

Man's Struggle for Private and Public Life in Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*

Dr.Sandhya Katumala

Assistant Professor (Adhoc)

Dept.of Humanities and Social Sciences

J. N.T.U.A. College of Engineering Pulivendula (A)

Pulivendula-516390

YSR (Dist) A.P., India.

Andhra Pradesh.

Abstract:

The cultural alienation of Indian writers in English literature is most often referred as swing towards west, east-west encounter or cross-cultural conflict. As a recurring theme, many protagonists face cross cultural conflict in the beginning phase of Indian writing in English. These protagonists have passion for Western culture and sentiments for native culture. In course of aligning between these two, some have become hypocrites and some advocated the truth of their experiences. The impact of globalization has not only transformed the modern world to be interdependent but also created a great clash between two cultures especially in countries like India. Indians are attracted by the uncontrolled passion for western life style, trends, entertainment and lucrative employment, while hesitant to leave Indian ethos, pathos and traditions. The dilemma takes place at psychological level in the middle and upper middle class of the modern Indians. In *Sakharam Binder* (1977), the clash is not between two countries, but two women who symbolically represent the traditional Indian culture and percolating Western culture. Sakharam as a man from middle class is unable to adjust with Laxmi and fails to manage Champa. The two worlds stand for the conflict between religion and rationality, tradition and modernity, spirituality and materialism, superstitions and scientific outlook, tyranny and democracy and instinct and institution. While holding the fact that the world has become a global village and no culture or society is pure or insular today, the paper presents how the play *Sakharam Binder*, can be understood symbolically the clash between deep-rooted values of Indian culture and the emerging Western culture respectively.

Keywords: cultural alienation. middle class, symbolical representation, traditional culture, emerging culture, religion and rationality, tradition and modernity, spirituality and materialism, superstitions and scientific outlook, instinct and institution

Disintegration of family and broken marital relationships are the topics of the media and problems of the Indian courts today. This phenomenon is rampant now a days. The research attributes this to the impact of emerging culture borrowed from the West, transmitted from world media. No generation of India experience the cultural upheavals as present one does. The globalization force men and women of the middle class into diverse experiences in India. As middle-class is an important historical and sociological category in modern India, the way it is attracted towards the emerging culture is due to the very original nature of humanity that inclines towards freedom and individuality. This leads to the immediate and unknowing reaction against suppressive local cultural norms of India. Indians are unknowingly attracted towards the Western life style, clothing, music, food, entertainment, language, self-help literature and above all dollars. It is observed that many are attracted to the West because of its respect for individual rights and freedoms. Its belief in human equality. Its standards for education and medical care.

Girish Karnad had confessed that he had still not overcome the jealousy he felt when he first read *Sakharam Binder*, singling it out as the greatest Indian play in the last thousand years. (Ramnarayan,2000:2) Certainly, As the play *Sakharam Binder* typically brings out the man and woman relationships of the lower middle-class society and its violence, it is a genuine stench from the abyss, whether that abyss means lower middle-class hell or the economic and sexual aggression inherent in our inequitable and repressive society. The playwright is very successful in depicting the broken relationships of man and woman as not only a failure of their subjective personality but also a result of economically unequalled repressive objective society in modern society. The three characters Sakharam, Laxmi and Champa are the examples for three typical personalities in Indian modern society.

Sakharam a brahmin born, ill-treated and deserted by his parents becomes an ardent avenger of the system. After excommunicated from the family, now he works in a binding shop and enjoys his own world of choice. He catches single woman who also become prey by the marital system and keeps them as concubines and uses and abuses them until he gets satisfied. This kind of Sakharam's typical belief that everything is relative and there is no absolute reality represents 'post modernistic' qualities in him. He doesn't believe in the institution of marriage and he is a bitter critic of the institution of marriage and attacks 'husbands' while pitying the 'wives'. He is a totally hedonistic character who wants to enjoy life to the maximum extent possible. He drinks heavily, has no sense of guilt and admits to all his vices. "Hinduism in him" V.S. Naipaul observes — "has been reduced to belief in honesty and a rejection of all shaming action"(1980:50).

Social class as a cultural phenomenon moulds middle class values and life styles. There is a linking between social structure and psychology. Social class has deep impact on child rearing. The cognitive environment concept combines elements of both ecological and ideological conceptions of culture in those family living situations and resources as well as

parents' values and beliefs come into play. One measure of this environmental influence is how children are included in parents' conversations at the dinner table, and what they talk about. Middle class families perform more parental tutoring than working class families. Culture capital is a store of knowledge, skills, and experiences that children acquire mainly outside of school especially through family. Parents, consciously and unconsciously, raise their children to be like themselves.

The play starts with the advent of Laxmi who is caught by Sakharam. Laxmi is also expelled by her husband for lacking children. She joins with Sakharam and leads a kind of slavery life in house. Laxmi has an archetypal identity in the play. She is a modern Hindu woman, who struggles to establish the norms of the society at the cost of her self-respect. It might seem strange that Laxmi, deserted by her husband and living as a kept woman with another man, is suggested to be the type of Savitri, but a careful examination of Laxmi's attitude towards Sakharam proves the validity of this suggestion. For Laxmi, Sakharam is husband. When Laxmi's legal husband deliberately snaps her wedding necklace, he ceases to be her husband in the spirit of matrimony. Her '*de facto*' husband, as far as she is concerned, is Sakharam, who gives her shelter.

But when Sakharam kicks Laxmi out of the house and brings Champa, from Laxmi's point-of-view Champa is immoral, because she has deserted her husband. Nobody could accuse Laxmi of having deserted her husband. This simplistic yet clear-cut distinction makes Laxmi feel very righteous and lets her consider herself as chaste and Champa a tramp. Sakharam's emasculation under Champa's rule is both literal and metaphorical. By the time he strangles Champa to death when Laxmi reveals to him her infidelity, his degradation has become complete. It is the stage of his spiritual death, the death of his identity as an independent, proud, and self-respecting individual. After he kills Champa, Sakharam is close to death even in a literal sense, for now his life is forfeit to the law. If his crime is discovered, he will be subject to capital punishment. In this situation of mortal danger to Sakharam, it is Laxmi who readily wittily hits upon a plan to save him.

This kind of attitude of Laxmi at this juncture, towards Sakharam reminds us a typical Hindu woman, who keenly takes the role of a faithful wife according to Manu. However, it is to be understood that Tendulkar in the character of Laxmi has portrayed a woman belonging to lower middle class and living the life of a prostitute as one who is still capable of having morals and is capable of protecting herself as well as her lover. In the last act, before Laxmi picks up the hoe to start digging murdered Champa's grave, while Sakharam stands rooted to the spot, too horrified by his own act to move, she touches both symbols from which she draws her strength—her *mangalasutra* and photograph of her god. She also fortifies herself with a litany of her own good deeds against all the evil deeds that Champa has been guilty of. She is

very clear in her mind about Champa's wickedness though it was she who gave her shelter in her hour of need.

Sakharam's desire for Champa is archetypal. Passion for the West is both cultural and ideological. Sakharam is knowingly attracted towards Champa as she has something charming with her. Audience have sympathy on Champa due to her realistic expression for life. It is observed that many are attracted to the West because of its respect for individual rights and freedoms. Its belief in human equality. Its standards for education and medical care. Its justice that puts law above rulers. Its opportunities for economic progress. Its respect for free press. Its track record for scientific and technological advance.

Champa is an antithesis of Laxmi. She leaves her husband as she can no longer bear the sadistic torture of Shinde, while Laxmi is left by her husband for not bearing children. Champa never bothers about tradition. She is confident and courageous. Her mother sells liquor and tobacco. Fouzdar Shinde comes to the shop on a raid and sees Champa. He takes her away from her mother even before she becomes a woman. The sadistic treatment of her husband makes her confident and courageous, but alienated and frigid. After beating Shinde, who comes to take her back, she says to Sakharam about the sadistic nature of her husband:

CHAMPA 'No, I don't have heart. He chewed it up raw long ago. [Pulls herself free.] He bought me from my mother even before I became a woman. He married me when I didn't even know what marriage meant. He'd tortured me at night. He branded me, and stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things. I ran away. He brought me back and stuffed chilly powder into that god-awful place, where it hurts the most. That bloody pimp! What's left of my heart now? He tore lumps out of it, he did.'" [167]

The torture Champa faces in Shinde's hands brings many changes in her. She is no more follower of the social and familial bonds. In spite of her moral decline, she is still the least corrupt and the best character in the play, even though she labels herself as corrupt. The reason to become like so is very clear. She loses her trust in marriage, freedom, and even the integrity of the male. She gets disillusioned because there is violence, insecurity and total decline in familial bondage that impose by patriarchy. But still something made Champa a human. Not long back, Sakharam promised her shelter and security. But now he becomes a perpetrator. He ill treats her in the name of familial duties. Sakharam terrorizes her into submission. He doesn't operate on truth because Laxmi has already made him to believe anything is possible in the house. She made herself vulnerable. Sakharam doesn't build the family culture not on truth, but on myths and traditions Laxmi followed.

Champa tells Laxmi the reality of life: “They don’t come and live your hell for you – those gods and Brahmins.”[180]. Champa is considered ‘a real woman’ as she is ‘tough’ and ‘ready to fight.’ She ridicules the rules imposed by Sakharam: “Rule! Is this a school or a court or something?”[161]. But her rebellion is only sexual. We rarely see her venturing into the outside world where there are even other kinds of violence against women in our country and other ways of fighting them those women of Champa’s class adopt. The white in Champa’s grey-black portrait comes the readiness with which she offers Laxmi shelter. She wins sympathy by what her earlier life with her husband. Though she looks seductive, she is the one who has suffered most on account of her voluptuous body while the men have sought their selfish pleasures from it.

Champa likes Dawood for his human nature and she feels enamoured with him. Finally, she enjoys sex with Dawood when Sakharam becomes impotent. She finds human love more in Dawood than in Sakharam. She is honest in what she does. Unlike Laxmi, she prefers human goodness to human tradition and unlike Sakharam; she breaks the tradition in order to be human and humane. But she can’t forgive her husband because he has torn her heart. Shinde and Sakharam have tormented her. She takes tobacco and liquor to numb the sensations of pain in her body. However, she does not suffer from powerlessness as Sakharam and Laxmi do. It is through Laxmi and Champa that Tendulkar shows how deep-rooted women’s exploitation in society is. Laxmi is hegemonically suppressed, used and abused. But there is no ‘reversal’ in her realization still resumes continuing in the same condition with more fervor. But Champa is different. It is interesting whether Tendulkar shows that revolt or retaliation is possible when suffering is inevitable. For here is a woman who is unconventional and strong enough to have left her husband. Here is a woman who can nonplus Sakharam by not behaving like a destitute dependent. Here is a woman who will not let a man use her body simply because he is her husband or her patron. However, in the ultimate analysis, she must still submit to Sakharam without exercising her ‘natural’ rights.

Laxmi has a lot of experience in life. But she suppresses them under her religious and traditional values. So she puts her life and freedom aside and focuses on mere leading a mechanical life. This stuns the audience and questions their own intellectuality and heritage. Those traditions do not create good family system that can honour woman like Laxmi and Champa. Actually Laxmi suppresses the voice of soul and mind because as a traditional wife she believes in the truth of silence. She starts experiencing life in a non-rational, and religious, say by whirling until she falls without a thought. Contrastingly, Champa is transformed, because she moves away by the voice of mind. That’s why she educates even Laxmi because she wants her to be saved from Sakharam’s clutches. Religions that promote myths and traditions consider knowledge and reality to be illusion.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent victim and up holder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change

and is no longer presented as a passive character. Unlike other writers in Indian writing, emergence of new women characters in Tendulkar plays do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will but defy patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity not because they are educated but they are forced by the circumstances. They do not assert their individuality and aspire self reliance not through education but by stark realities of life. As an extremely explosive subject matter the controversy revolved around Sakharam's lasciviousness, his women, and his apparently vulgar language.

The success of Sakharam Binder lies in the playwright's skill in characterization. Sakharam, Laxmi and Champa are neither characters nor schematic types. All these are basically images of astonishing creativity. Laxmi is a superlative image of darkness and death. She is one of the champion life haters in drama. There is a rich interplay of ambiguity about her. She wins the sympathy of certain critics like Veena Noble Dass who compares her to Savitri (Veena Dass, 1988:104). Champa is not a feminist as expected by Renuka and does not champion the cause of women (1997:64). She is not that enlightened. Through her bitter experiences, she learns to protect herself. She succeeds in protecting herself and protesting against the male chauvinism of Sakharam. Geetha Kumar identifies many similarities between Champa and Sakharam and calls her 'a female Sakharam' (1998:90). However, Champa has a power for life, full of the rich sap. She is lewd but not lewd enough to engage in loveless sex. The disintegration and death of Champa is one of the most moving spectacles in modern drama

The contractual arrangement between him and the woman he keeps represents a replica of the modern arrangements in marriage. Sakharam is a typical middle class Indian modern man who oscillates between Indian women and western. He expects Indian woman as wife and western woman as girl friend. Laxmi's calling him her husband and her subsequent elevation of him into a 'god' demonstrates the patterns of thinking instilled in women by the patriarchal tradition. Laxmi's blind belief in an oppressive system appears even more stifling than Champa's grass vulgarity is looking down foreign culture as inferior and ours superior. What shocks the audience is not the fate of Laxmi, Champa and Sakharam but the ugly reality of moral deprivation and corruption that seeps within the soul in the institution of marriage as it exists in the society today

Sakharam's struggle between two different women is not new to a believer of Indian mythologies. Krishna's entanglement between Radha and Rukmini, Siva's dilemma between Ganga and Parvathi and Srinivasa's oscillation between Bhudevi and Sridevi remind the audience of an unsolved struggle of polygamy. However Sakharam's case is entirely different. The triangle love relationship is also seen, as an archetype in English as well as world literature. Shakespeare also served quiet amount of entertainment to his audience on the theme. Sakharam, Champa and Lakshmi as trio of the play serve two major themes to the man-woman relationships in the society. Firstly Sakharam's oscillation between two women is microcosmic presentation of two worlds by a middle class men and woman in India. In 1970's,

while India was going through the Nehruian socialism, the urbanization created middle class in the society. The middle class has always a struggle between two worlds and two cultures. Western culture advocates individualism and freedom which result fragile familial relationships.

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