Abstract

Human Relationship is the most mystifying. Hence it is the most exciting for a novelist. Within this relationship woman’s place is of greatest concern to Vijay Tendulkar because of the abysmal difference that women experience in relation to men. Vijay Tendulkar portrays the daily humiliations that women suffer in the male-dominated society. While dealing with the evils and drawbacks of the Indian society, Tendulkar throws light on the human relationship within and outside of family and brings out their complexity and connectivity in the play Sakharam Binder. Tendulkar thoroughly scrutinizes and explains the blood relationship on various levels. In the play Sakharam Binder is a foul-mouthed womanizer. He gives shelter to a woman, deserted by her husband, but she gets from Sakharam treatment worse than that from her husband. In helping the women out of their precarious situation, he arranges a kind of husband and wife relationship.

1. Introduction

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2. Different Relationships Depicted In A Play

- **Triangular relationship**
The play depicts the triangular relationship between Sakharam, Lakshmi, and Champa. Their relationship is one of the victims and the victimizer. It is through the portrayal of female characters that Tendulkar’s plays expose vices and weaknesses of society. Women are often projected as exploited and losers. That is why, in an interview with Tendulkar, when the critics Satya Saran and Vimal Patil ask a question charging him with an anti-woman bias, pat comes the playwright’s plea:

“When I show the struggle of a woman, it is not one woman’s fight… I am, in writing of her situation, showing that the possibility of struggle against it exists.…. When the members of my audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or sister in the woman’s position and come up with a way of changing the situation for her advantage”. (An Interview with Vijay Tendulkar, Famina, June 8-22, 1984, 37. Quoted in Asha Kanwar, Ghashiram Kotwal: A Study Guide, 40).

- **Illicit relationship**
Champa’s illicit relationship with Dawood, his friend, turns Sakharam mad with anger. In consequence, he strangles her to death. Towards the end of the play, he gets an emotional support from Laxmi, which helps him cover up the murder and get rid of the feeling of remorse. “Anyway he was a sinner. She’ll go to hell. Not you. I’ve been a virtuous woman. My virtuous deeds will see both of us through”. (196)

- **Sexual relationships**
Sakharam Binder is about man-woman relationship outside marriage. The totality of experience here is about sex. The sexual relationships among the five characters are the main artistic concern of Tendulkar, and how it manifests itself through violence is the chief action of the play. So sex and related violence are the explicit or latent forces which reveal the characters. The play consists of three acts. The first act depicts the relationship of Laxmi and Sakharam. It also gives the necessary
background information and the character of a Sakharam in relation to the past and present and his relationship with Laxmi. The second act is devoted to the relationship of Sakharam is presented in relation to the present-Champa. The third act depicts the relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam-Champa. It brings all the three characters together. The main crux of the last act is the conventional triangular relationship with its in-built tensions and problems. Two women and one man is a universally accepted cliché. But still the end of the play is unexpected. One of the women has to give up and the reader will anticipate and guess, but the twist makes the end spellbinding. The play portrays lower strata of society.

**Contractual relationship**

Sakharam, a middle-aged man, has with him Laxmi, the seventh woman he has brought home. Since he does not believe in the institution of marriage 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 for fulfilling his sexual passion. It is a kind of contractual relationship based on mutual convenience. As long as both are happy with the system they live together without marriage, but both of them have the right to walk out of the contract. So it appears as though he has decided a system wherein he may satisfy his carnal hunger. The women may also look for shelter. The contract looks very attractive. Upto six women the system has run successfully. The women are the victims of failed marriages, either the husbands have kicked them out or they themselves have walked out of the marriages or they have suffered widowhood.

For the first sixty women Sakharam’s method proved a success. This success made him confident or even overconfident. He is a self-acclaimed achiever in this respect. There is no emotional bond. As long as it is useful, it will last. It has worked effectively upto the present. Like a tour guide Sakharam leads Laxmi to his house on her first day, he talks about himself, his house, his previous women and his successful working philosophy.

**Slave relationship**

For him it is a master – slave relationship. So the woman will not have any say in cohabitation. The last condition laid down by Sakharam is a difficult task. He wants ‘the house’ to become a home. A house becomes a home because of the emotional bonding of the people who live in it. He is a successful polygamist outside the institute of marriage. He has been successful with six women upto Laxmi. The woman has to live within the limits set by Sakharam. There are do’s and dont’s which throw light on Sakharam and his attitude towards women.

**Physical relationship**

The physical relationship without any ties and commitments is the life philosophy of Sakharam which has worked effectively till now. He does not consider such a relationship a sin because he does not feel ashamed of it. He is ready to face God. He is very honest. There is no double talk. He is god fearing, god facing and god believing. Sakharam questions the validity of marriage, an institution accepted, run, recognized and initiated by religion, society and the state. It is an ‘experiment’ that fails. The success of six times has not prepared Sakharam for what he has to face during the seventh and eighth time. Sakharam is the master of the house and the woman has to obey his word like a slave. She has to satisfy his excessive physical lust and provide him with domestic comforts ungrudgingly. He wants his woman to serve day and night for him, and respect him, and satisfy him. He does not care a fig for her and throws her out, when there is left nothing womanly about her.

“Laxmi is portrayed as an ideal woman like Savitri in the mythological story” (Veena Noble Dass, “Women Characters in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar”, 12)
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 fulfill his every need and despite the fact that he even fails to understand her expectations and exploits her physically and psychologically. Laxmi is religious. She has not eaten because it is Chaturti. It is something unexpected for him. So it appears that she is different from the earlier six. The personality of Laxmi is brought into sharp contrasting focus, to the utter surprise of Sakharam. He has just returned from the press and he hears Laxmi talking in intimate terms to somebody. He becomes suspicious. He first thinks it is her madness. She is crazy, talking to herself, but he is curious. He wants to know to whom she is talking. His interest is kindled.

She has been driven out by her husband because she was childless. Here, with Sakharam the relationship is purely and totally physical. She is trapped without conscious understanding. Sakharam gets interested in her and her idiosyncrasies. Laxmi’s relationship with Sakharam brings about good changes in the latter’s stormy life. Due to the sharp contrast in their nature, they cannot satisfy each other physically or mentally. Sakharam and Laxmi are totally in contrast with each other. Therefore, their relationship cannot last for a long period. 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 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 a very cordial manner.

The second Act is about Champa and Sakharam. On Laxmi’s departure, Sakharam brings Champa, the police officer 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 in nature. All, good desirable changes in Sakharam’s life come to an end with the arrival of Champa. Sakharam repeats to Champa, what he told Laxmi earlier. A few changes are there, which mark the difference between Laxmi, the seventh woman and Champa, the eighth woman. In the case of Laxmi was ‘terrified’. So she did not talk much. Her body language was also timid and restrained. But Champa is different. Sakharam, right from her entry, is on fire. She has a magnetic physical presence for the first time in Sakharam’s house. Sakharam is on shabby ground. The confident and arrogant Sakharam of the first Act or initial phase is nowhere to be seen.

3 Sensual Beauty & Masochism

Sakharam dictates his own conditions of her stay in his family. He imposes his authority but her responses are different from those of Laxmi. He wants that she must maintain his house as home. Champa’s sensual beauty becomes a passion in the life of Sakharam. In an unconscious way, with her warmth of female passion, Champa overpowers the masculine self of Sakharam. He finds it difficult to resist the temptations of her smiles. She ridicules the false authority of Sakharam. She makes use of abusive language for her previous husband. In the play Sakharam, it is not only a question of male masochism but also female masochism. Champa’s masochism is a part of the observations of Karen Horney who defines it as, “the general principle of finding satisfaction by losing the self” (Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time, 270) In Champa’s masochism, for the first time, Sakharam becomes aware of the strength of her spirit. Sakharam remains unmindful to her suppressed rage and without caring for her violent reaction; he uses nasty words to impose his authority on her. Even he accuses her of sexual aberration. When Laxmi returns to Sakharam’s place, it becomes a triangle of Sakharam, Champa and Laxmi. It is not a trial of personal relationship only but it reflects some more complex issues regarding the survival of man in society.
Laxmi and Champa talk and confide to each other. Both have nearly similar background. They have relationship with the same man, through one had in the past and the other has it in the present. Still the understanding and appreciation of each other’s fate is evident. Champa takes the lead. There is no jealousy, anger, or hatred for each other. The significant change is that even Champa’s language changes while talking to another woman closely. It may be the influence of Laxmi. Champa uses abusive language while she is among males like Sakharam, Dawood and Fouzdar Shinde. It may be to beat the males in their own language. Or it may be an attempt to survive in a cruel world where there is a demand for sex and sensuality.

4 Dominant and Submissive characters

According to D.V. Deshpande, “In this play there are two dominant and two submissive characters. Sakharam and Champa are dominant, Shinde and Laxmi are submissive. The dominant are sadists. The remaining two are submissive; out of that Fouzdar Shinde is clearly a masochist. Laxmi also has some shades of it. The shades are strong enough to create the doubt, whether she gets pleasure out of the brutal treatment Sakharam gives her”. (D.V. Deshpande, Mala Dislei Natake, 296)

The two submissive characters end differently at the end of the play. Fouzdar Shinde’s life becomes tragic while Laxmi’s life reaches a high note of dominance, even over Sakharam when he becomes passive and she over-active and protective. Champa appears to be constructed on simple lines. “If Laxmi draws her strength from being convential, Champa draws it from being an independent, respecting individual” (Shanta Gokhale, “Tendulkar on His Terms” in Shona Choudry and Gita Raja; 2001, 17-20). Champa does not accept conventional norms and values regarding man-woman relationship. Her mother’s disregard of and carelessness to her and her husband’s brutal treatment to her have made her aggressive and violent. Outwardly, Sakharam pretends that he is the savior of women, but he is a reservoir of all that is bad in society, so far as man-woman relationship is concerned. Although he criticizes married life, he develops such a relationship, which is worse for the woman who suffers more with Sakharam than with her husband before. He brings the deserted, miserable woman to his house not to improve her but to serve his needs. He wants his woman to slave for him day and night, to respect his wishes, and to satisfy his lust. He is ready to throw her out when he finds that there is nothing womanly about her. He is, indeed, a self-centered pleasure-seeker. He is a masochist who seeks pleasure by inflicting pains and miseries on others.

5 Contractual cohabitation & Self-awareness

Sakharam Binder is a fascinating study of the relationship between man and woman. It dissects the morbid, squalid aspects of human life against a bizarre backdrop of plebeian society. The brutal objectivity and crudity with which he depicts 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 of their homes to serve his needs. 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 bed. They are also promptly dismissed from his haven on the slightest offence. Sakharam’s life receives a big jolt after the intrusion of his seventh and eighth 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 his 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, Tendulkar points out 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 infliction 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. Champa and Shinde, her former husband, once again bring out the sordid aspect of a degenerated relationship. The effeminate sex pervert Shinde, who is desperately in search of his run-away bride Champa, talks of her, like a puerile man, as if she is a cow or buffalo (the size of her buttocks and breasts etc.) And Champa, having brushed aside the bitter fact that this man is her husband, abuses her as a ‘corpse’ and a ‘ninny’. Dawood, Sakharam’s friend sums up their connubial status brilliantly, Marriage puts the woman, the bird, in cage symbolized by her husband. Even if the bird flies, the cage chases her. There is no ‘riddance’.

However, the play is set on motion. When Sakharam, Champa and Laxmi embark upon a trilateral symbiotic relationship under the initiative of Champa who confident of her physical superiority to Laxmi’s, arranges for the latter’s permanent lodging in her household. With a cool business-like attitude that is reminiscent of Sakharam’s Champa confers upon. Laxmi all the menial arduous tasks of the household and herself takes the charge of quenching Sakharam’s unabashed sexual hunger. It is curious to note, how Sakharam is gradually being usurped from his own position as a decision-maker. But while the two women somehow adjust with the new set-up, Sakharam, the veteran womanizer, now feels too fettered to indulge in his lust for Champa as freely with Laxmi around. As he secretly writhes under the agony of a growing sense of impotence, Champa, probably cured of frigidity, initiates a clandestine affair with Dawood and proffers to him a share of her animal appetite, the ‘official proprietor’ of which is Sakharam. Laxmi, on the other hand, while developing a secret sexual relationship with Shinde, Champa’s wretched husband, senses a potent enemy in the form of Champa. When Laxmi finds Champa and Dawood in an objectionable condition, her sense of morality gets immediately beefed up against Champa’s fortification. In Laxmi we find a queer amalgamation of genuine fellow-feeling for the opposite sex viz., Sakharam, Shinde and a virtual non-understanding of the same sex, the latter partially being due to her urge for survival in an unequal triangular relationship. She cannot bear the misery of Shinde and accept the betrayal committed against Sakharam by Champa. But she remains surprisingly blind to Champa’s generosity towards her and the fact that Champa herself once used to be tortured by her husband.

6 The double standards of patriarchy

The play 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 was no better than them. He made sarcastic remarks about the wife’s loyalty to their despotic husbands but he himself demands utmost obedience from his mistresses. He represents the 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 patriarch to rule his little ‘philanthropic’ polygamous monarchy.

### 7 Natural Proclivities

Vijay Tendulkar’s portrayal of man-woman relationship is charged with a sensitive yet dispassionate study of human nature. It is a kind of fierce naturalism that banishes all the artists made artificiality or gaudiness of imagination from the domain of the drama. It is his fanatic passion for the ‘real’ that makes him present life in the ‘raw’ sans without any sugar-coating. Each of Tendulkar’s plays is an enigma by itself that sensitizes the readers or the audience to all the beastly as well as redeeming aspects of man-woman relationship. He is poignantly alert to the vulgar, the pervert, and the violent to which man has shown a natural proclivity. The astonishing range of his plays, be it the victimization of the individual by a hypocritical society in the sheer bawdiness and bloodiness in Sakharam Binder.

### 8 Conclusion

Tendulkar’s plays reveal several oppositional themes through which the critique of reality and family is affected. The family in Tendulkar’s play is essentially, nuclear. In this family women are equated with the “inner” or the “private” domain, whereas the public domain is reserved for man. Family is a political and not a natural unit in that it interpolates men and woman in different subject positions. The organization of family is patriarchal in that all men are considered superior to all women though this does mean that women have no place within. Family becomes the site for the subjugation of women. The characters bring out the sham, hypocrisy and double standards for men and women. The greatest quality which Tendulkar can claim as a creative artist is his ability to simultaneously involve and distance himself from his creations. This endows his works with infinite subtlety. Two other distinctive aspects of his creative self are his keen sense of humour and his intense compassion which are sometimes difficult to detect because of their imperceptible quality. Playwrights before Tendulkar like Warerkar and Acharya did try to present a critical view of the double standards of morality for men and women but no one before had tried to debunk the myths that family provides a place of protection, comfort and security and that motherhood is the supreme justification and the noblest aspiration of a woman’s life.

### 9 References


