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INSULARITY TO VICTIMIZATION: A STUDY OF *SAKHARAM BINDER* BY
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Abstract

The present paper is about the social, economic and cultural changes that took place in the life of contemporary abandoned wives. The play *Sakharam Binder* was written in 1972. It is an account of protagonist's life who was devoid of ethics and opposed the institution of marriage, he keeps those women who were discarded by their husbands but as a mistress and not as a wife because he did not want them to settle with him permanently. The protagonist of the play lives with them in his own house for his sexual gratification and gives them food, cloth and shelter in exchange for domestic services. He acts to favour women's right to revolt against their husband's cruelty but in reality there was a hidden jealous, lusty and brutal man.

Keywords: Dehydrated society, subaltern women, muffled voices, spiritual hollowness, existential dilemma, spiritual hollowness.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) came as a rebel against established taboos of the contemporary society. He emerged as the Angry Young Man of Marathi theatre. Vijay Tendulkar came to limelight with the production of *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* in 1967. This play brought him Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Award. *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1970) is another political play that created controversy in socio-political milieu. He was honoured with Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1970 and Kalidas Samman in 1999. He was crowned Padma Bhushan Award in 1984 and Saraswati Samman in 1993. In 1977 he won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay for the movie *Manthan*. He had been influenced by western playwrights like Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and J.B. Priestley. Vijay

Tendulkar was a journalist too and worked as a sub-editor in *Navbharat*, *Maratha* and *Loksatta*. His forte was social realism. Journalism gave him the opportunity to explore and notice violence in human nature and this perspective entered in his works.

The purpose of present paper is to deal with the women victims of sexual exploitation and domestic violence done by the protagonist of the play *Sakharam Binder* (1972), who pretends to be a protector of discarded women by their husbands. The present play is an account of its hero who is not married but he lives with these discarded helpless women. Sakharam, a book-binder is the central character of the play who disgraces the woman to the position of an emotionless contract. His real

business is to do sexual violence with abandoned wives. On this too he thinks that he is doing a great work by providing shelter, food and clothes to these forsaken women. Sakharam's personal hypocrisy is exposed when his eighth mistress Champa demands equal freedom and rights and also forbids to accept impositions of Sakharam but it was bitter challenge to the manhood of Sakharam which becomes the cause of Champa's tragic end.

The entire play is divided into three acts. The first act expounds relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam. The second act depicts the relationship of Champa-Sakharam and the third act is depicting the complexity in the relationship of Laxmi-Sakharam-Champa. Sakharam is the central character of the play. Laxmi and Champa are his 7th and 8th mistress respectively. Laxmi and Champa are contrasting characters. Laxmi is portrayed as an ideal Indian woman and Champa appears gross and sensual. This is a socio-literary document representing real picture of the life situation of contemporary middle class man in urban society and the value system of which is highly self-centred.

The play starts thus- Sakharam, a book binder is the pivot of the play who had picked up a discarded and homeless woman called Laxmi in the name of providing shelter. He is going to keep her in his house as domestic servant and sex partner. Sakharam is a Brahmin by birth but carelessness and misbehaviour of his parents with him made him vicious and coarse in manners. But he is straightforward as he remarked; "I have done every kind of thing. But never a dishonest act in my whole life. I told you. I Womanize. I am drunkard and I'm ready to announce to the whole world."(Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder*, 126). Sakharam had spent his life with six women. Laxmi is the seventh one, who represents the archetypal figure of Savitri of *Mahabharata*. Flaunting his machismo, whenever Sakharam comes with a destitute woman, he tells her that he must be respected at any cost in his house; "May be I'm a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper... I'm all of that And I drink. But I must be respected in my own house. I am the master here." (126). His character is a medium to express the relationship between man and woman and also

analysis the unhealthy and unethical aspect of human life of uncivilized society's bizarre traditions. The subjects chosen by the writer is sex and violence which are the natural part of human conduct. Sakharam does not follow ethics and his character explores lust and violence. He is full of vices such as alcohol and violence. He remarked; "I am hot-headed . When I lose my temper, I beat the life out of people. I've foul mouth. There is always a bidi on my lips. That's what the whole town says about me." (125)

He is not running a charity to help victim homeless women. Sakharam is always in search of these 'destitute'; 'victim' and 'marginalized' women and these women sign an official contract with him so that they can set free themselves from violence degradation and exploitation of their husbands. Laxmi is a traditional Indian woman devoted towards her husband. Her husband was a tyrant and he threw Savitri out of the house because she was a sterile woman and she failed to become a biological mother. Laxmi and Sakharam's relationship is not based on love. Laxmi is a discarded woman and Sakharam uses her for sexual pleasure and as a supporting hand to run his house. Laxmi is scared and starved woman who is ready to accept any condition for shelter and food. Sakharam tells her that she will get food and shelter but she should remain confined inside the room; "You'll get two square meals. Two sarees to start with... if you're careless, I'll show you the door... If someone calls, you're not supposed to look up and talk."(125). Lakshmi is God fearing woman and believes in the ideology of Pati Parmeshwar. Though her husband victimised her verbally and physically, she prays for his long life. Sakharam ridicules at her praying for long life for a man who has discarded her. The woman before Laxmi was also a devoted wife as Sakharam remarked; " worship her husband's shirt... The fellow who's out to kill them- he's just a man."(127). It shows the condition of Indian traditional women who is a symbol of devotion and sacrifice. The position of women is in a sorry state because they are victim of social practices, opinionated religious beliefs and superstitions. The difficulties he had faced after leaving his home made him to not to let anyone rule over him. Thus he

becomes a victimizer. He did not believe in the marriage institution so he lives with forsaken women but for a short time. As he tells his friend Dawood; "It's good thing I'm not a husband. Things are fine the way they are. You get everything you want and yet you're not tied down. If you've had enough, if she's had enough, you can always apart."(129).

In this cruel world ant is the only friend of her. She feels lost and lonely in a world where struggle for survival is the only truth for women. Sakharam tells her all rules and regulations made by him for his house and also tells her to behave like a wife. Helpless Laxmi has to accept this because she does not have other option. He reminds Laxmi again how Indian wives are victimized by their husbands; "All alike where the one thing's concerned. Mention your husband's name and your eyes begin to brim over with tears. He kicks you out of the house, he is out to squeeze the life out of you."(133). Laxmi's character is a symbol of Indian traditional women who worship their wicked husbands. Laxmi is a suppressed woman. She conveys a sense of loneliness when she talks to ant in the kitchen; "Go away...I'm not going to give you anything today. You've become a regular pest. Get off me, please. Right away." (136). Religious as she is, she has brought devoutness to the house of atheist Sakharam by installing Ganapati's Idol. Laxmi is narrow-minded, she wants that Dawood should not attend the Ganapati Puja as he is a muslim. She remarked; "He's a muslim and we-we're Hindus"(144). This infuriates Sakharam. He flings the aarti things down and slaps her hard then lashes her with the belt. Sakharam's physical violence on Ganesh Chaturthi is the reason of bodily pain of Laxmi. Laxmi is used like a punching bag and Sakharam gives her blow upon blow over this trivial matter. He controls Laxmi's emotions also. He forces Laxmi to laugh to excite him sexually though the coals falls on Laxmi's foot and she is in terrible pain. Instead of this he ordered Laxmi; "No, you can sleep later. Get up and laugh. Laugh or I'll choke the life out of you."(141). Victim women play a central role in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. These victim female characters belongs to the middle class. They are the medium to show not only different social situations

but also the struggle between emotions and intellect of a victim. *Sakharam Binder* also having similar idea.

The character of Sakharam shows that how a gruesome crime like domestic violence is not a big deal in a male dominated society where women are considered the soft-targets often. He has no moral values or social values. His character explores victimization and violence existed in human being. Sakharam is a crude womaniser and indulges in drinking. His claimed kindness points out hypocritical middle class man. One day Laxmi complains; "It's a year now since I entered this house. I haven't had a single day's rest... You torture me the whole day, you torture me at night."(146). On which Sakharam replies; "once a woman is thrown over, nobody calls her respectable. Remember that. I at least took you in."(147). Marriage, a social institution supported by tradition was challenged here by the character of Sakharam by keeping the deserted woman. Sakharam's character criticizes the institution of marriage where women are mere slaves to their male owners during post-colonial India in a patriarchal society. Laxmi's complain makes Sakharam mad. He decides to throw Laxmi out of his house. He drags Laxmi and pushes her out. When Dawood tells Sakharam to let her in, Sakharam remarks; "I'll live alone. And if you have it in you, you can always bring in women by the dozen. It's not as if she's got a special made of gold while every other woman's is just a brass one."(150). Laxmi comes in behind Dawood and goes to the kitchen. On that night somehow Sakharam controls himself and goes to Laxmi. He remarks; "We're not married. You can go your way. I can go mine. I'll buy your ticket. I'll give you a *saree* and *choli*. Don't want you to say later that I didn't treat you well."(151). This very remark shows victimization and hypocrisy of Sakharam. He pretends to be a saviour of discarded Laxmi but in reality he is a verbal and emotional abuser. His philosophy of life is based on principle of pleasure. All he needs is sexual pleasure and a helping hand in his domestic affairs. He was a visitor of brothels but it was costly and risky too so he decided to live with these destitute women. Sakharam and Laxmi lived in the same house without marriage. Indulekha Burmon rightly observes; ""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" (Burmon, *Man- Woman Relationship in the Sakharam Binder*, 167). Laxmi's concern for food, security and shelter compels her to live with Sakharam after his husband discarded her but here too she faces physical violence over trivial matters. She was tormented by her husband earlier and now she is victimized by Sakharam. Throughout the world women are the victims of violence ending up having a wide list of health problems.

Sakharam's exigencies of having sex with new woman have a game plan i.e. verbal and physical abuse. He had spent almost a year with Laxmi in this house. V.S. Naipaul remarks about him; "Hinduism in him has been reduced to believe in honesty and the rejection of all shaming actions." (Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 50). Sakharam hears that a police Faujdar had decided to leave his wife so he starts emotional and physical violence in order to get a new woman and finally throws Laxmi out of his house by giving her a ticket and a saree at the end of first act. The amount of victimised women in India is little high. Lakshmi is victim of sexual assault, molestation and marital abuse.

The second act starts with the advent of Sakharam's eighth mistress Champa. She leaved her husband Faujdar Shinde who tormented her. She is the antithesis of Laxmi. She is not religious and powerless like Laxmi. She is confident courageous and walks on her alcoholic husband. She rejects the violence perpetrated upon her by leaving her husband and joins Sakharam. She take tobacco and liquor. Laxmi's efforts turned Sakharam into a religious person but Champa makes him a drunkard. Champa asks Sakharam to make a tea for her on the very first day. It is shocking for a man like Sakharam. He replies; " you'll have to make the food yourself. That's a woman's job." (Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder*, 161). This very remark exposes cultural stereotypes of a middle class man with bloated egos giving the Indian male primacy at home. Champa has aggressive masculine behaviour. Sakharam and Dawood both are infatuated with her body. Her physical beauty makes them babbling fools and now

they are ready to do anything by keeping their male ego aside. Sakharam asks Dawood; "You think you could make tea?" (158). On which Dawood replied; " of course, why not? For a peach like this, anything." (158).

Sakharam is feeling anxious and jealous when he finds Champa talking to Dawood. Jealousy makes Sakharam forbid his friend Dawood from entering his home again. He also orders Champa; " I won't allow to much talking to strangers. It's a very important point." (160). Sakharam can not live alone in his house without a woman. After Laxmi he brings another woman called Champa for the fulfilment of his sexual gratification. Champa is alluring, youthful and horribly vulgar. After years of violence, degradation, depression and terrible suffering she decides to desert her husband. She remarked; "He bought 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." (167). In the search for Champa her husband becomes alcoholic and later dismissed from his job also. He finds her in the house of Sakharam. Champa was victimized by her husband and that victimization made her victimizer. She hits him violently with the chappal, drags him to the door and flings him out like a bag full of potatoes. Dawood and Sakharam seek to prevent her. They become aware of the power in her. she does not surrender to Sakharam's physical needs and it was shocking for him but soon Champa realises that she must have to fulfil sexual desire of Sakharam in exchange of roof over her head. It shows how a woman is not more than a commodity. She can be bought, victimised, used and threw away in the end. Though Champa is free and liberal in nature but also is victim of exploitation, suppression and violence. Her marriage with Shinde is not a happy one. Harsh treatment of her husband makes her insensible and emotionless. Her character is showing 'nothingness' in the life of victim abandoned wives. Arundhati Banerjee points out; "Sakharam who does not believe in the Institution of marriage and arranges contractual cohabitation based on convenience... shows tendencies of being religious and domesticated when in contact with Lakshmi. In his association with Champa he is transformed into a sensual, drunkard with thoughts

only of sexual enjoyment." (Banerjee, "Introduction", *Five Plays of Vijay Tendulkar*, xiv-xv). Sakharam is also a controlling man who drinks and beats his mistress Champa. Shinde and Sakharam had abused and molested her. She became an alcoholic to numb the sensations of pain. Champa is also a victim of domestic abuse, physical abuse, economic abuse and emotional abuse like other seven women kept and thrown by Sakharam. In an interview Vijay Tendulkar said; " 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". The final act starts with the conversation of Laxmi and Champa. Laxmi went to stay with her nephew because she was unable to bear violence of Sakharam. But she comes back as her nephew throws her out of his house. She narrates; "My nephew threw me out. His wife charged me with stealing. Would I steal? They were going to hand me over to the police. So I came here. The only place left for me."(Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder*, 176). Sakharam sees her and stiffens. He begins to rain blows and kicks on Laxmi viciously. Had Champa not intervened, Laxmi might have been killed by Sakharam. She tells Laxmi; "My head and my body, just a bundle of pains and aches. But your Sakharam, he really takes his money's worth out of a woman."(181). Champa becomes prey in the web of Sakharam. She faced mistreatment throughout her life so she becomes rough and stone hearted. She appears drunk on Dassera which shows that she does not follow ethics and religion. Champa is stone hearted but there is no jealousy or hatred for Laxmi in the heart of Champa. She confidently remarked; " I am on my own ..if they're there, well, they're there for all they're worth. If not, I'm all by myself and all alone that's the way it is."(181). Sakharam strongly objects over Laxmi's arrival but Champa protects her from Sakharam and also warns Laxmi to not to web any intrigue against her; "As long as you don't push me out! If you try to do that I can turn nasty. I might as well warn you."(181).

Champa finds human love in Dawood. She is suffering from alienation of the mind and the body because of victimization of Sakharam and Shinde both. She has walked on her husband and Sakharam

too. Sakharam's brutality is in extreme when Laxmi discloses the illicit relationship of Champa and Dawood. He beats Laxmi black and blue because he thinks that Laxmi is lying to create a gulf between him and Champa. Laxmi groans in pain and remarks; "It's true— she's unfaithful to you— Yes— with Dawood. She goes to him— every afternoon— when you're at the Press. I have seen them with my own eyes." (196). It is a turning point in the life of Sakharam. Dawood is friend of Sakharam. He proved to be a deceitful character according to Sakharam. He cheats Sakharam by establishing an illicit relationship with Sakharam's eighth mistress Champa. This affair makes Sakharam to loose his temper. He reduces his tension by taking the life of Champa. He strangles Champa and mutters faintly; "Murdered- I've murdered her- murder- I've murdered."(196). It is satirical that Laxmi who appears to be a religious and innocent woman, becomes the reason of the murder of Champa. When Sakharam throttles Champa, he repents but Laxmi gives him moral support; "Hush! Don't shout. Not a word. (continuous staring at lifeless Champa.) Anyway she 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. I'll stay with you. I'll look after you. I'll do what you say." (196). Laxmi who considers her husband as God and worships him, pours the poison of jealousy in the ears of Sakharam. Her world is limited having no ambition in her life but for the sake of her security she indirectly compels Sakharam to murder Champa. Champa was a victim of her husband's violence and now she is killed by a womanizer Sakharam, to whom she has come for shelter. Laxmi and Champa both are sufferers and victims of patriarchal society. They face physical and emotional torture of brutal and stone hearted Sakharam.

This paper describes the panoramic picture of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence done by Sakharam which are still true as the day the play was written. Sakharam was treated negatively in his childhood by his parents which causes him to behave rebelliously. He becomes cruel and to overcome his powerlessness he persecutes and victimizes the marginalized women. Lakshmi and Champa are striving hard for their own existence in

the filthy atmosphere of patriarchal society. Sakharam's character stands for male domination that transforms into maltreatment of women. His house is a world where women are only to serve and please man. Champa's relations with Sakharam's friend Dawood makes Sakharam a dazed creature and he strangles Champa. The play not only exposes the female victims of sex and violence in middle class society but also pinpoints the complexity of man-woman relationship, male's hypocrisy, manipulation, victimization and brutality. Men and women both are foundation of a society but many questions related to the issues of women are still unanswered. Women are still not safe in spite of reforms in our laws. They are neither safe outside nor at home. Their life is endangered due to domestic abuse and sexual violence leading them to depression. They should learn self-defence. To ensure their safety entire population should be properly educated.

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