

# Feminism and Patriarchal Society: An Illustrative Case Study of Sakharam Binder

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**Abstract – Feminism talks about equality in every manner but in India where patriarchy has deep as well as strong roots, it seems very difficult to bring harmony and equality in power structures. Patriarchy has caught Indian middle class society in its claws and its grip on society is rigid and dense which adversely affects the lives of females. The oppression faced by females is consequence of male domination and Tendulkar tends to focus on patriarchal society in Sakharam Binder. An attempt has been made in this paper to show how patriarchy and feminism are interconnected and how male domination turns into oppression of woman when inequality and domination enters into power structures.**

**Key Words: Patriarchy, Feminism, Oppression, Domination, Aggression, Tension Reduction Theory.**

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“To empower women, power must be given to them, presumably by an entity that already has it. And that entity is the patriarchy” (Krawcheck, brainyquote.com). All the power in Indian middle class society is in hands of males which ultimately leads to the pathological condition of females. Power, when becomes inharmonious, undoubtedly results into oppression and domination whether it is domination of man over woman or vice versa. Indian middle class society has same imbalanced power structure and hence male domination exists as a result of patriarchy. The dominating nature of males throws women into a well of oppression of every kind. Such condition of females is shown by Tendulkar in *Sakharam Binder* and one of the strong reasons behind it is certainly patriarchy existing in society.

The play starts when Sakharam takes Laxmi, the seventh woman, home to satisfy his each and every need including his biological itch. Laxmi is portrayed as a good and religious woman who has faith in God, but the way she adores her husband proves her to be a victim of male dominated society. She believes in social codes and customs. Although, she is presented as a good woman and good wife, yet cannot escape from being victimized by society. She is abandoned by her husband due to her infertility. This shows a cruel phase of male dominated society.

In male dominated society, women are exploited for not fulfilling their husbands' demands. Meenakumari strongly agrees with Tendulkar when she states:

Indian Civilization has an unquestioned practice of treating women as the secondary self who has to

dance to the tune of man's lyric as regards their choice, belief and life style.... In patriarchal culture, power is equated with aggression and masculinity, weakness with compassion and femininity. Women are supposed to bear male oppression silently and meekly. (140)

The bitter thing that Tendulkar presents in this play is that the exploited women do not blame their husband for their exploitation; they consider themselves responsible for this barbaric treatment. They even think that their husbands have authority to punish them if they are unable to fulfil their husbands' demands. The same treatment can be seen in the life of Laxmi, who is first humiliated by her own husband and later by Sakharam. He beats her even for not laughing on his demand. Tendulkar shows passive attitude of Laxmi towards her sufferings. But his portrayal of another character Champa, the eighth mistress of Sakharam, gives a message to the readers/audience that it is not necessary that a woman always remains submissive to her victimization but sometime, she also plays the role of a victimizer as Champa plays.

Champa is represented as a bold and powerful lady. She is neither good nor passive like Laxmi. She is seductive and able to fulfil Sakharam's sexual desire, but fails to do household chores. She is as vulgar and violent as Sakharam and even shocks him by showing her abusive and aggressive behaviour. Champa is also oppressed by her husband, Faujdar Shinde, who is a drunkard and beats her and tortures her mentally, physically and sexually. At last she abandons her husband due to

his impotency. Champa has also suffered for being a seductive woman. Thus, all her sufferings compel her to turn into a victimizer. Champa's oppressive attitude is seen when her husband comes to her in Sakharam's house to bring her back, but gets beaten by Champa until he bleeds. Sakharam is shocked when he sees her bold and violent nature as he has not seen such cruel behaviour before. All his seven mistresses, including Laxmi were well behaved and had no voice in their mouth but Champa, the eighth one, is a contrary experience for him. She does not even feel shy to call Sakharam an impotent when he fails to satisfy her due to Laxmi's presence in the house again. Champa's affair with Sakharam's friend Dawood shows her nymphomaniac attitude which later leads her to death. The characters play roles of either victims or of victimizers. But it is also a fact that sometimes a victim turns into victimizer just because of unspeakable oppression. Another character Dawood is represented as a minor character, but plays a significant role in the play and seems as complex as other characters. He is a fast friend of Sakharam and visits him daily at his house. Dawood knows more about Sakharam's activities than Sakharam himself.

Women being called as 'birds' by Dawood who come to Sakharam's house shows his disrespectful nature towards woman. Champa's seductive body attracts him, which leads him to deceive his fast friend like Sakharam. His lusty personality shows that sometimes physical lust wins over true bond of friendship. Thus, Dawood does not seem an ideal friend as he deceives his friend by developing an affair with his mistress Champa. He does not only ruin his friendship, but also the life of Champa just for the sake of his biological need.

"The purpose of this oppression is to obtain psychological ego satisfaction and strength and self-esteem (Meenakumari 140)." Faujdar Shinde seems in the same boat because he suffers from inferiority complex due to his impotency. Being a Faujdar, Shinde is a powerful person and head of the family and husband of a beautiful wife like Champa. It was not easy for a powerful person and a person who leads his family to accept the fact that he is an impotent, as it is a matter of reputation for him not just in family but in society too. It hurts the male ego and is shameful for Faujdar which leads him to frustration and enforces him to react violently. He tries to bring his wife back to his home to retain his dignity in the society as a potent man. Tendulkar shows how norms of society compel an impotent to avoid his sexual dignity and makes his condition worse than condition of animals and due to this humiliation; he turns into a victimizer and victimizes others. In patriarchal society, it is quite true that being a potent is a matter of pride while being an impotent is shameful.

The impact of patriarchy is in blood of Sakharam who fails even to understand the significance of pious

relationship, such as sexual marital relationship. He does not care for the norms of the family and purity of caste. Brahmans are considered as intellectual and Gods of earth and it is believed that they are superior to all non-Brahmans. The same can be seen in a patriarchal society where men are believed to be superior, strong and brave while women are treated as weak and are meant to be oppressed and beaten. These so-called conventional norms give rise to the phenomenon like violence. These norms make the person authoritative and head of the family who later leads by force over others and oppresses them according to his own wish. Through this play Tendulkar tries to open the eyes of the audience and shows how characters like Laxmi is being victimized in this male dominated society just because of the fear of homelessness.

Tendulkar's female characters in *Sakharam Binder* are emotionally oppressed, sexually assaulted and physically abused by their male partners. Sakharam believes that it is Laxmi who provokes him to beat her by her silly behaviour. He blames her for the battering she gets. The most striking feature of a frustrated person Tendulkar presents in the play is that he always tries to defend his misbehavior and blames others for his mistakes. Sakharam warns Laxmi and says, "You just be careful about what you say and else...." (148). He threatens her to beat if she does not obey him. But Sakharam's blaming Laxmi for battering differs from the reality.

It is not Laxmi who provokes him, but the patriarchal system of our society which provokes him to show his manly power to dominate a woman. Although, Sakharam rejects social codes or marriage system but he does the same as a husband does and wants the same to be done by Laxmi as a wife does to her husband at his house. He wants Laxmi to cook food, prepare tea, follow him like a puppet, and above all he wants her to be a wife to him. Being a male is the only reason behind his violent behaviour towards her. It is his masculinity which enforces him to suppress his wife by using his physical strength. To make her understand, he prefers beating, kicking, slapping or scolding to anything else.

Sakharam calls Laxmi an ungrateful wretch and throws her out of his house and even ready to kill her. Both Sakharam and her nephew have thrown her out from their houses. But it is a bitter truth of our male dominated society that a deserted woman nowhere gets respect and the same happens with Laxmi, she is tortured and humiliated at her nephew's house again and driven out from there too. She cries poignantly over her misfortune in front of a person like Sakharam and says, "My nephew threw me out. His wife charged me with stealing. Would I steal? Ever? They were going to hand me over to the police" (176). It seems that the weaker is born to be exploited by the stronger.

Laxmi's hard luck takes her back to Sakham's house to stay there. She wishes to die in the shelter of her master Sakham. But she is beaten there by Sakham as before, but this time more brutally, he kicks her when it seems to him that she is no longer useful for him. It seems as if Laxmi has made up her mind to bear all she gets in any form and falls at his feet and begs in a hope to die as his wife. Sakham remains adamant and beats her time and again, "clenching her teeth, he begins to rain blows on Laxmi. She doubles in pain, but she will not let go his feet. He swears at her, hits her" (183). Though, he hits below her belly, but she does not speak even a single word of complaint. Tendulkar, through the sufferings of Laxmi, presents the sufferings of women of the whole world who are victims of male dominated society.

Sakham states by showing no respect for the women who are casted off, "...once a woman is thrown over, nobody calls her respectable. Remember that. I at least took you in" (147).

Tendulkar gives his characters significant words to use so that dialogues of the characters seem realistic and leave a positive effect on the mind of the audience. Through Sakham's dialogue, he shows the egoistic nature of a person like Sakham who takes advantage of being male and having authority to provide shelter and throwing out according to his own wish.

Tendulkar directly satirizes the Sakhams of contemporary patriarchal society. He also rebukes males for using a woman as a thing to play with for personal benefit. When Sakham realizes that he is getting fed up with Laxmi and her passiveness in bed, he decides to point the exit door to her. He justifies himself to Dawood, "...she was tired out after all that hell her husband had given her. She was getting on in years, too. And you know what I am like...there's the body, the home of all our appetites... No point in troubling her any further" (153). The portrayal of Laxmi depicts miserable condition of all deserted women of contemporary society who are not disregarded only by their husbands, but also neglected and humiliated at the hands of others.

Tendulkar depicts that Sakham does not only show his manly power, but also expresses his intention to spoil Champa's will by assaulting her. He tries to protect his hollow manly image by oppressing her, the image that he has built among others. It is assumed that to make a woman stoop is a matter of praise for a man in a male dominated society. So, a man does not oppress a woman always in anger and frustration, but he also oppresses her for the sake of his image. It is considered that when a man beats his wife or shouts at her, nobody pays attention but when a wife shouts at her husband and beats him, it becomes an issue of discussion among people in their gathering.

The women characters in Tendulkar's dramas suffer a lot as the victims of the hegemonic power structure. The female body as an object of male sexual fantasy and desire is theatrically presented by Tendulkar. All women characters in his plays are marginalized objects in interlocking system of sexual politics and power politics. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's study of the unhappy lot of the subaltern people in 'Can subaltern speak?' has great similarity with Vijay Tendulkar's female characters. (Das 107)

Tendulkar believes that forced sex may satisfy sexual itch of a victimizer, but hidden purpose of it is to show physical power or dominance over the person who is victimized. Champa has already experienced sexual expression of violence at the hands of her husband Faujdar Shinde whose only purpose of torturing her was to hide his impotency and for this he tries to trade her body. Shinde's frustration of being an impotent leads him to his downfall; he becomes a violent creature who is even ready to kill himself.

As it is defined in Drive or Tension Reduction Theory that a stressful life leads a person to mental disability and excessive stress may lead a person to commit suicide. The same is shown in the life of Faujdar Shinde, who first victimizes his wife and then becomes the victim of her wife as well as of the society. Thus, his stressful life compels him to commit suicide, which he expresses in front of Champa when she beats, kicks and humiliates him. He says, "I'll kill myself!" (167). He drinks to reduce his tension. Both the theories, Frustration Aggression Displacement by Dollard and Tension Reduction Theory by Clark Leonard Hull, can be used to frame the bad condition of Faujdar Shinde, as he drinks to get rid of tension and his frustration of losing his reputation leads him to have the intention of committing suicide. Due to the frustration, he lives the life of a wanderer. On the other side Champa's sufferings do not come to an end. After leaving her husband's house, she faces the most frightening face of sexual violence at the hands of Sakham who himself proves to be a hard master to tolerate. Tendulkar reveals how excessive sexual assault turns a victim like Champa into a nymphomaniac. She drinks and reacts like a nymphomaniac when she says, "You'll have your fun. ... Wait. I'll give it to you. [keeps on drinking and making him drink. Laughs uncontrollably.] Fun for anyone who comes along. A dog. A corpse even..." (171). Her body is not a body, but a bundle of pains which she gets from Sakham every night. It seems that she laughs not on her misfortune, but on the hollowness of patriarchy which knows no respect for woman as a human being.

He also rebukes the whole marriage system and husband-wife relationship, but he wants all the rules of married couples to be followed by his partner. Sakham's humiliating words disrespect

women of Indian society where they are considered as goddesses but only in theoretical way. As he says:

It is 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 enough, she's had enough, you can always part. The game is over. Nothing to bother you after that ...That's cheap way of fixing all your appetites ... And on top of it, the woman stays docile. She works well, she behaves herself. She knows that one wrong move and out she goes. (129)

The statement of Sakharam proves the fact of patriarchal society that women are considered as things to be played. Theoretical image of woman is idealized as goddess *Durga* and *Laxmi* but in practical affairs, she is destined to be a helpless cow. Patriarchy can lead just to oppression and domination because it gives males a power of superiority, resulting into atrocity and cruelty in lives of females because in a male dominated society, a husband, in spite of deserting his wife and throwing her out from the house is still regarded as God.

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