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**A STUDY OF MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
SAKHARAM BINDER**

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar's Sakhram Binder is an epoch-making play in not only Marathi theatre but Indian theatre as well. The play became successful after being banned by censor board of Maharashtra govt. It was staged after legal action taken by producers against censor board. The play had to endure many ordeals to become successful. Translated in various Indian languages, the play presents complex man-woman relationship. The protagonist defies all set norms, values and traditions of the society and puts a question mark on the basic institutions of society, like the institutions of marriage and family which are the foundations of Indian society. Moreover they play a crucial role in the development of any individual. Vijay Tendulkar, no doubt, is a famous personality. He was a great playwright, director, actor, columnist, essayist, journalist and social commentator. Girish Karnad honored the play by his apt comment as one of the best plays from last thousand years. The play is also translated in English and was praised unanimously by critics and audience, so that it was continuously going on for a month in a New York City of America.

Keywords: Drama, Performance Art, Indian Drama, Vijay Tendulkar, etc.

The most controversial play by Vijay Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* - a deft piece of literature was first published on 10 March 1972 and staged by Welcome theatre group in 1974 in Mumbai. The original play was directed by *Kamlakar Sarang* and played by *Nilu Phule, Lalan Sarang* and *Kusum Kulkarni* in lead roles. The paper aims to study and compare the man-woman relationship in the play between *Laxmi – Sakhram* and *Champa-Sakharam*. The play tells the story of a book binder *Sakharam* – a single male who shelters destitute women into his home and expects a docile and wifely behavior even satiate his carnal desires. He exploits them and forces them to submit their will into his. He rules the home and does not maintain emotional relationship with them. His doors are always open for them to leave him if it becomes unbearable. Apart from his being too arrogant, bold, insulting, abusive, drunkard, addicted to *Beedi* and *Ganja* and treads an anti-social path he provides basic needs to the destitute women left by their husbands is the only positive trait in his character.

The play opens with his bringing the seventh woman, *Laxmi* – a docile and timid religious woman who naturally falls prey and mutely suffers his physical and psychological atrocities. After one year he throws her out of his home against her wish after her angry retorts to him. He brings next the woman *Champa*- a flamboyant, young, attractive and headstrong woman. She enters his home and rules him. The play further takes many dramatic turns and reaches its climax after the return of *Laxmi*. The minor characters *Dawood* and *Faujdar Shinde* heighten the effect of the play.

I : Sakharam-Laxmi:



Sakharam- Laxmi relationship begins with their arrival at his home; Laxmi is deserted by her husband discarded because of her barrenness. Shakharam tells all the rules of his home with utter domination, "I won't have you complaining later on. I like everything in order here. Won't put up with slipshod ways. If you are careless, I will show you the door. Don't ask for any pity then. And don't blame me either. I am the master here. I don't care if they treat me like dirt outside. But a house must be a home, you understand?" (Banerjee, 125) He offers her shelter, food and clothes and in return looks for 'wifely duties' during the day and fulfill sexual passion at night- with full devotion. Being docile and accustomed to such behaviour she accepts all and even performs well without any grudge. Heartless and cold blooded Sakharam leads her to find her way from coming out such type of situation where she involves herself in religious rites and fast and entertain herself by befriending big black ants, ants and crows easily available in her kitchen. She is caught in a flux- a no win situation. The small incidents occur between them and show their opposite temperaments of the victim and victimizer like- his forcing her to massage his legs, laugh without her wish in, beat her harshly in front of Dawood when she opposes Muslim Dawood to recite Ganapati Aarti, burning her feet with charcoal for his ganja, laughingly satiate his lust, beating and tolerating his threatening to kick her out, tireless homely duties, preparing food and tea time to time. A chain of atrocities make her bold after one year being a human being she becomes successful in responding him angrily. Though he changes himself in her habitant but the male ego is still alive in him which leads him to throw her away from his home without her wish as they are not married. Like a Duke in Robert Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess' Sakharam makes her to leave his home as the Duke makes to leave his Duchess leave the world, in the words 'All the smiles stopped together'.

Man-woman relationship between them ends here, though she enters towards the end of the play, when he is already deeply involved with Champa- his next prey (woman). But in the presence of Champa the unwelcomed Laxmi is treated badly by him though she is sheltered by Champa for daily chores. He finally has to agree her and an opportunist Laxmi takes advantage of helpless murderer Sakharam in the end.

As they are living in live-in-relationship a contractual relationship is obvious. The man-woman relationship between them is executed by male-chauvinism and submissiveness. As Dr. Shailaja Wadikar observes in her research paper, "The relationship of Sakharam and Laxmi cannot last for a long period, as they are in contrast with each other. Laxmi is very sensitive, generous, calm, and tender hearted. Sakharam is very aggressive, violent and sensual. Laxmi fails to fulfill his excessive physical lust and Sakharam remains blind to her expectations. Both cannot satisfy each other physically or psychologically. There is no sharing, no harmony in their relationship; their life is totally disrupted" (The Criterion, 3). Sakharam controls her most actively and being passive she is controlled. She is caught in a flux- a no win situation. His being a rascal is told by him in the play that is his family disorder suffered by him, he has to leave his home at the age of only eleven. Suppression and suffocation leads him to search some sort of outlet. He leaves his home but by taking the same image of his father that is to be a monster to his counterpart, Quillier-Coach aptly observes: "The 'Masculine' style is, of course, bold, forceful, clear, vigorous etc: In the list of pairs you can conclude 'objective' and 'subjective', universal or accurate depiction of society versus 'confessional' 'personal' or even 'narcissistic' and 'neurotic' (Pande, 40).

While growing up in his family his tender feelings had been crushed by the bitter experiences of his family. The picture carved in his mind of the misery and suffering even after leaving his home. The unfair and exploitative outside world whom his mingled eventually and unavoidably moulds him into a rough, frustrated and tough person who have developed his own philosophy of life, his crystal clear opinions about man-woman relationship and using female body for his lust without a feeling of



sin for it, he considers himself honest, he expresses himself as if honesty is there then nobody can torture.

On the other hand, Laxmi's bringing up is also from the same lower middle class strata where woman is considered as a second sex. The play doesn't provide any details of her childhood but the way she behaves and interacts with Sakharam presents her mindset. She was cruelly treated by her husband and even thrown away of home on being unable to beget his child. A woman is already subject to enslave by male moreover her barrenness add fuel to her predicament. Her husband being a patriarchal male as sarcastically narrated by Sakharam shaped her psyche to be submissive.

The inner self of both Sakharam and Laxmi affect the man-woman relationship. Man is born to rule and woman to be ruled such mindset hovering over this relationship. She mutely tolerates his injustice considering him her husband even she considers herself fortunate enough to die into his lap like a sincere Indian wife who submits her will in the will of her male counterpart for that she is harshly beaten by him who never considers her wife and any marital bond. He always enjoys a superior status at home and to be a free individual without any shackles. It has become his nature. Both of them behave true to their nature and this relationship between them is based on torture, atrocities, male-supremacy, egocentrism and mute sufferings.

The positive aspect of this man-woman relationship is that the change in Sakharam's personality in the association of pious, virtuous and religious Laxmi. The atheist Sakharam becomes theist that he brings the idol of God Ganapati to his home for first time, worship god every day by bathing; he drinks wine, tobacco, ganja and beedi less even don't touch wine in Sankasthi Chaturthi and Chaturmas. He started wearing clean clothes. Though he is overtly showing bold in front of her he is afraid of her as a holy spirit. The cruel, aggressive and violent Sakharam displays the change in his character to a religious and family loving man. Her departure makes him nervous, which he accepts with his best friend Dawood, he says, "There have been many women here, but this left a mark before she went away" (Banerjee, 153). Laxmi becomes successful in shaping humane side in a wild Sakharam.

II: Sakharam-Champa:

The man-woman relationship between Sakharam and Champa begins when she is brought by him to his home after the departure of Laxmi. Being younger and attractive than Laxmi in their first meeting Champa seduces Sakharam and Dawood as well. Her seductive inclination towards Dawood is not tolerated by Sakharam who told him not to come to him now. As a victim of sadism of her drunkard and dismissed police husband Champa leaves him for his frequent threatening of suicide. Rebellious Champa gives Sakharam shocks aftershock after her arrival. She neglects him while he is telling his 'rules' for every woman moreover she orders him for tea, changes her saree in front of him and Dawood and tells Dawood to manage betel leaf and tobacco for her, ready to sleep in living room and again orders Sakharam to keep meal ready for her as she is hungry after her sleep while abusing her husband in a very vulgar and mean terminology. Sakharam opposes and tells her to prepare food is a feminine duty done by female in his home. She readily, confidently and shamelessly responds him that she is not habitual as her mother-in-law at her husband's home and her father at her maternal home were preparing food so she is not habitual with cooking. While neglecting her arrogance Sakharam tolerates her because of her being attractive and tries to make physical proximity with her. She is first woman who opposes him for physical pleasure saying, "I m not 'that' kind of woman". He goes out frustrated so she involves in it after drinking a lot of wine and making him to drink. Both of them enter into the world of being libido. Drinking wine and having sex becomes their daily routine. Sakharam remains intoxicated day and night in her company even forgets his job. Once again Champa stuns Sakharam and Dawood by her heartless beating her husband in front of them by abusing him who has



come to meet her in Sakharam's home. Both of them leave speechless. Thus the man-woman relationship between them is based on lust only. Things become worse for Sakharam after Laxmi's returning home. Champa who shelters Laxmi without taking his permission saying, "you look after the house, I'll look after him. Anyway. I can't cope with both. You stay alive and I'll stay alive too". His inner fear for pious Laxmi becomes alive. His sexual performances start to get affected in Laxmi's presence. The drastic change in his lusty behavior is aptly observed by Champa, she says, "She's made an impotent ninny of you. Don't have the guts to take me before her. You turn into a corpse – a worm" (Banerjee, 193). She starts to call him 'effeminate' openly. He vents his frustration upon Laxmi-the mute sufferer and forces her to leave the home. Champa started losing her interest in Sakharam and searches her easy target available to her in the form of Dawood. Laxmi who considers Sakharam as her husband even wears *Magalsutra* (black beads necklace) by his name, she is loyal to him though badly treated by him. Being her rival in Sakharam's love Laxmi expects the same from Champa. She stealthily observes Dawood's mating with Champa in Sakharam's absence and reports it to Sakharam to win his favour at a crucial time. Sakharam can't tolerate Champa's adultery and he becomes mad and throttles intoxicated Champa to death. His relationship with Champa automatically comes to an end.

The negative aspect of this man-woman relationship is that Sakharam who has brought positive traits into his personality in the company of Laxmi totally goes back to his earlier position of drunkard and addictive. He even worsens himself to be a libido. He leaves his job and finally ceases after becoming a murderer. His relationship with his best friend Dawood worsens and transforms him into a doubtful and opponent in his love for Champa.

Never the less the positive changes of this relationship are observed. The positive changes Champa brought in his personality are that his vices like –male ego, male-chauvinism, stubbornness and headstrongness develops for some time. Dr. Kavya points out, "Vijay Tendulkar questions the immortality of humans which is the prime source of all evil. Being a woman Champa has shades of man the way she indulges in animal love and Sakharam being a man had gone jealous like a woman so man and woman lie on the same plane and being human is crucial" (Kavya, 51). The universal truth about the human nature the dramatist has tried to point out which appealed the audience. They are stunned by observing the embodiment of their own nature in the play in theatre.

III: Champa – Dawood:

Dawood is Sakharam's best friend and witness each and every woman Sakharam sheltered in his home. He scrutinized all the women at his friend's home, observes and discusses with Sakharam frequently about them. He astonishes to see Champa, her beauty and her boldness fascinates him. Champa purposefully attracts him towards her for her assistance in the newly home and for her addiction like beetle leaves and tobacco. Sakharam is shrewd enough to come to know that Dawood is taking much interest Champa and closes his door for him to avoid his contact with Champa. But finally, Champa and Dawood become successful in maintaining illicit physical relationship stealthily with each other. This relationship is mentioned by Laxmi in the play that shrewdly used the secret to strengthen her place in Sakharam's mind and home and to get rid of Sakharam from her rival Champa. This is the relationship which creates a permanent scar on the mind of Sakharam, even challenges his male ego who undertakes an extreme step to kill Champa. Champa maintains this relationship just to satisfy her carnal desires unaware of the fact that her adultery would destroy her permanently. The relationship becomes successful in bringing a twist in the story of the play and changes the whole course of the play. The previous two relationships born out of necessity on the side of both the parties but in this case it is not necessary for Champa to have relationship with Dawood as a compulsion.



IV: Champa - Faujdar Shinde:

This is a married couple; their life is not depicted in the play but told by Champa to Sakharam. The man-woman relationship between them is marked by male ego and female vulnerability as reported by Champa. She is victim of his atrocities and being addicted to wine. Their first meeting is on the wine shop run by her mother, where he had come for his duty to raid the place. Shinde attracted towards her and forced her to marry him; she was quite young at that time unknown to his habits her mother married her off by seeking his favour in her business and his job as police. Soon Champa is fed up of living with him, she says, "All he does is to drink and then he keeps on threatening to kill himself" (Banerjee, 157). Champa cannot adjust with him and took extreme step to leave the home. Her resentment goes extreme level when Shinde arrives to Sakharam's home in search of her, she brutally beats him in front of Sakharam and Dawood which stuns both of them. She blames that Shinde harassed her sexually. The relationship comes to an end when Champa decides to live the home. The man-woman relationship between them witnesses transformation of the gender roles, at her home Champa is docile while Shinde is dominant and at Sakharam's home Champa is dominant while Shinde is docile. Champa represents a stereotype of woman from lower rank Indian society who is used by men for their lust and even killed for male ego.

V: Laxmi - Faujdar Shinde:

A very different aspect of man-woman relationship can be observed with this relationship. In the absence Sakharam and Champa, Champa's husband Shinde (drunkard and suspended police) meets Laxmi who has come in search of Champa. Laxmi deliberately inquires him about Champa to know the loop holes in Champa's character to prove in future that how she is comparatively better than Champa. She displays affinity for him, takes him inside the home and even offers him meal. Laxmi even maintains an asexual relationship with Champa's husband. The relationship show how Laxmi is foil to Champa, the first one develops human relationship with the latter's husband while the second develops intimacy with unknown person.

VI: Relationship between Husband and Wife:

This relationship between husband and wife is mentioned by Sakharam while talking to Laxmi. She is the woman sheltered by Sakharam before Laxmi, she is died in the hospital of Miraj. Sakharam scornfully laughs at her love for her husband and children, who carelessly made her to leave the home. They never love her but the woman is deeply involved in her husband that she died by taking her husband's name till her last moment. She is tortured and kicked away by him still she doesn't have any objection for him and accepted her life as it is being a woman. She represents a perfect Indian womanhood who accepts and worships her husband as her god and never blames him and even considers it is a blissful life is she dies while serving him and her demands god her death before him. This relationship is also marked by male- ego and woman as a negligible creature.

VII: Similarities and Contrasts:

One can find some similarities and contrasts between the women of these relationships that is Laxmi and Champa with Sakharam. These women are from lower middle class family. Both women deal with the problem of marital life. Both are from rural background and both of them victims of patriarchal system and over possessive husbands. Laxmi is submissive while Champa is rebellious. Laxmi is thrown away from her home by her husband without her mistake; the same Laxmi is thrown away by Sakharam from his home as well. Laxmi is timid nature and her tendency to accept the will of her husband and her partner in live-in-relationship as her gods and hence worshipped and follow their orders without thinking herself. She dances to their tunes and considers her bliss to die in latter's lap as the earlier has discarded her, like a typical Indian woman. While Champa is bold who tolerates the



sadism of his drunkard husband by living in his home. She herself leaves her home and husband when she finds herself unable to tolerate. She beats her husband who has come in search of her at Sakharam's home. Here her husband is ready to die with her beatings whereas Laxmi is ready to die happily in Sakharam's lap. Champa's husband can't come out of her attraction after her departure also and visits her frequently while Laxmi's husband never comes and even asks for her, leaves her to die as Laxmi is thrown away while Champa throws away her husband and leaves her home willingly. Both of the women have different philosophies of life. Laxmi is leading a life of typical Indian womanhood who has pride for her parents and her maternal family, her husband and her in-laws and even for Sakharam and his home and his miser income.

She blames herself for being unfortunate when all of them are unjust, oppressive and become strong reasons for her mental, physical and psychological agony as a representative of typical patriarchal society. While Champa never utters a single word of pride for her family, neither marital nor maternal and always mentions them scornfully, she uses words like 'a corpse' (Madha) 'a mimic' (Song) and many slang words for her husband. She is a revolt at her husband's home and also at Sakharam's home. She is total converse in behavior compared to Laxmi. Their upbringing at their father's home is also different. Laxmi is brought up in a typical rural Indian family like a submissive girl and married off in a suitable age while Champa is brought up in a totally opposite atmosphere where her mother was a bread winner of the family and father performing household duties.

Her mother had a shop of betel leaves and tobacco- (a typical male business) and faced vulgar male gaze. She stealthily used to sell wine also assisted by Champa and interact with mean persons as their customer. She sold her daughter Champa off (before her reaching puberty) to her regular customer, a policeman for his favour in her business. Married at an early age Champa is a victim of unnatural sex of her drunkard husband who tortured her like a beast. Champa made her mother-in-law to perform daily chores rather than her. She expects the same at Sakharam's home. Laxmi leads a spiritual life while Champa never believes in God and leads a life of carnal desires. Laxmi is never addicted but Champa is addicted to betel leaves, tobacco and drinks wine occasionally to vent her frustration. Both are frustrated in their lives; one involves in religious practices to maintain her peace of mind while the other involves in the world of libido.

Both the women are poles apart in the life of Sakharam, the protagonist. Their relationship with Sakharam is the main theme of the play which varies as the personalities. Dr. Shailja Wadikar aptly remarks, "Laxmi accepts Sakharam 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". (The Criterion, 3-4). Laxmi and Sakharam lead a very peaceful conjugal life, he develops his faith in God, and he develops from his negativity towards positivity while in the company of Champa, Sakharam deteriorates his livelihood, forgets his religious practices and he deeply sinks himself in wine and sex. His journey starts from positivity to negativity again. As Dr. Kavya rightly points out, "Man and woman cannot get along well as they try to dominate each other" (Kavya, 51). The man-woman relationships in the play and in the society affect with the same principal and finally a tensed relationship is observed. Some couples continue the bruised relationship because of no courage to break the marriage which is considered as social stigma and future of the issues but some couples understand the futility of the relationship and accept the path of divorce by giving much importance to individuality.

Psychological factors: Collective angles of Champa and Laxmi:



Sakharam goes on increasing his dominance/atrocities on Laxmi because she is docile and become more docile with Champa who is bold, attractive and young. Champa transforms him into a lewd and lecherous person while Laxmi tried her best to develop into a humble and religious person and she is successful. It is not a triangular relationship because when Laxmi returns she is admitted in the house by Champa and both the women maintain very practical relations.

The physical levels of relationships:

For the protagonist he does not accept any emotional ties but Laxmi looks after him as her husband and goes merely physical level on the other hand Champa is living on the same plane like him. In fact her lust is bigger and there is subtle powerful as both Sakharam and Champa are very dominating characters. It ends in a disastrous manner where Sakharam kills Champa and Laxmi emerges as the most powerful character in the end. The relationship does not take the common course which is expected in normal relationships. It provides a shock treatment to the audience.

Towards the end of the play Vijay Tendulkar becomes successful in giving twist to the course of the play. Virtuous, peaceful and timid Laxmi becomes violent. Being opponent in her love for Sakharam she slander Champa at her back and considers herself pious, when the same Champa has sheltered her when Sakharam was not ready to shelter her. Finally she makes best use of the fact. Knowing Sakharam's being headstrong she purposefully backbite the infidelity of Champa by leaving him restless when he is forcing Laxmi to throw out of his home. Thoughtless Sakharam throttles intoxicated Champa in his anger. He becomes aware of the fact after her death resulting in powerless and helpless creature. All the main bold characters like Sakharam and Champa remains motionless either dead or alive and it is only coward Laxmi who handles the situation bravely. She finds path to dispose dead body to save Sakharam from the crime, win his favour and settle in life with him finally. Champa and Sakharam lose their battle with their thoughtless actions while clever Laxmi is the winner due to her thoughtful action and being opportunist in their respective relationship with the hero. Towards the end Laxmi presents herself true to the Darwinian theory of evolution 'survival of the fittest' while Champa leads herself to her own destruction and Sakharam a helpless man. Vijay Tendulkar is famous for bringing out genuine aspects of human nature which affect the relationship most. Through this play he wants to exhibit goodness and evilness inbuilt in each and every human being, his main characters shows the same as Dr. Kavya pinpoints, "All human beings inherit faults in them nobody is perfect, but it is up to them to nurture goodness or evilness....but all are sinners in the end" (Kavya, 51). Great dramatist William Shakespeare's world famous 'tragic protagonists' meet their tragic end just because of the same that every human being has loop holes/draw backs in his/her characters that is 'hamartia'. Vijay Tendulkar being a very talented dramatist has become successful in bringing out the same zest into regional Marathi theatre.

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