

THE MUFFLED VOICES IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SAKHARAM, THE BINDER AND KANYADAAN*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to focus on these evils of the society portrayed in the two plays of Vijay Tendulkar named *Sakharam, The Binder*(1972) and *Kanyadaan* (1983). Both plays show different dimensions of marginality – sexuality and caste hierarchy. Tendulkar's use of the most fundamental tool of the theatre- the spoken words with its silences and pauses, as a tool to voice the marginalized section of the society will be dealt in this paper. The enslavement of women because of her Sex by Sakharam in his *Sakharam, The Binder*(1972) for his sexual gratification and their silences in one hand and the cry of Jyoti, the daughter of a Brahmin activist Nath and Seva in *Kanyadaan*(1983) suffering at the hands of caste conflicts on the other hand is the subject of study in this paper.

Post Colonial Indian drama has empowered the stage through its richness of multi-faceted variety of themes. Indian English drama has not only moved itself away from the traditional continuation of the religious and mythical representation of themes, but it has now appeared as a boon for the oppressed voices who have been portrayed as marginals in the various forms of art. Instead of focussing on the traditional themes, the modern playwrights are using the play as a proper medium to revolt against the orthodox ideologies of the society. The modern playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and others have tried to focus on the two evils that have their roots embedded in the Indian society – i.e. Patriarchy or the male hegemony and castism. Tendulkar uses the most fundamental tool of the theatre- the spoken words with its silences and pauses, as a tool to voice the marginalized section of the society and this aspect will be dealt in this paper through the two plays namely, *Sakharam, The Binder* (1972) and *Kanyadaan* (1983) respectively.

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Sakharam, The Binder* (1972) depicts a character who is a foul mouthed womanizer; and rejects the traditional norms and values which are generally considered to be the foundation of the Indian society. He reacts to these values as if they are imposed on him and he craves for a liberty from this chain. The world of Sakharam is an uncommon world, entirely different from the normal world. He is a not willing to believe in the institution of marriage which clearly shows his ill temperament towards women as well as the society, he just wants to utilize women as a mere object for his sexual gratification. Sakharam criticizes the institution of marriage as he says,

SAKHARAM: the husband-he's a proper swine! He ties her down; he doesn't get tied down himself! He flits around again-a free bird! (Tendulkar, 130)

Thus, he feels safe not to be a part of this imposed relationship called marriage as he points out,

SAKHARAM: It's good thing I'm not a husband (Tendulkar, 129)

And he asks his woman to come to closer to him but not like a wife. He looks at the relationship of man-woman only from the commercialization point of view. He searches for the cast-off women, so that he may bring them home and give them food and shelter. In exchange, these women are expected to appease his sexual itch. He is aware of the fact that he can be an autocratic ruler of his little house as the women he brings home are so helpless that they dare not to think of leaving the house. Therefore he can rule the way he wants and he can throw the women out whenever he wants to do so.

Sakharam's own view about life is - Without harming anyone, enjoy your life to the hilt. Only one should not be a liar or a fraud. The enjoyment that he refers to, is his lust for the sensual pleasure, for which he picks up various women to his house and makes them feel as if they are meant to be enslaved. Gerda Lerner in her *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) shows a similar picture of women. Probably, we can say that women in Sakharam's life range from a slave woman to a slave concubine. Unlike, the "free woman" presented in Lerner's view, the free woman in this play voices the exploitation that happens against the female folks. On bringing Laxmi home he says,

SAKHARAM: This is not a royal palace. It is Sakharam Binder's house. (Tendulkar, 125)

This patriarchal thought that governs his mind puts him forward to torture the marginalized entity known as "woman". This habit of exploiting and torturing women is a part of his nature as he usually expresses his thoughts in this manner to each woman he picks up, this is quite evident when he explains the rules of his house to Laxmi on her first arrival to his place

SAKHARAM: I like everything in order here. Won't put up with slipshod ways. If you are careless, I shall show the door.... I am the master here... a house must be a home, you understand? (Tendulkar, 125)

It suggests how he expects Laxmi to behave that is, he not only needs her for bed but rather he wants to rule her in the maximum possible ways. Sakharam tries to utilize Laxmi for his own sake. He restricts her to remain indoors whenever visitors come, she is not even allowed to talk to any strangers, and he even makes it necessary for Laxmi to be in *pardaah* if there is urgency for her to talk to any unknown person when she is alone. Apart from all such restrictions Sakharam's own expectations of Laxmi are so obscurantist that they could easily be termed as a form of violence against women.

Tendulkar portrays Laxmi as a marginalized woman, who has no choice of her own but to suffer in Sakharam's hand incessantly just because she is out casted by her husband for failing to produce an heir. Thus, being a human she had to deaden her own desires and voice, just because she belonged to the margin. Even though she appeases Sakharam in every possible ways yet she is physically assaulted by him at regular intervals depending on his whims.

In Act II of the play enters a new woman, Champa who can truly be termed as the "New Woman" of Tendulkar. Even though she belongs to the class of "free woman" of Lerner yet she is different of her type. Champa represents a woman who differs from the woman like Laxmi whose voice has been muffled by Sakharam. Tendulkar's portrayal of the character like Champa clearly shows his intention which is targeted at the male dominated Indian middle class society.

He depicts Champa as a modern woman who is capable of protecting herself, and her body in a male dominated society. For this he does not deaden Champa's voice unlike Laxmi's.

Champa belongs to the class of deviant woman. She is shown to be unaware of the gender roles in the society. Instead of being a victim to her husband's wrath she batters him; uses fowl tongue for her husband. Champa's character tries to remove the gender trouble from the society. She even breaks the rules of Sakharam's house. Just like a middle class common man of our society, Champa is addicted to tea, tobacco, pan and cheap liquor- something that does not suit a woman. Thus, Champa differs from the traditional woman in variety of ways; she even does not easily surrender her body to anyone not even to her master, Sakharam. She surrenders herself to Sakharam only when she is completely unconscious-Drunk. This behaviour of Champa helps her to create an atmosphere where even a male like Sakharam feels dominated. Probably, Tendulkar's motif behind the portrayal of a character like Champa's is to bring in a change in the society; to shaken up the androcentric fallacy and to create a women's history.

In *Kanyadaan*(1983) the inevitable feuds between the upper castes and Dalits is reflected. It depicts the reality of a society where caste discrimination still prevails. It aims at the portrayal of a tension which takes place between the ideal and the real through the delineation of a daughter's sacrifice in pursuing her father's ideals. Although the main theme of the play deals with the disparity in the society, yet the play cannot be termed as an anti-Dalit or anti-Brahmin. Tendulkar handles this sensitive issue with a balanced view point. The visionary power of the Tendulkar is to bring out the voices from the margin, the ever muffled voices that still prevail in the mindset of the out caste individual if not in the society.

The story of the play deals with psychological study of the social tension caused by the caste hierarchy in the Indian orthodox society. It portrays an outcaste character named Arun Athawale, a Dalit poet, who is shown psychologically oppressed, which is quite visible through the actions he takes against his wife Jyoti, a Brahmin girl. As the title of the play suggests, the theme of the play resolves around the matrimonial relationship. Jyoti, a highly cultured Brahmin girl, comes from a politically and socially active family. She marries Arun Athawale, a young Dalit poet, with her father's approval and encouragement. Jyoti can be termed as a victim of her own idealistic father who dreams of a casteless society and who not even dares to sacrifice her own blood. She becomes the subject of violence in the hands of her Dalit husband, who shows his mental suppression of being an outcaste. Arun after his marriage develops a sense of inferiority as he belonged to the marginalized section of the society, this ultimately results into his inhuman behaviour towards Jyoti., Jyoti fails to recognize the value of her mother and brother's warning about her upcoming married life which proves to be a nightmare for her and this mistake of her made her pay seriously throughout her life. She marries Arun not only because she loves him but because she is fascinated towards his flair for writing. She was least aware of his inner agony as well as his being psychologically oppressed. But Jyoti should not be blamed alone for this situation, as her father, Nath is equally responsible. Nath cravings for a casteless society made him almost blind and this compels Jyoti to turn his ideals into reality as he point out,

NATH: Look, Seva, society cannot be transformed through words alone. We have to act as a catalyst in this transformation. The old social reformer did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow remarriage...? That was also an experiment, a difficult experiment. But they dared to risk it. (Tendulkar, 524)

This statement of Nath shows that he has a vision of making the society casteless, where human being regardless of class, race, gender and caste are treated as human not as an animal. Even this strenuous effort made by Nath cannot remove the mental inferiority of an outcaste individual, Arun, who feels uncomfortable when Jyoti introduces him to her family members. His discomfort comes out as he says,

ARUN: These large buildings are just like crocodiles and sharks whenever they want, they can gulp you down certainly be changed. (Tendulkar, 512)

This clearly points the big gap between an upper caste and an outcaste person. He feels secure on the streets, where he has grown up. He makes them aware of his sufferings by describing the actual condition of his society, he says,

ARUN: Will you marry me and eat stinking bread with spoilt dal in my father's hut? Without vomiting? Tell me, Jyoti, can you shit everyday in our slums village toilet, like my mother? Can you beg quaking at every door, for little grass for our buffaloes? Come on tell me!...And you thought of marrying me. Our life is not the socialist's service camp. It is hell, and I mean hell. A hell named life. (Tendulkar, 513)

This makes a clear attack on the upper caste people, whom he thinks responsible for the sufferings of lower caste. This inferiority of Arun forced him to take revenge on Jyoti, his wife whom he beats even when she is pregnant, only because she belongs to an upper caste.

The wife battering episode in Arun's life is because of barbaric atmosphere he has found himself in. He has witnessed his mother being beaten up mercilessly by his drunkard father. He feels that he had to bear all this only due to the suppression of the upper class and that's why it takes no time for him to beat Jyoti mercilessly. That is why when Seva, Jyoti's mother tries to ask him about his inhuman behavior towards her daughter, he replies,

ARUN: What am I but the son of scavengers. We don't know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives...We make love to them...but the beating is what gets publicized....(Tendulkar, 540)

Arun tries to unmute the ever silent voices, the deaden voices, as he points out,

ARUN: I am what I am...and shall remain exactly that. And your Jyoti knew what I was even before she married me. In spite of that she married me, she did it out of her own free will. (Tendulkar, 540)

The feminist critics ask its readers to base their readings on women, that is, to be women-centred. By women-centred we mean, to ignore the facts of women's marginality, because the moment we start reading a work from the point of view marginality we are actually adhering to the patriarchal interventions. In the similar way, Tendulkar's portrayal of Laxmi, Champa and Arun are nothing but a way of giving a voice to the muffled voices of the society.

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