by Mohan Rakesh (Hindi), Badal Sarkar (Bengali) Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi) and Girish Karnad (Kannad). Indian drama is “an expression of our national genius” said R.K Reddy (2006:07) which has a “long history of 2000 years in a unique phenomenon in the literary world” (Ibid.). Vijay Tendulkar has been the vanguard of not just Marathi but Indian theatre for almost forty years and he has been considered as a major and leading playwright in modern Indian literature. He is one the earliest playwrights of Indian languages who has transformed the regional theatre into national theatre. His main themes are alienation, hypocrisy, jealousy, violence, plight of women in a male dominated urban middle class society. The plays Sakharam

Binder, the vultures, Ghasiram Kotwal, Silence! The Court Is In Session and Kamala, are some of his well acknowledged plays where the above mentioned themes occur more often. Tendulkar was smart enough to look into the psyche of his subject and focuses his attention on the ugliness he detected in society, proving himself the writer of modern generation to depict human problems and sufferings in a skillful and realistic manner.

Keywords: live in relationship, exploitation, violence, male chauvinism, social evils, human relationships,

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most acknowledged playwright of Marathi language. He has twenty-eight full length plays, twenty-four one act plays and eleven children dramas to his credit. Most of his plays have been translated into English and in some other languages of India. He was one of the strongest and hard-hitting writers of his times. His writings gained recognition more because he raised compelling issues from lives around which embraced bitter reality and grim truth. The works he caters to the world is usually grave and brutal. Tendulkar is popularly known to foreground the unspoken and absolutely unconventional issues of common folk. In many 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’. He has given Marathi and Indian drama a completely different perspective. Vijay Tendulkar’s plays are centered in the middle- class society. He pens the real image of Indian society without the layer of imagination as many of his plays are based on the real life incidents. A Shailaja B.Wadikar in the book Vijay Tendulkar: A Pioneer

Playwright, critically observed:

“A remarkable feature of Tendulkar’s plays is that they give us not an idealized but an actual portrayal of life with all its baser aspects that are an integral part of nature.” (25)

Tendulkar was born on 6th January 1928 in Mumbai, Maharashtra and started writing at the age of eleven. He took on various flaws present in the contemporary society and is well known as a controversial writer for writing plays like *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kamala* (1981) and *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967). Tendulkar’s plays dealt with various burning issues of caste discrimination, patriarchy, human trafficking and how women emerged as worst sufferers in his time. His play *Ghashiram Kotwal* was a political satire against the established government of his time and considered one of the most controversial plays. *Sakharam Binder* depicts the story of a binder named Sakharam who is a womanizer and takes pride in his advantages towards women. Both the plays were eventually banned due to their too natural depiction of reality.

Vijay Tendulkar, in *Sakharam Binder*, challenges the institution of marriage as well as the accepted moral standards associated with it. It is one of those plays which is conceptualized on themes much ahead of their times. It portrays the life of Sakharam, who works in a local press and gives shelter to women who are helpless and abandoned by their husbands, or widows who are destitute. The only favor he asks for, in return, is that his physical needs are taken care off. He abhorred the whole concept of marriage and thinks himself a superior being than others. The renouncement of his socially superior caste and adopting an inferior one, or refusing to surrender to the normalcy of society by not getting married, shows how less he cared for society. The trouble lies with the fact that his indifference towards society does not result in anything good, instead adds to the malpractices taking place in it.

Since women destitution has been a very common phenomenon 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 puts 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.

Laxmi is introduced in the beginning of the play as the seventh woman brought by

Sakharam in his house. Sakharam has had contractual cohabitation with many women earlier and Laxmi is the seventh one. She is portrayed as a shy, innocent, average looking woman who is submissive and timid. An argument with her drunkard husband led to her fleeing the house. She eventually finds shelter in Sakharam's house. Sakharam instructs the duties to her,

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 some of the 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) The play progresses and we come to know the blatant side of Sakharam in the following scenes when he beats Laxmi for talking to an ant and not allowing Dawood (Sakharam's friend) to attend Puja. He beats her with a belt and the torture continues for months to come for various reasons from evening Puja to her resistance to his physical needs. All this while, Laxmi, is portrayed as a submissive, religious, pious woman and typical Indian woman with high moral standards. A twist comes in the play when Laxmi decides to leave Sakharam when she can no longer bear the torture. It is in a view of her advancing age, and not her attachment to gods and traditional values, that Sakharam dives Laxmi out of his house.

On the other hand the next woman Champa is reverse to Laxmi, introduced as flamboyant, outspoken, is more exposed to the world and lives on her own terms. Despite coming from a good background, she is portrayed as a social rebel. She stands not only as a bold rebel but also as a symbol of freedom. The striking contrast in the portrayal of both the women characters stand for the huge gap between orthodox social setup and acceptance of the reality.

The play and the character of Sakharam as well is a unique creation of Tendulkar. Sakharam himself being a victim of parental domestic violence in his childhood ran away from his house. '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 portrayed a very different character altogether. He is not conservative in his friendship with his best friend Dawood, a Muslim by religion. He openly rebukes the falsehood in the institution of marriage as witnessed by him. Wine and women are the chief attractions for 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) Arundhati Banerjee rightly remarks that the "presence of Laxmi and Champa at the same time has a strange effect on Sakham as if

the two different strands in his character come into direct confrontation, creating a psychological turmoil in him and resulting in his temporary impotence" (Banerjee xiv-xv)

Overall, Tendulkar depicts not only Sakham but Laxmi also as an exploitive person. Champa's attitude helps in proving the fact how an oppressed turns into an oppressor due to evil circumstances faced by an oppressed. She is first victimized by her husband and then victimizes him back., whereas Laxmi, who seems a good woman, plays tricks with Champa, when she threatens Laxmi to drive her out, trapping her by exposing her affair with Dawood, she supports Sakham's evil deeds when he kills Champa. So every character in the play is indulged in the act of violence, various sort of violence can be visualized through each and every character of the play whether one is victim or victimizer.

The play depicts the conflicts among characters in relationships, such as interpersonal and personal relationships which are entirely based on violence. Apart from the character of Sakham, the characters such as Laxmi, Champa, Dawood and FaujdarShinde are also portrayed as the violent characters who express their violent behavior in different expressions of violence such as physical, psychological, political and verbal. Though Sakham's mode of living centers on bodily appetite, he has moral enough to make feel temporarily impotent. Further, it is from the viewpoint of male sexuality that the play critiques man-woman relationship.

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