Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*: An Analysis of Masochist Casanova

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Abstract:
Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder is a true depiction of the middle class male who runs his life as Masochist Casanova. In spite of all his attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the institution of marriage he could not uphold the elevating picture of man-woman relationship replete with tender affection and moral bonding. On the contrary he demeans and disgraces the woman to the label of pleasure- object which is to be thrown out when no ember of pleasure is left in it. He debases the man-woman relationship to the position of an emotionless contract such as a "link based on need: the need ended, the link snapped". Apparently he seems to approbate woman's right of revolt against male cruelties but in the deep core of his heart there is hidden a brutal man. Sakharam is neither magnanimous nor a protector but a befuddled and cunning guy whose real business is to tangle and exploit the deserted and miserable women just for sexual pleasure. His sexual itch justifies all kind of woman's physical and mental exploitations. The extent of his hypocrisy is crystal clear when he denies the sanctity of marriage and criticizes husbands but only to befool and snare the deserted woman to satisfy his sexual itch.

Keywords: Masochist, Casanova, Hypocrisy, Pleasure, Marriage, Sexual, itch.

Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* is a true depiction of the middle class male who runs his life as Masochist Casanova. He is a Brahmin by birth but because of the wretched situation created by the cruelty and maltreatment of his parents in his childhood he became quite uncouth, vicious and coarse in manners but very straightforward in his approach as reflected in his statement: " 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. Sure... with my hand on my heart"(FP126). He considers himself as: ther you are a Brahmin and yet you've a Brahminn's ways! And me ! born in Brahmin family, but I'm a Mahar, a dirty scavenger. I call that bloody joke!"(FP127). He left his house when he was just a young boy of eleven years. He grew up like a cactus in the open. After leaving the father's house he would not let anyone to rule over him or accept as a boss over him. He is the only master of himself. He got a job in printing press as a binder. This is the background development of his personality which is responsible for what he is. About himself he says " This Sakharam Binder –he's a terror... he's not scared of God or of God's father"(FP 126). He does not believe in the institution of marriage and lives with several cast-off women but not for a long time. The fourteen years of his life were spent with six women. And the play starts when he commences his journey with Laxmi, the seventh one who is very typical Indian woman . He is sarcastically honest in his remarks when he observes Laxmi's respect for God "we're not

saints. We're men. I tell you, worship and prayer can't satisfy the itch. If you want a thing, well you've got to have it: what is there to hide? And from whom (FP 127)?

It is a stark reality of Vijay Tendulkar that he chose those characters to fulfil his thematic purpose who are mostly the dregs, debauched and marginal people of society for whom the established social and cultural norms and values have no place in their lives. Tendulkar was severely criticised for such a practise of choosing characters who have no respect for moral values. Tendulkar very honestly answers to his criticism in these words "the characters I write about reflect my interest Besides, it is one thing to be assured of your security and stage a fight against the accepted norms and value; and another to fight for the same when cornered altogether. It is the latter that catches my eyes."[1] Perhaps this is the reason that he selected frankly a character like Sakharam Binder who is the protagonist in his famous play *Sakharam Binder*. Vijay Tendulkar is such a writer who does not believe in imaginary characters or conditions. He is a real man with utterly real approach to life which is definitely full of pain and difficulties for people in general. Once he said "I have not written about hypothetical pain or created a an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from middle class family and 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".[2]

Sakharam may be very rude, jealous and lusty but he is very candid in his thoughts which make a very striking point of his character as Ashok Desai points out "his rough idioms seems the right vehicle for the values he has evolved for himself. He tries to work out independent philosophy of life, with no sense of false obligation".[3] He believes to live a very natural life without any restrictions in the name of society or culture or so called values and taboos. He does not hesitate to drink heavily and honestly admits all his vices without any sense of shame. He knows very well that man is not perfect so why should he adopt hypocritical approach to life. Life for every individual his own personal choice and is to be lived as he likes. V.S. Naipaul 's remark about him is quite relevant as he says " Hinduism in him has been reduced to a belief in honesty and a rejection of all shaming action".[4] Thus the character of Sakharam is the consequence of the angst and stress of middle class and socio-individual clash. The spiteful aspect of his behaviour is a kind of a psychological reaction, to say more honestly a kind of retaliation against the festered structure of society which does not permit to live as per desires. In the words of Indulekha Burmon " Sakharam Binder is a fascinating study of of the relationship between man and woman. It dissects the morbid, squalid aspects of human life against a bizarre backdrop of Plebeian society".[5] We find a close affinity between Tendulkar's character Sakharam and Anantha Murthy's character of Naranappa in *Samskara*. Like Sakharam he also derides all socio-cultural taboos, loves the intoxication of wine, has very intimate muslim friends and lives with low caste woman leaving his lawfully wedded Brahmin wife. Vijay Tapas the critic of Tendulkar's later play *Kanyadaan* is of the view that " but this kind of life is lived by microscopic minority".[6] We may come across such a man living a dual life divided between the love of wife at home and devotion to concubine when out of home. There are also many people who could not marry the woman they loved and liked yet they lived an ideal life. There are also some people who remain unmarried throughout their life having illicit sexual relationship. But the case of Sakharam is the rare of rarest who is unmarried and likes to live with forsaken woman. He is cynical to the institution of marriage when he mocks the 'husbands' in the following

words:“I tell you Miyan, those fellows – that can’t father a brat and they take it all out on their wives. Beat her, kick her every single minute of the day. They’re an impotent lot! For them woman’s just dirt, that’s all”...It’s a 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” (FP 129). He further criticizes the role of husband: “he’s a proper swine! He ties her down; he doesn’t get tied down himself! He flits around again- a free bird! Now look! I’m being quite frank. As far as I am concerned, I don’t believe in double talk. What have I to gain from that” (FP 130).He does not stay behind in deriding the pitiful devotion of ‘wives’ and says: “What’s wrong? Oh, all right. I won’t ask you. The whole lot of you! All alike where this 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. But he’s your God. You ought to worship a god like that with shoes and slippers! He should be whipped in public”(FP 133).It for this reason that Sakharam promises reasonable freedom and good conduct to every deserted woman he brings to his house:“And you’re free to take all that you’ve given here. I mean clothes, chappals, bangle. Oh, everything good and proper, where Sakharam Binder is concerned” (FP135). But this is only the one side of his personality where he wants to prove himself different from their previous husbands. But the fact is that he behaves as a ruler who aspects from his woman to receive what he gives without any complaint, follow the rules what he frames for them. He clearly explains Laxmi the meaning of freedom to be shared and rules to be followed in his house: “If someone calls, you aren’t supposed to look up and talk. If it’s a stranger, you’ll have to cover your head and answer him briefly. That’s all. And if I’m not around, don’t admit anyone into the house. Maybe I’m a rascal, a womanizer, pauper. I am all that. And I drink. but I must be respected in my own house. I am the master here...in this house, what I say, goes. Understand? the others must obey, that’s all” (FP 126).

In the second Act he strictly warns Champa too: “I like everything in order here. Won’t put up with slipshod ways. If you are careless, I’ll show you the door. Don’t blame me then, you understand? I’m the master here”(FP155). Thus Sakharam rejects the established norms and values and utterly criticizes the institution of marriage but could liberate himself from their conventional stamp. Sakharam is not just a character but a representative of Tendulkar himself because he has been blamed of restricting the freedom and potential of her wife Meena just to fulfil his needs and bring up his children. In an interview Meena says “ even when I used to be a working woman, soon after our marriage, he was very possessive and cautious... he used to keep an eye on who I spoke with, moved about with... it is now, with age, that he has become more understanding”.[7] Hence, Sakharam may be observed as the imitation of his own creator Tendulkar who according to Nitin Samant is “confused and has no scientific method of analysis”.[8] Sakharam utters various places that he does not believe in the role and status of so called husband which is the ultimate outcome of the institution of marriage, rather he wants to be friend to a woman. Presenting himself as a liberator He says “ it’s a good thing I’m not a husband”(FP129). He repeats “ he’s no husband to forget common decency”(FP135). Not only this, even he also aspects his woman to come closer to him “not like a wife” but on the other hand this great redeemer wishes that the woman who lives with him “will have to be a wife to me”(FP67) the same idea he repeats when he says to Champa: I don’t mean she died! I packed her off. I only keep a woman as long as I need her. She has to carry out all the duties of a wife” (FP159). Thus he pretends to be a redeemer but on the

contrary he proves himself to be a cruel masochist Casanova who knows nothing good regarding man-woman relationship in society. Two woman characters Laxmi and Champa are very opposite in nature but unavoidable for the thematic development of the play. Tendulkar was a subterranean observer and adroit master of introducing a variety of woman characters with multiple traits as Shanta Gokhle remarks "from the unbelievably gullible to the clever, from the malleable to the stubborn, from the conservative to the rebellious, from the self-sacrificing to the grasping".[9]

In spite of all his attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the institution of marriage he could not uphold the elevating picture of man-woman relationship replete with tender affection and moral bonding. On the contrary he demeans and disgraces the woman to the label of pleasure- object which is to thrown out when no ember of pleasure is left in it. He debases the man-woman relationship to the position of an emotionless contract such as a "link based on need: the need ended, the link snapped". Sakharam thinks that he has done a grand munificence by providing shelter, food and clothes to helpless and hapless women deserted by their husbands and in exchange he wants their slavery to his masochist urges. Thus his relation with woman crosses all the limits of brutality leaving him a complete fiend. His cynicism eclipses every core of his humanity under the credence of duplicitous social mores to such an extent that converts him into a deformed person. Consequently, all that is laudable in him seems to be distorted and depraved. Apparently he seems to approbate woman's right of revolt against male cruelties but in the deep core of his heart there is hidden a brutal man who feels that the inflicted wives should have proper regard for their husbands despite their cruelties which is obvious in such remarks: "I am the master here...in this house, what I say, goes. Understand? The others must obey, that's all"(FP126), and in the second Act he again gives the evidence of a hidden masochist Casanova: "everything different here. I'm hot-headed. When I lose my temper, I beat life out of people. I've a foul mouth... If you are careless, I'll show you the door... I'm the master here. I don't care if outside they treat me like a dirt"(FP155). But this masochist Casanova is very shrewd who knows how to snare the deserted women in the net of his deceitful sympathy. He pretends his rage for their previous husbands responsible for their miserable conditions showing himself as a great redeemer. But his reality is far and far away from this as beautifully pointed out by Arundhati Banerjee in Introduction to *five Plays* "Tendulkar weaves a matrix of intricate interrelationship between his characters. 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 Laxmi. In his association with Champa he is transformed into a sensuous, lewd drunkard with thoughts only of sexual enjoyment. The presence of Laxmi and Champa at the same time has a strange effect on sakharam as if the two different strands in his character come into direct confrontation, creating a psychological turmoil in him".[10]

Thus Sakharam is neither magnanimous nor a protector but a befuddled and cunning guy whose real business is to tangle and exploit the deserted and miserable women just for sexual pleasure. His sexual itch justifies all kind of woman's physical and mental exploitations. The extent of his hypocrisy is crystal clear when he denies the sanctity of marriage and criticizes husbands but only to befool and snare the deserted woman to satisfy his sexual itch. His mentality and cruelties against woman are worse than their previous husbands yet he presents himself as a great rescuer. He condemns marriage not for its stupidity and follies but to fulfil his sexual urge through man-woman

relationship without bearing the responsibility of married life. His insincerity and double standards are fully manifested in his act of assassinating Champa just because "she is tough and ready to fight".[11] Just because she is not ready to accept any imposition of Sakharam and just because her sexual spark is no way less than Sakharam. Champa represents that class of woman in India who demands equal freedom for woman like man. It was bitter challenge to the manhood of Sakharam which becomes the cause of Champa's tragic death. Thus Vijay tendulkar was the true champion in the art of exposing the personal hypocrisy deeply rooted in socio-cultural traditions in sexual relationship in Indian society.

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Abbreviation:

FP- *Five Plays*, Vijay Tenduklkar, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.