

SAKHARAM BINDER: A PORTRAYAL OF ANIMAL IN MAN

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Abstract:

The present paper is a systematic study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* which portrays a stunning exposure of animal in man through shading ample light on the animalistic qualities like violence, brutality, ferocity and cruelty ingrained in men to which women become the victims in the conventional society. *Sakharam Binder* reveals a highly pathetic and heart moving scenario of the abandoned women like Laxmi and Champa exploring the terrible and harsh reality of their complex relationships with the womanizer, Sakharam, who shelters them at his home to satisfy his domestic needs and sexual itch. The play realistically presents a morbid picture that how most of the women are rendered voiceless and became victims of the animality of their male companion in the society. It portrays savagery, brutality and violence lurking as animal in man.

Keywords: violence, animalism, brutality, savagery, cruelty, ferocity, callousness and misconduct

Introduction:

Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* portrays a stunning exposure of animal in man through shading ample light on the animalistic qualities like violence, brutality, ferocity and cruelty ingrained in men to which women become the victims in the conventional society. Tendulkar strongly believed that man is primarily a part of the animal world, so the behavioural patterns of his plays' characters are subjugated assertively by their inner tendency of savagery and brutality which result to their inflicting pain, torture, and violence on the second sex. In an interview, while answering Makarand Sathe's question on human violence, Tendulkar himself says,

“...man is a part of the animal world. Despite his stranger brain, he is no different from animals and birds. Whatever I read and see today convinces me that we have the basic instincts of animals. Culture and other factor affect us, but only superficially. At critical moments, in critical situations, the top layer of culture peels off and ... human beings turn into animals...”

In the play, a book binder, Sakharam who is a Brahmin by caste but lives like an animal rejecting all the outdated social codes, rituals and marriage systems and follows his own ideology. This self proclaimed womaniser, Sakharam searches helpless and forsaken women, whom he brings home, gives them food, shelter and clothes and then brutally tortures them to satisfy his carnal desire and domestic needs. In his contractual cohabitation or live-in-relationship with woman, if a woman fails to keep him happy for long or there is no spark left in her, he discards her and brings another woman who can live with him as if his married wife. The play begins when he has left the sixth woman and brings the seventh woman, Laxmi, a typical Indian woman to his home. While entering the house, Laxmi trembles with fright because of his wild uproar at the children who are gaping at the fence of his house. In fear she clutches at the bundle held close to her bosom and cowers near the wall. He presents a list of commands and permits no possibilities of intervention. He tells her the rules of living at his home and expects her to behave as an obedient wife. He says,

“...I'm the master here . . . a house must be a home, you understand?” (125)

Laxmi is not allowed to speak in raised voice, to ask any question, or to talk with any stranger. She has to live within the four walls drawing veil over her face.

The animalism in man also reveals when Sakharam in spite of his own cruelty abuses husbands for their misconduct and tyrannical nature against their wives. Going beyond his hypocrisy in criticising husbands, Sakharam thinks, “It’s good thing I’m not a husband.” (SB 129) In a vivacious conversation with his close friend Dawood Miyan, who has come down to have a look at his new “bird” (Laxmi), Sakharam expresses his condemnation of husbands:

“I tell you, Miyan, those fellows – They 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 the woman’s just dirt, that’s all.” (129)

Laxmi is the eternal oomph of a traditional Indian woman with her unflinching devotion towards her tyrant husband, who has tortured and thrown her out of the house as she fails to conceive his child. She accepts the vicissitude of life without any protest. She clutches Sakharam as her only option to survive and worships him as her husband. She tries to satisfy his each and every need besides the fact that he even fails to understand her expectations and exploits her physically as well as psychologically. He orders her to press his legs.

The terrible form of animalism in man raises the heartbeats of the readers in act I, scene VI, when on Ganesh Chaturthi, Laxmi does not permit Sakharam’s close friend, Dawood Miyan to join in the prayer of Ganpati because he belongs to Muslim community. On this incident, Sakharam fails to control his rage. He suddenly flings the *aarti* things down and in rage slaps her hard. He callously beats her like an animal with the belt till her body convulsed in pain. Laxmi in spite of opposing his physical violence bears it saying not to beat in front of God. The following conversation is the exposure of brutality, violence and callousness in the animal lurking behind Sakharam:

Laxmi: I’m only speaking the truth. A Muslim singing an *aarti* to *Ganpati* and in my home— [Sakharam lashes at her with belt.]... If you want to beat me, beat me inside. Not in front of God! He’s only come to the house today...

Sakharam:[considers Laxmi’s upright and quivering stance a challenge]. All right. Come in. I’ll fix you. (144)

Laxmi’s upright and quivering stance irritate his wrath more and he follows her inside with the belt. The sounds of blow upon blow along with her agonised moans come from within the dark kitchen. Though her whole body is throbbing with pain due to his beastly beating her with the belt but, he doesn’t forget to gratify his physical lust. His sexual thrust makes him insensitive to the animalism inflicted by him on the body and mind of the women in his life. He controls Laxmi’s emotions, even her sense of playfulness, when he catches her in conversation with an ant. Physically Laxmi appears him a frigid woman, but at night he tries to excite her by asking her to laugh. Her laughter becomes a metaphor to guard his ego making him impatient to give an outlet for his suppressed passion. His unconscious pain echoes in his allegation, “you laugh for the ant. But you won’t laugh when I ask you to.” (141) Out of contempt, he does not let her sleep. His conversation with drowsy Laxmi during midnight reveals his excessive excitation enforcing physical and mental violence that compels her to do what he says:

“**Sakharam:** Now laugh. Are you going to laugh or not?

Laxmi: [moaning]. No... My whole body is throbbing with pain. Such gnawing pain. [Moans] You’d think my flesh was on fire.

Sakharam: So what?... Are you going to laugh or shall I throw you out? Shall I? Come on, get up.

Laxmi: Let me go. Oh, God... I’ll die!

Sakharam: Laugh, and then die!

[Laxmi continues to moan.]

Sakharam: Laugh! Laugh this minute. Or I’ll twist your arm. I will. I’ll get the belt. Laugh.” (145)

Hence, in this way Sakharam gratifies his whimsical desires by beating and scolding his sheltered woman.

Laxmi who has to do all the household works from day and night just like a slave, finally, gets exasperated and can take it no more. Being fed up with Sakharam's hellish treatment and brutal behaviour, Laxmi further says,

"I've never heard a kind word here. Always barking orders. Curses. Oaths. Threatening to throw me out. kicks and blows. [Wipes her eyes with the end of the sari.] There I was in agony after I'd been belted, and all you wanted me to do was laugh. Laugh and laugh again. Here I am on the point of death and I'm supposed to laugh. Hell must be a better place than this. [Whimpers] If I die, I'll be free of this once and for all." (148)

Laxmi's bitter words hurt Sakharam, who becomes more violent and aggressive towards her. His force to laugh her stimulates his sexual appetite which remains him blind to her expectations. Dr Shailaja Wadikar compares him with the angry young man of *Look Back in Anger*:

"Sakharam, like Osborne's Jimmy Porter, appears to be the spokesman of the angry and frustrated modern generation. He lashes out at his women and the world at large explicitly and implicitly at himself. He does not care for the world but wants the world, particularly his women to care for him."

When the generous, tender and calm-hearted Laxmi fails to fulfil the excessive physical lust of aggressive, violent and sensual Sakharam, he throws her out of his home and brings a new 'bird', a young and attractive Champa who too is a victim of animalism hidden in her drunkard husband, Fauzdar Shinde like those before her. Champa got from her husband—unbearable tortures, humiliations, cruelties, sadisms and the pains of marital rape. She leaves her husband to save her honour because he in his addiction of alcohol wanted to make her whore. Her horrible description of tortures affirms that it is the illusion of social code that woman is treated as insensitive and passive. Unveiling the physical, psychological and sexual torture of her husband, she says:

"...I don't have a heart. He chewed it up raw long ago ... He brought me from my mother even before I'd become a woman. He married me when I didn't even know what marriage meant. He'd torture 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 most. That bloody pimp! What's left of my heart now? He tore lumps out of it, he did. He drank my blood..." (167)

Being passionate towards Champa's oozing beauty and sexuality, Sakharam cannot control his extreme desire for bodily lust and so, on seeing the sleeping Champa, he becomes restless. He is so much infatuated with her boy that he cannot free himself from the lure of its charm. He repeatedly tries to go around her like a hungry dog behind a bitch. In Act II, Scene III, he again tries to take her into his clutches in her sleeping at night. She reacts immediately and sits up. Rejecting to share her bed with him, she says, "Take care not to rub me the wrong way. I don't like it—all that man-woman stuff." (SB 168) Just like Laxmi he also forces Champa to gratify his sexual itches with physical and psychological violence. But, when she rejects to do so, he becomes violent and threatens her reminding his condition to stay at his house as a wife. However, ultimately, in all her helplessness as there is left no alternative to her but to share bed with him and for the fulfilment of her bare needs such as food, clothing, and shelter—she has to yield to his sexual hunger but, for that she reluctantly has to drown herself in alcohol first to hide disgust. She gives outlet to her inner suffering:

"...he (Sakharam) really takes his money's worth out of a woman. I've managed to last out here. What else can I do? Go out in the streets? Face half a dozen animals every day! Easier to put up with this one." (181)

In act three of the play, animalism in man reaches to its zenith when the bad luck of Laxmi brings her back to Sakharam's home. She has driven away from her nephew's house in the accused of stealing. But as soon as Sakharam saw her, he becomes red in anger. He refuses to give her shelter in spite of her pleading plight. She has already considered him as her God (husband) and started wearing *mangalsutra* of his name. But he mercilessly kicks her away. Clenching his teeth, he begins to rain blows on Laxmi. She

doubles up in pain, but she does not leave his feet. The stunning exposure of animal in man like Sakharam continues till the quit moment of the play. When Sakharam comes to know the physical relations of his new wife, Champa with his friend, Dawood, his masculinity doubly hurts. Her unfaithfulness turns Sakharam mad with anger and in its consequence, he murders her.

Conclusion:

Thus, the play realistically presents a morbid picture that how most of the women are rendered voiceless and became victims of the animality of their male companion in the society. It portrays savagery, brutality and violence lurking in animal of man. Dr Anita Myles comments:

“The play is admirable for its realism as Tendulkar has laid bare the stark realities of the economically backward lower strata of society focusing on the fact that all classes of past independent India suffer from the evil of lust for power specially men over women and this narrow centric attitude frequently ends in either physical violence or emotional breakdown.”

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