



Violence in Tendulkar's *The Vultures* & *Sakharam Binder*: A Comparative Study

Dr. Ajay R. Tengse

Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of English, Yeshwant Mahavidyalaya, Nanded.

Ms. Savita Laxmanrao Andelwar

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Yeshwant Mahavidyalaya, Nanded

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Abstract

The two plays of Vijay Tendulkar are *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder*. One thing common among them is that violence is found in them in different forms. Verbal violence is one of them. *The Vultures* commences with it off the stage which continues on the stage. It is routine for the two brothers to exchange hot words. Nor do they spare their father and sister. *Sakharam Binder* too abounds in it. Even the wife abuses her husband. Second, there is physical violence in the two plays. In *The Vultures* at the very outset, violence is there off the stage which persists thereafter. The two sons behave with their father in violent ways, seeking to hit him. In *Sakharam Binder* also physical violence is found at the very commencement of the play and it continues subsequently. There is beating of the husband by the wife! The two plays depict desires to do murders and one of them depicts an actual murder. Violent atmosphere in them is heightened by the animal sounds. In *The Vultures* the shrill screeching of vultures is heard throughout the play. In *Sakharam Binder* too, there are cawing of a crow, chirping of crickets and barking of dogs. They herald the impending violence.

Keywords: *Verbal violence, physical violence, murder, animal sounds.*

Full Text

Introduction

Although Vijay Tendulkar has written several plays, two of them draw a reader's attention because of the similarities and dissimilarities in their characters when viewed in terms of violence. They are *The Vultures* and *Sakharam Binder*. *The Vultures* was first produced in 1970 and then published in the following year. It is a story of human relations in a family belonging to an upper middle class. The head of the family is Hari Pitale (Pappa) who has two sons named Ramakant and Umakant and a daughter Manik. He has also an illegitimate son named Rajaninath living separately in the garage. Rama is the wife of Ramakant. Tendulkar assigns minor roles to Jagannath, a gardener, Sakharam who is Pappa's brother. Pappa's family members except Rajaninath are involved in violent activities.

After writing *The Vultures* Tendulkar had a prognosis that he would not be able to write another play depicting extreme violence. But he proved himself wrong and in 1972 he produced and published *Sakharam Binder*. Its setting is the lower strata of the society. It revolves round Sakharam who works as a binder in a printing press. He chooses to live outside the accepted norms of society. He brings destitute women one by one, keeps them for a while and then sends them away. In the play he brings a woman called Laxmi, sends her away and then brings Champa. There are two more characters. One of them is his Muslim friend named Dawood Miyan and the other is Fouzdar Shinde who is Champa's husband. Both Laxmi and Champa become victims of his violent nature.

In the following pages this paper makes a comparative study of the violence as a evident in the behaviour of different characters.

I. Verbal Violence

A reader is struck by verbal violence in the two plays. *The Vultures* commences with verbal violence off the stage. Ramakanth tells Jagannath, "Ungrateful bastard! ... Get out on the road! Or I'll shoot you!" It is followed by a female voice, "Kick the bastard in the balls! Give him another. Slam him"¹ Pappa adds that Jagannath deserves kicks and curses. He also calls him a pimp. Sakharam is a bloody mannerless brute for Ramakant.

The two brothers do not spare their father either and use abusive language both on his face and in his absence. They refer to him as a bastard unhesitatingly. Ramakanth calls him a bloody burden having stupidity. Pappa sarcastically comments that he is indeed stupid as he produced bastards like Ramakanth. The

latter also says that both Pappa and uncle are absolute swindlers. Other abusive words which the two brothers use for their father are bugger, rascal, etc. He is a crafty old swine and bloody miser for Ramakant and for Umakant a cunning, old bastard.

It is routine for the two brothers to exchange of hot words and call each other bastards. After Sakharam's exit from the house there is a celebration in the family. But the atmosphere is soon charged with unpleasantness. Ramakant tells Umakant, "I'll finish you." Umakant retorts, "I'll knock the bastard's block off. I'll crack him open like a cockroach!" Ramakant remarks, "I'll bash your bloody brains out! Filthy bloody bastard!" Umakant calls Ramakant a bastard at which the former calls the latter a double bastard.² On another occasion Ramakanth calls him a gnat. While talking about the ownership of their house, Umakant asks Ramakant to go and die. He also addresses him as an animal, swindler and coward. He talks of sitting on his neck. Ramakant tells Umakant that he is a swine and muckworm. Umakant informs Ramakant that the child in Rama's womb is of Rajaninath and taunts, "Call the brat your own.... Lick his piss! Let that smart-arse have fun.... Bloody fool. Not a paise worth of sense. Bloody dupe.... Bringing shame on all of us."³

Umakanth threatens to smash Ramakant's mouth who retorts by talking about shooting him and calling him a lifelong bloody enemy. When the quarrel continues, Rama asks Pappa to stop it but he calls them devils, pimps and scoundrels. Umakanth's ire is directed towards Pappa and he opines that a mangy dog would have been a better father. The latter is distressed that the sons talk of his funeral when he is alive. He uses terms like bullies, pimps, devils, murderers, pimps, etc., for his sons. He addresses Manik as a she-devil. Subsequently he again uses this term for her as well as calls her a whore.

There is verbal violence between Manik and her brothers. She openly says that she keeps the door of her room shut because she fears that other members of the family would strangle her. She alleges that when she had typhoid they plotted to put poison in her medicines and she did not even drink water brought by them. She calls Jagannath a swine and bloody cheek and Pappa senile. She calls her brothers ruffians, swines, hypocrites, bastards, beasts, slanderers, devils, etc. She further alleges that they would burn her alive, poison her, slit her throat and so on. In their row over the use of the bathroom, Umakanth calls her a cow and she retaliates by saying that both of them are bastards. Subsequently the two quarrel over as trivial a matter as a game of rummy. He threatens that her tongue would hang out by the roots and grabs her neck. On another occasion Umakant calls her a bitch. Ramakanth too calls her a whore and bitch. When Rama fears that she will abort, he is greatly disturbed and asks her to keep quiet. He even threatens to murder her.

Towards the end he is drunk and he tells himself that Rama's child is not his child. He talks of shooting himself and the child/aborting it.

There is no love lost between Rajaninath on the one hand and the two brothers and Pappa on the other. Ramakanth says about Rajaninath, "A kept woman's bloody son! A bastard! If he'd come here begging for a share (of property), I'd have shot him with my rifle. I'd have blasted him!"⁴ Umakant too calls him a bastard and son of a whore. Nor does Rajaninath show affection for the two brothers. He says that it is humiliating to call such persons as his brothers. He calls Pappa a corrupt man. When Pappa visits him in the garage, he feels like asking him to go back and finally does it. He tells Pappa, "Clear out of here! Clear out. Don't dare set foot here again! Get out! Or I'll throw you out."⁵

Sakharam Binder too abounds in verbal violence. In the very beginning of the play he introduces himself to Laxmi and, inter alia, admits, "When I lose my temper, I beat the life out of people."⁶ Verbal violence abounds in the play subsequently too. Sakharam tells Laxmi that she is a bitch, worthless, bloody and mad. He threatens to twist her arm and beat her with a belt. He tells her that he would beat life out of her, knock out her teeth and brains, and break her jaws. When she comes to live with him a second time, he wants her to go back. He calls her a shameless bitch and leech. He threatens to slit her throat, split her skull, make her vomit blood, breaking jaw and even kill her.

Sakharam brings Champa whose nature and behaviour are different from those of Laxmi. Sometime after they stay together, Shinde her husband came. This is not to Sakharam's liking. He says that he will like to tear him limb by limb. His relations with Champa too turn sour before long. He warns her that he could turn nasty and thrash the life out of her. He even threatens to turn her out of his house, calling her a bitch. In a fit of explosive fury, she hurls the plate from which she is eating food. When she is drunk even on the Dashshera day, he is exasperated. He calls her good-for-nothing and even talks of breaking her jaw. She in turn calls him an impotent nanny.

Both Sakharam and Champa use foul language against Shinde. Sakharam calls him a bastard, rascal, swine, filthy worm and says that he will break his jaws. Champa has contempt for him and considers him a clown, corpse, clod, bloody, pimp, insect, worm, pig, corpse, dead duck, son of a bitch, etc. When Shinde threatens to commit suicide, Champa asks him to do it fast as it will be a good riddance. When he comes again, he asks her to take his life.

II. Physical violence

In *The Vultures* at the very outset, there is physical violence although it is off the stage. Talking about the gardener, Ramakant says, "So I just slapped him. Blood

streamed from the fellow's mouth. Must have lost one or two teeth." He would have even shot him dead.⁷

Pappa suspects that his sons want to kill him. Once Umakant raised a flower vase to hit him and was going to kill him. But he warns them, "If I die, I'll become a ghost. I'll trample on your chests! Who d'you take me for? I'm going to dance on your chests. Trample on them!"⁸ Ramakanth is quick to add that in such a situation the two brothers will become arch-ghosts.

Their attitude towards Sakharam is even more macabre. Manik calls him "old wreck" and suggests, "Then throw him out! He'll writhe to death with cold all right. On his own."⁹ Early morning Ramakanth went to him with an airgun. But fearing for his life, he bounced on his bed and escaped. Thereafter the brothers turn against their father. Ramakanth topples the chair on which he was sitting and the three fall on the ground. Pappa suffers a gash on his head and blood comes out. He wants to call the police.

Manik suspects that her brothers are plotting to kill her. When Umakant is unable to have bath since Manik is using the bathroom and he calls her a cow, she flares up and we see an unusual sight of a sister catching hold of her brother's neck and in retaliation he hits her on her hips.

In *Sakharam Binder*, at the very commencement of the play he gives his family background by saying that he ran away from home when he was eleven because he was fed up with his father's beatings. He refers to domestic violence as a normal part of husband-wife relationship and tells Dawood, "Not that I don't give a blow now and then. I know I do."¹⁰ Thereafter he tells Laxmi that although husbands misbehave with their wives, they still treat them as gods. But such gods should be worshipped with shoes and slippers. He thinks that women are like corpses. He kicks live coals at Laxmi's feet and hopes that they would roast them brown. Although she is writhing in pain, he orders her to laugh. Since she tries to prevent Dawood from participating in the aarti, he inflicts blows on her in the background. She tells him, "In any case my body is one big sore.... Hell must be a better place than this."¹¹ When she informs him about Champa's affair with Dawood, he flares up and beats her black and blue.

When Shinde comes for the first time and praises Champa, Sakharam is enraged. He catches Shinde by neck and drags him to the door. Champa slams her fist into Shinde's face and blood streams out of his mouth. But she still pounces on him and kicks him. Even though Sakharam tries to restrain her, she behaves like one who is possessed. She alleges that Shinde tortured her severely after their marriage. She complains to Sakharam, "He'd torture me at night. He branded me, and stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things.... He... stuffed chili powder into that god-awful place, where it hurts most.... What's left of my heart now? He

tore lumps out of it, he did. He drank my blood.”¹² Therefore, she threatens to stuff chili powder in his body.

After an exchange of hot words between them, Sakharam pounces on Champa and a struggle follows. At last, he puts his hands round the neck of Champa and strangulates her to death. Her murder stupefies him and Laxmi takes a sheet to cover her body. She then starts digging her grave to bury it.

III. Attempted killings and actual killing

The two plays depict desires to do murders and even an actual murder. In *The Vultures* the two brothers talk of the possibility of their sister committing sati when the Raja of Hondur dies with whom she had an affair. They also talk about killing her unborn child. Ramakant remarks, “I’ll give such a kick, he’ll fly up to the bloody skies.”¹³ Their worry is that the child would claim their father’s property. K. Janardhanreddy and P. Satyanarayana comment, “The cruelty and obscenity of human behaviour is at apex when the brothers kick at the belly of their pregnant sister.”¹⁴

However, Manik also shows animosity for the unborn child of Rama. She attempts to abort it by black magic in a pre-planned manner. Thinking that she has succeeded, she is filled with hysterical joy, laughing loudly and madly. As it is, Rama is filled with fear because she believes that both Pappa and Manik look at her with eyes resembling live coal.

Pappa fears for his life. In one single dialogue five times he pleads “Don’t kill me.”¹⁵ He is gripped with fear and he sits trembling violently. Thereafter he again pleads with them to spare his life.

IV. Animals and animal sounds

In order to create the required atmosphere, in both the plays the characters allude to animals on the one hand and there are sounds of animals in the background on the other. At the commencement of *The Vultures* before any conversation among the characters, the shrill screeching of vultures is heard and it continues throughout the play till the end. It begins with Rajaninath writing a poem in which he compares the family home to the hole of a tree,¹⁶

“Where vultures live
In the shapes of men.”

Pappa thinks that other members of the family are waiting for him to die and he calls them wolves. When he is forced to sign a cheque in favour of his sons, he senses danger to his life. Umakant says that he would crack Ramakant open like a cockroach. Manik tells her brothers that worms will rot in their mouths. She also

calls them bloody beasts. Rajaninath says that their cruelty will put the wolves to shame.

After Ramakant learns that Rama is carrying Rajaninath's child, he entertains the idea of shooting him dead and behaves like a beast of prey. It is noteworthy that Rajaninath concludes the play poetically,¹⁷

“The tale of the five vultures
Had this end. The story of men accursed.
Or of vultures accursed
To live their lives as men.”

There are references to animals in *Sakharam Binder* too. When the sixth woman's funeral ceremonies were conducted, a crow came which supposedly had her soul. The incident was inconsequential. But when Laxmi came she claims that ants, sparrows and crows talk to her. Such talks infuriate Sakharam and he orders her that her pretensions of talking to an ant are madness. He tortures her so much that she begins to think that her life with him was not different from that of a dog. As he shows infatuation for Champa, she tells him not to move around her like a dog behind a bitch. There are cawing of a crow and chirping of crickets indicating that something is about to happen. They herald the return of Laxmi to Sakharam. This is followed by the barking of dogs. After Laxmi informs Sakharam about Champa's affair with Dawood, he at once flares up and pounces on her like a tiger.

Conclusion

We find violence both in the background and in the two plays. It is in different forms it is verbal violence which abounds the most in them. In *The Vultures* the characters use words like bloody and bastard as a matter of routine. Children do not spare their father and abuse him without any hesitation. In *Sakharam Binder* while Laxmi does not abuse Sakharam, Champa abuses both him and her husband. Physical violence is perpetuated in the two plays. In *The Vultures* it is not only between brothers but also between brothers vis-a-vis father. The two plays depict attempted murders. In *The Vultures* it takes the form of killing unborn children and in one of the two cases it is a woman who attempts it. Uday Shankar Ojha rightly comments, “Strangely enough, these vultures have unique fertile minds. The devilish ideas crop up like anything in quick succession. And similar is the horrible haste in transforming it into action.”¹⁸

In *Sakharam Binder* a murder takes place albeit unintentionally and hence the murder is at his wits end thereafter. What is more, it is a woman who attempts the disposal of the crops. Animal sounds in the background heighten the violent atmosphere on the stage. But at times the characters themselves behave like

ferocious animals. In view of all this it is little surprising that Tendulkar is classed as a playwright whose plays have violence both with and without bloodshed.

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