

**Tribhuvan University**

**Subaltern Consciousness in Vijay Tendulkar's Play *Sakharam Binder***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Dilli Ram Bhandari has completed his thesis entitled “Subaltern Consciousness in Vijay Tendulkar's Play, *Sakharam Binder*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2067/01/17 B.S. to 2067/06/15 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences****Approval Letter**

This thesis entitled “Subaltern Consciousness in Vijay Tendulkar's Play, *Sakharam Binder*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Dilli Ram Bhandari has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* represents the consciousness of peasant workers as it explores the saga of subaltern character Sakharam Binder, who through his benevolent charity for other subaltern caste off women--Laxmi and Champa and a Muslim, Dawood by giving them shelter. They are all are peasant workers. But as Gramsci and Spivak argue, there is the politics behind speaking or working for the subalterns, which suggests the central and serious issue about the liberation of the subalternity exist for centuries. Sakharam is a man who does not care about ethics and morality, and professes not to believe in "outdated" social codes and conventional marriage traditions followed by elite groups. Sakharam who on the one hand pretends as if he is giving a very benevolent support to the subaltern people, but behind the bush he exploits sexually and expresses deep-rooted oppressive power of the patriarchy and elitism over the subaltern women. However, to a greater extent, this play can be important space for critical discourse about subaltern studies.

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## Chapter I

### Socio-political Issues in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar

This study on Vijay's Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder* (1972) examines subaltern consciousness during the time of Independence in India. In *Sakharam Binder*, the voices of women, the downtrodden and other exploited groups have always been subdued. In the aftermath of colonial period in India, these groups who were once under severe exploitation at that time have still lacked agency in society and access to social power. Though the binder, Sakharam gives voice to the marginalized and excluded from societies, he fails to fully work towards empowering them in terms of social, political and educational field as he himself gets inclined to take advantage of their situation. Though he cannot work altruistically, Sakharam's attempt of rehabilitating the poor, peasant women and social outcasts reflects the need of recognizing and uplifting those who lack agency in society, which testifies to Tendulkar's subaltern consciousness.

Tendulkar deals with the topic of complication of human nature and exploitation of marginalized characters. The title character of the play Sakharam takes in other men's discarded women – widows, castoff wives and untouchables who would otherwise be homeless, destitute or murdered with impunity – and gives them shelter and job. Sakharam Binder, a bookbinder takes in a succession of women who have been thrown out of their homes by their husbands. He offers them food, shelter and living essentials in exchange for domestic services and companionship. Brahmin by birth, Sakharam fiercely opposes the hypocrisy he sees in the institution of marriage and practices this

alternative arrangement in his home. He even offers to give them a *sari*, fifty rupees and a ticket to wherever they want to go.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar, who was born in 1928 in Kolhapur, India, is a leading contemporary Indian playwright, screen and television writer, literacy essayist, political journalist and social commentator for the past five decades. He has been the most influential dramatist and theater personality in Marathi. Tendulkar was born in a Bhalavalikar Saraswat Brahmin family in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, where his father held a clerical job and ran a small publication business. The literary environment at home prompted young Vijay to take up writing. He wrote his first story at the age of six. He grew up watching western plays and felt inspired to write plays himself. At age eleven he wrote, directed and acted in his first play. At the age of 14 he participated in the 1942, Indian freedom movement leaving his studies. This later alienated him from his family and friends writing then became his outlet though most of his early writings were of a personal nature, and intended for publication.

Vijaya Tendulkar is the most prolific writer who has to his credit twenty eight full-length plays, seven collections of one-act plays, six collections of children's plays, four collections of short stories, three of essays besides seventeen film scripts and a novel, all in a span of fifty years. Critics bring our notice to the prismatic quality of his writings and it is this that can be spotted in his writings, especially in the plays -- *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Gidhade*, *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, *Sakaram Binder*, *Kamala*, *Kanyadaan* to name a few, and his movie, *Nishant*, *Aakrosh*, *Manthan* and *Ardha Satya*. He has been celebrated as the 'Playwriter of the Millennium.' His plays which have been perceived by critics as being ahead of their times, are also timeless, because of his accurate and sensitive portrayal of the social issues of the time.



Balwant Bhaneja regards Tendulkar as a prolific writer as he takes him as a giant among these modern Indian playwrights, both in terms of the volume and quality of his dramatic creations – a subtle observer of Indian social reality, a humanist, an innovative playwright who continuously experimented with form and structures. He was known for his “‘insightful objectification’ in the development of multi-layered characters whose existential angst was held up against the social crises of the society” (Bhaneja 11).

Tendulkar is a realist writer as he does not write about fictitious subjects. He depicts the reality of society. He himself has said in an interview with Sumit Saxena:

I have not written about hypothetical pain or created an imaginary world of sorrow. I am from a middle class family and I 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.

(8)

So, Tendulkar's plays have dealt with themes that unravel the exploitation of power and latent violence in human relationships. As he noted: “[T]he basic urge (to write) has always been to let out my concerns vis-à-vis my reality: the human condition as I perceive it” (x).

Tendulkar began his career writings for newspapers. He began to write a play *Amchyavar Kon Prem Kamar* (who will love us) and he also wrote a play *Gruhastha* (The Householder) in the early 20's; the later did not receive much recognition from the audience. In 1956, he wrote *Shrimant* which established him a good writer. In 1961, Tendulkar wrote the play, *Gidhade*

(The Vultures) but it was not produced until 1970. Gidhade proved to be a turning point in Tendulkar's writing with regard to establishment of his own unique writing style.

Tendulkar's *Silence: The Court is in Session* (1967) is a milestone not only in his career but in the history of whole Marathi drama. He was now marked out as a rebel against the establishment values of a fundamentally orthodox society. In his next play *Sakharam Binder* (1972) Tendulkar has dealt with the issue of domination of the male gender over the female. For many decades no play created such a sensation in a theatre world of Maharashtra as this play *Sakharam Binder*. It is probably the most intensity naturalistic play. In 1972, Tendulkar wrote a musical play *Ghashiram Kotwal* (Ghashiram the Constable), which dealt with political violence. The play is a political satire created as a musical drama set in 18th century Pune. It combined traditional Marathi folk music and drama with contemporary theater technique, creating a new Paradigm for Marathi Theater. It brought him a "Jawaharlal Nehru fellowship", (1974-75) for a project titled, "An Enquiry into the Pattern of Growing Violence in Society and its Relevance to Contemporize Theatre".

*Ghashiram Kotwal* remains one of the longest running plays in the history of Indian Theater. *Ghashiram* rose to such furores, that there came international recognition, although the play received fierce opposition from the local Marathi audience. By its admixture of melody in the Aristotelian sense with prose dialogues *Ghashiram*, created a new form of drama on the Marathi stage. Such a mode of drama received not only national but global acceptance. Tendulkar wrote screen-plays for the movies *Nishant* (1974), *Akrosh* (the cry) (1980), and *Ardhsatya* (the half truth) (1984), which established him as an important "chronicler of violence of the present time" (Bharan 19). He has

written eleven movies in Hindi and eight movies in Marathi. In 1990's Tendulkar wrote an acclaimed TV-series Swayamsiddha in which his daughter, Priya Tendulkar performed in the lead role. His son Raja and wife Nirmala both died in 2001, and were shortly followed by his daughter, actress Priya Tendulkar in 2002. In his writing career spanning more than five decades Tendulkar has written 27 full length plays and 25 one act plays. By providing insight into major social events and political upheavals in his adult life, Tendulkar has become one of the “‘strongest radical political voices’ in Maharashtra in recent times” (Gokhle 81).

Tendulkar’s plays give an insight into major social events and political upheavals during his adult life, the way he courageously exposes the hypocrisies in the Indian social mindset is the actual point to be noted. He uses powerful expression to reveal the orthodox society. Although highly criticized, he is far ahead of his times to give wings to his flights of imagination with its solid heels on earth. The best thing about his plays is that they can be related to the real life of a middle class man. Many of Tendulkar’s plays derive inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals. The way he galvanizes theatre through his provocative explorations of morality, power, and violence, deserves a great applause. The reason behind his huge success is the accurate and sensitive portrayal of the social issues of the time.

The ‘middle class’, an emotion-ridden if ultimately elusive concept, has been redefined by Tendulkar as those fighting privilege to escape the economic insecurity (not to mention the indignity). In a country characterized by poverty and inequality, the complex interplay of these factors can have favorable or adverse effects on different regions and on different classes of society. Tendulkar has untapped this group's position in the class hierarchy and

in the overall power structure, as well as its environmental vulnerability.

Generally, people from the middle strata are likely to be the greatest sufferers in this process. What he has portrayed gives a great matter for Tendulkar's ideas to flourish and ripen.

Not only class but gender is an important dimension of patterns of the class division which drew the attention of Tendulkar. In this regard, A.N. Prasad and Saryug Yadav note, "In his feminist research on the effects of development on women Tendulkar has clearly revealed that in many areas of the country the rights of women are infringed and women are exploited emotionally, socially, and physically" (21). Tendulkar's *Kamala* (1981) is a play inspired by a real-life incident, in which Ashwin Sarin, who actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented her at a press conference. At the center of the play is a self-seeking journalist, Jaisingh Jadav, who treats the woman he has purchased from the flesh market as an object that can buy him a promotion in his job and a reputation in his professional life. Tendulkar raises certain "cardinal questions regarding the value system of a modern success-oriented generation which is ready to sacrifice human values even in the name of humanity itself" (Tandon 159). The innate self-deception of this standpoint is exposed dramatically by the playwright.

Tendulkar successfully gives the readers a clear insight into the lives of his individual characters and evokes empathy for them all, as they seem to be victims of their own trappings. His portrayal of women characters range from the socially deprived characters who are so close to the real life. Tendulkar's strengths are evident and there is tenderness and realism in his depiction of the central character he focused upon. Vijay Tendulkar happens to be one of the most prolific Indian playwrights who have enriched the Indian drama and

theatre by picturing the varied problems of native life in Maharashtra. The main reason for our attraction for him is that he does not copy from or imitate the Western dramatists and thrust it on the native audience. Tendulkar successfully ventures in unveiling the social turpitude and the holocaust in which the main interests of the fairer sex are almost strangled. His iconoclastic endeavors shake the very ground of the established values of a fundamentally orthodox Indian society.

Tendulkar won Maharashtra State Awards in 1956, 1969 and Maharashtra “Gauruw Puraskar” in 1999. He was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1970, and again in 1998 with the Academy's highest award for “Life time Contribution”. In 1998 he won the Sangeet Natak Academy fellowship.

Thus, Tendulkar is a creative writer with a fine sensibility and at the same time a contemplative and controversial dramatist. He has made a mark in the field of journalism also. So, because of his highly individual outlook on his vision of life and because of his personal style of writing he has made a mark in the field of literature. By doing so he has put Marathi drama on the national and international map. According to Ram Sharma,

Tendulkar has contributed to the laying of the foundation of a distinctive tradition in the history of Indian drama by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk love with context to contemporary socio-political issues. A cumulative theatrical tradition evolved by Vijay Tendulkar and other contemporary dramatists prepared the background of contemporary Indian English theatre. (10)

This proves that Tendulkar is a multifaceted creative genius, who experimented and explored the potentials of the dramatic genre. Tendulkar's plays have a massive impact on the tender and fresh minds of the worldwide avid readers.

Tendulkar is a towering and glowering Indian dramatist and all his plays are sharply focused and illuminating. Through his writings he attacks the society hypocrisies. Thematically, his plays have ranged from the alienation of the modern individual to contemporary politics from social-individual tensions to the complexities of human character, from the exploration of man woman relationship to reinterpretations of historical episodes. The themes of gender relation, sexual norms, institution of marriage and issues of conventional morality have been featured prominently in his plays. In *Silence! The Court is in Session*, Tendulkar has combined social criticism with the tragedy of an individual victimized by society. *Sakharam Binder* explores with great objectivity the complication in human nature two necessary components of which are sex and violence. His *Ghashiram Kotwal* deals with political violence.

Tendulkar, through his writings, has exposed the theme of man's existential Loneliness. There is a streak of naturalism and humanism in all his plays. All his plays convey a social message through his writings he wanted to make society a better place to live in. Tendulkar exposes alienation of modern individual to contemporary politics. Ram Sharma writes:

He also exposed men's dominance over women, his portraiture of overt and covert violence in human-beings and above all his deep and abiding consciousness of women's vulnerability in Indian social hierarchy. Tendulkar's central concern is the

relationship between individual and society. In play after play he has made effective presentation of the latent violence and lust in middle class life, the consequent devastation and the essential loneliness of man. He has depicted the indomitable and grit of human spirit. (9)

We find the idea of the social and aesthetic concerns in all plays. His primary compulsion is and has always been humanistic. Man's fight for survival, the varied moralities by which we live, the social position of women, these are his binding concern.

In his plays, he portrays the human lives which are stagnated in the mire of personal frustration, sexual innuendo. He tried to expose the essential artificiality of the society. All his plays have a direct, one to one relationship with society. This prolific writer has also exposed. The patriarchal set up of marriage a means of not only regulating sexual and reproductive behavior but also a means of upholding male dominance.

### **Literature Review**

Vijaya Tendulkar is the most prolific writer among the very few contemporary Indian playwrights who has to his credit twenty eight full-length plays, seven collections of one-act plays, six collections of children's plays, four collections of short stories, three of essays besides seventeen film scripts and a novel, all in a span of fifty years. Critics bring our notice to the prismatic quality of his writings and it is this that can be spotted in his writings. He has been celebrated as the "Playwriter of the Millennium." His plays which have been perceived by critics as being ahead of their times, are

also timeless, because of his accurate and sensitive portrayal of the social issues of the time.

Rajni Singh Solanki views that in Sakharam Binder Tendulkar demonstrates how society “adds to the depreciation of women as human being and deprives them of most of human rights, relative to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the Individual” (749). He shows how women are exploited, tortured and victimized in postcolonial India.

Rajni Singh Solanki finds elements of naturalism in Sakharam Binder as he says:

The most naturalistic play, Tendulkar’s Sakharam Binder (1972) revolves round its central character, Sakharam a book binder, a Brahmin by caste but presents an antithesis to the general conception of a member of his community. He also exploits women, tortures them and treats them mere as an object of Lust, both mentally and physically, day and night . . . (749)

Tendulkar's plays have dealt with themes that unravel the exploitation of power and latent violence in human relationships. As Shanta Gokhle noted: “the basic urge (to write) has always been to let out my concerns vis-à-vis my reality: the human condition as I perceive it” (79).

From the above-mentioned criticism, it becomes clear that though the text has been analyzed from various perspectives, subaltern perspective has not been applied yet. Hence, this researcher seeks to examine this perspective in this play.

The work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a glimpse of Vijay Tendulkar, his writing and a short critical response. The



second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It basically discusses the theory of Subaltern Studies with its origin, form and practice as a theoretical tool to analyze the text.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Tendulkar explores subaltern consciousness about subalternity during the time of Independence in India. It tries to prove the hypothesis of the study – So, in Sakharam Binder, though he cannot work altruistically, Sakharam's attempt of rehabilitating the poor and social outcastes reflects the need of recognizing and uplifting those who lack agency in society, which testifies to Tendulkar's subaltern consciousness. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

## Chapter II

### Exploring Subaltern Consciousness in the Play *Sakharam Binder*

This research studies Vijay Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder* from the perspective of subaltern studies as the play represents the voice of subaltern people. It seeks to provide space for underrepresented worldviews and experiences of non-elite groups. The play is full of poor peasant workers, widow, outcaste female characters – who represent and seek a sense of place and belonging – a home within homelands torn apart by colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. It is a play whose story stretches out from and around the experiences of South Asian Indian characters as grand historical events of nation. *Sakharam Binder* also includes an overlooked history of rural and peasant people especially women.

The title character of the play Sakharam helps other men's discarded women – widows, cast-off wives and untouchables who are homeless, destitute or murdered with impunity – and provides them with food and lodging. Though Sakharam provides the women with basic necessities, he tends to exploit them as he makes the work very hard for him. At the same time, he opposes the hypocrisy he sees in the institution of marriage and practices this alternative arrangement in his home. He even offers to give fare to wherever they want to go if they do not like to stay with him. So, in *Sakharam Binder*, though he cannot work altruistically, Sakharam's attempt of rehabilitating the poor and social outcasts reflects the need of recognizing and uplifting those subaltern people who lack agency in Indian society in the postcolonial India, which testifies to Tendulkar's subaltern consciousness. But, Sakharam fails to fully challenge the elitist historiography of India.

### Relating the Saga of Subaltern Characters

Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder* relates the saga of poor orphaned boy, named Sakharam's three generations: himself, his sons and granddaughter. Though Sakharam is poor man from low social background, Tendulkar gives him voice by elevating him to the status of the social worker. His story begins from his childhood when he is left stranded at the harbor where he used to work on the sampan. Later, when he is given work in the house, a woman who has no shelter helps Sakharam because he works very hard to the satisfaction of his employer. As the play is set in the aftermath of colonial time in India, the effect of colonization is clearly seen in the play, which Sakharam is well aware right from his childhood. Only Sakharam is aware of these explosions left by British invaders as the story revolves round him, which is dealt with in a very subtle manner. This makes imperative to study the play from the perspective of subalternity.

The play has three central characters, Sakharam, Laxmi and Champa. Sakharam, is the pivotal character. Though he is in some places presented by Tendulkar as an opportunistic male, a self proclaimed womanizer who loves to drink and doesn't give a damn about social values, I attribute all this to the elite ideology and hegemony. I do not hold Sakharam fully responsible for the entire negative connotation which Suresh Nair provides as he notes:

Like a predator preying on the weakest among the herd, he  
[Sakharam] finds women abandoned by their husbands.  
Dishonored from society and unable to provide for themselves,  
Sakharam with his offer of a house to stay, two square meals,  
two set of clothes might at first seem like a savior. But it comes  
with a heavy price. An almost slave like existence under a tyrant  
master, who demands satisfaction of his hunger and other bodily

needs and liberally uses his mouth for slander and hands for beating. (3)

Most importantly, the play's beginning with Sakharam bringing home Laxmi, a timid soul, abandoned by her husband for not having kids reflects subaltern consciousness. Of course Sakharam is exceptionally clear in telling her of what's involved, in an almost well practiced speech. Tendulkar does not tell us what happened with most of them, except that the previous one died of TB. And while talking about her there is a lot to commend the side of Sakharam which seems almost human and solicitous for the exploited. Also what comes across is his hatred of the institution of marriage, husbands in particular. Therein lays the complexity of the character. The same person, who seems to hate marriage, tells each woman that he expects them to stay with him as if she is his married wife. The women are each free to leave him whenever they desire, yet as long as they live in the house they are not even supposed to talk or keep contact with anyone else. Is this irony just his selfish assumption of what a marriage should be or a mockery of that institution? There are subtle hints about his background, his childhood which make one wonder whether he too is just a victim of his past. However, the play dramatizes lived experiences of poor people.

The concept of the subaltern refers to any person or group of 'inferior rank' because of several reasons. This concept refers to the groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes. As Gramsci concretely used the term for the proletariat or working class and claimed that the subaltern classes had just as complex a history as the dominant classes, the characters in *Sakharam Binder* are from working class background and have different history. However, this "unofficial" history of Indian subaltern in the

play has been fragmented and episodic as the characters Dawood, a Muslim Laxmi and Champa since even when they rebel, the subaltern are always subject to the activity of the ruling classes which Sakharam also represents to some extent. However, in Gramsci's theory, the term 'subaltern' is linked up with the subordinated consciousness of non-elite groups such Laxmi and Champa.

Although the notion of Subaltern Studies appeared in 1982 in India under the title of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on Indian History and Society* to rewrite or reinterpret the overlooked historiography of the non-elite groups, this theory is applicable to Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder* which was written in 1972 as the play explores the subordinated consciousness of non-elite groups such as Sakharam, Dawood, Laxmi and Champa. Subaltern Studies offers debates specific to the writing of modern Indian history from the perspective of margin. It exceeds the discipline of history, participating in contemporary critiques of history and nationalism, and of orientalism and euro-centrism in the construction of social-science knowledge. It tries its best to establish the subalterns like Sakharam as free from elite hegemony. The group led by Ranjit Guha, has endeavored to provide the subaltern people with their own voice. This group of historians "aimed to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian society" (Guha vii). These historians' objective has been to examine the conditions of subordination in South Asian Society in terms of class, caste, age gender, and so on. As the major characters in the play are women, non-Brahmin and poor in Indian society, the subaltern theorists' concern is meant for giving voice to their subdued voices.

As the subaltern study has now become a standard way to designate the colonial peoples who were or have been exploited by “colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism” (Guha 1), the whole concept of subaltern subject is now to resist this colonial or elitist discourse rather than subscribe to it. This is what Sakharam does as he blurs the boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims as he beats one of the women, Laxmi for disallowing a Muslim, Dawood in singing aarti for Ganapati. He does not discriminate people on the basis of religion. In the play, when Laxmi does not allow Dawood who is a Muslim to join in singing aarti for a prayer to Ganapati? Tendulkar writes:

LAXMI. What's wrong with what I said? How can a Muslim join in a prayer to Ganapati?

SAKHARAM. Why not? If I can join in, why can't he? (144)

Sakharam's statement reflects his subaltern consciousness, which also shows the bond between two modes of subaltern consciousnesses. This also shows the bond between two subaltern characters. So, many postcolonial writers in India and Africa have now taken the task of resistance by writing in favour of colonized and marginalized minority groups such as women, Muslims and other peasant workers.

Subaltern Studies raises questions about history writing that made the business of a radical departure from English Marxist historiographical traditions, inescapable. It started as a critique of two contending schools of history: the Cambridge School and that of the nationalist historians. Both of these approaches, declared Guha in a statement that inaugurated the series Subaltern Studies, were elitist, as those historians could not understand “the contributions made by people on their own, that is, independently of the elite to the making and development of this nationalism” (6), even as they wrote up

the history of nationalism as the story of an achievement by the elite classes, whether Indian or British.

The story of *Sakharam Binder* also includes a recorded history. The immediate impulse, then, would be to read this play as a postcolonial text that receives and has silently transformed Anglo-colonial biased histories that revises or have silenced and/or erased the subaltern presence. The play's revisiting of historical events can be read as a symbolic and real restoration of subaltern history and cultural memory that, as Azade Seyhar comments generally, "accord meaning, purpose, and integrity to the past" (15). So, the play guides its readers to interpret its narrative as a subaltern historical narrative. The play gives a relative picture of historical, details. Tendulkar's cast literally includes poor women buffeted about by the gale-winds of history; these protagonists are driven from settled homes. In particular, Tendulkar has shown the portrait of poor and unnoticeable cast-off women's lived experiences to depict the history of subaltern mass.

As Ranjit Guha writes that the word "subaltern," is used in the book "as a name for the general attribute of "subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age gender, and office or in any other way" (vii). He includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes. Sakharam Binder, who is the main character of the play, thinks that he has the system by the tail and he can disregard the culture and societal values as long as he is truthful and serves the exploited and the downtrodden groups. He finds the whole system as the de facto enslavement of women in postcolonial India, despite the promises of democracy and modernity. Sakharam has been left stranded in India as a young boy who is the only person aware of the activities

of socio-economic issues -- exploitation, oppression and discrimination. Sakharam comes from low and humble socio-economic background. He says that he can work hard to earn his living. He says, "If I lose one job, I can find another. I'll carry loads or break stones. After all, there's no getting away from work, Dawood. . . . I have always fended for myself. See! Never called my own father, Father. And as for my mother, to her I was like the son of a wretched Mahar, a scavenger. I grew up like a cactus – out in the open" (172).

As Sakharam is the centerpiece of the play, the conversations between the characters revolve around the reactions the drama received when it was first performed Sakharam says, "I carry two things in my mouth-either a beedi or an expletive" (137). That is what he is. You can't clean his language. Then he stops being Sakharam. This shows a subaltern character's risk, which Tendulkar highlights. That is why, Sakharam, as a bookbinder and thus a subaltern himself, picks up discarded women -- castoff wives and widows, who have become homeless, destitute or murdered with impunity as a result of domineering males -- and gives them shelter in his house. He treats one of such women named Laxmi when she first comes to his shelter:

SAKHARAM. Come in. Have a good look around. You're going to live here now. This house is like me. I won't have you complaining later on. Yes, look carefully around the place. If you think it's all right. Put down your bundle get two square meals. Two saries to start with and then one every year. And not a fancy one at that. I won't hear any complains later. I like everything in order here. Won't put up with slipshod ways. If you're careless, I'll show you the door. Don't ask for any pity then. And don't blame me either. I'm the master here. I don't care if they treat



me like dirt outside. But a house must be a home, you understand? (126)

Though he seems very strict in his dealings with the women he has given shelter, yet each woman is told that she is free to leave whenever she likes as he provides them any help they may require in future. He says to her that she can take anything – “clothes, chappals, bangles etc. (135), she is given by him in his house. He expects everything good and proper, as far as Sakharam is concerned. He says he is no husband to forget common decency. He does not care what society dictates and what he does not anticipate are the moral and emotional complications of this arrangement. He says:

It's 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 had enough, if she's had enough, you can always part. The game is over. Nothing to bother you after that. While it lasts, she has a roof over her head, and you get home-cooked food. That's a cheap way of fixing all your appetites. No need for you to go begging to another's house! (129)

Moreover, Tendulkar exposes the male ideology and hegemony that has relegated to the subaltern position. He shows how women are compelled to worship their husbands even though they never respect and female subjectivity and individuality. Whenever Laxmi refuses to take her husband's name as she says, “. . . a good wife is not supposed to utter his name? I'm not used to all this!” (133). This reflects the pitiable situation of women. This is the subordination and subjugation of women who are treated as inferior beings, not equal as men. Sakharam endeavours to lift the women from such a miserable situation. In fact, he carries a sense of consciousness about women's

subalternity. He indirectly motivates and inspires women to raise their voices against the exploiters in Indian society. In response to Laxmi's hesitancy to take name her husband's name, he questions her:

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 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. Gods, eh? . . . You women, you're all the same. Suckled by dead mothers! Corpses! That's what you are. You get kicked by your husbands and you go and fall at their feet! (133)

Sakharam takes care that Laxmi eats well when she lives in his house when he knows that she takes fasting. He acts as a mother figure as well. He reminds her of the torture her husbands has given her. Instead, he tells her to worship God. He means to say that the exploited groups like women in Indian society are compelled to worship their husbands as God. In fact, this works to make Laxmi more conscious and rebellious to challenge the oppressive patriarchy.

Tendulkar writes:

SAKHARAM. Do you want to kill yourself, fasting like this?

LAXMI. I am used to it.

SAKHARAM. Used to it! It won't do in this house. Here you must eat well. Twice a day. You'll need all your strength, if you are going to serve me. All these fasts must end. I'm warning you! Go, Go and sleep. (134)

Sakharam's narration about a miserable woman's death in his house also reflects how he has dedicated himself to serving and uplifting the condition of subaltern women. When Laxmi asks him if she had any children, he answers that how the husband took away the children separating the children from the mother. Sakharam says:

SAKHARAM. Two. The husband kept them. That's why she pined away. Those last moments she was gasping for breath, but she kept on repeating her husband's name. She remembered the children. I gave her last sip of water, but the name on her lips was her husband's. (154)

Sakharam relates to Laxmi that he did everything good and proper for the women from taking hospital to lighting the funeral pyre after her death. Sakharam's narration shows how women lack agency in male-dominated society, as a result when they die they do not get proper burial.

Another woman who ends up into Sakharam's house for shelter is Champa. She has a rebellious nature as she has suffered a lot at the hands of her husband. She relates her life story to Sakharam:

CHAMPA. No, I don't have a heart. He chewed it up raw long ago. [Pulls herself free.] He brought me from my mother even before I'd become a women. 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. Get up, you pig. I'll stuff some chilly powder into you now! (167)

The present trend of postcolonial and third world literature has been to raise the issue of marginalized groups and their culture. In this backdrop, almost all the postcolonial and third world writers have concerned themselves to represent and give voices to marginalized or suppressed voices in their writings. As Subaltern Studies Group has been found to record the historiography of the subaltern-marginalized people in the third world countries, it is needless to say that Vijay Tendulkar has risen to prominence in the field of English literature because of his brilliant depiction of third world experience and issues in his play *Sakharam Binder*.

In subaltern studies, Guha claims that Subaltern Studies studies “the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as to the attitudes, ideologies and belief systems--in short, the culture informing that condition” (vii). This shows that Subaltern Studies focuses on its commitment to history and culture of the non-elites. As the elite historiography is generally commuted to the ‘elitist or official history’ overlooking the marginalized people’s history, Subaltern Studies has helped “to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area” (vii), *Sakharam* and the women’s consciousness about their predicament has contributed to subverting the elitist hegemony. This shows that Subaltern Studies serves the interest of the marginalized people by making them conscious whereas elite historiography stands for official history, which is always elitist and bourgeois which. It can never work for the people from the lower strata, who are the poor, the oppressed, and the peasants like *Sakharam* and the displaced women.

In fact, the concept has been adopted and adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies historians group. As Sakharam, Dawood, Laxmi and Champa include all oppressed groups – working class, peasantry, women, and tribal communities and used it as a name for a general attribute of subordination. The project as such was lead by Ranajit Guha with the explicit aim of expanding and enriching Gramsci's notion of the subaltern by locating and re-establishing a "voice" or collective locus of agency in postcolonial India. The purpose of the Subaltern Studies project was therefore to redress the imbalance created in academic work by a tendency to focus on elites and elite culture in South Asian historiography. Paraphrasing Guha's influential "On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India" (37-44) the goals of the group stemmed from the belief that the historiography of the victorious pro-independence movement in India was dominated by elitism – both British colonialist and local bourgeois nationalist. Such historic literature suggested that the development of Indian national consciousness was an exclusive elite achievement and failed to acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by "the people on their own", that is, "independently of the elite" (Bose 39). In this respect, "the politics of the people" (Bose 40) should be understood as an autonomous domain that operates outside elite politics.

One clear example of this radical difference between the elite and the subaltern would be the nature of political mobilization. Whereas elite mobilization was achieved vertically through the adaptation of British parliamentary institutions, the subaltern relied on traditional modes of social organization where popular mobilizations took the form of peasant uprisings. In *Sakharam Binder*, Sakharam and other women are never politically mobilized. Rather they try to raise their voice in a more passivve way as they

cannot go beyond social values dictated by the elits. Laxmi's resistance which comes out of living with Sakharam as she challenges Sakharam when he tries to dominate her:

LAXMI. You think I'm afraid to tell you? How much more can a person bear? It's a year now since I entered this house. I haven't had a single day's rest. Whether I'm sick or whether it's a festal day. Nothing but work, work; work all the time. You torture me the whole day, you torture me at night. I'll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end. (146)

Moreover, the contention by the Subaltern Group would continue to be that this remains a primary locus of political action, despite the change in the political structure of independent India. In other words, despite the great diversity of subaltern groups, the one unvarying feature continued to be encapsulated in the notion of resistance to elite domination. In such a context "the failure of the Indian elite to speak for the nation" (41) meant that the nation of India failed "to come into its own" and for Guha "it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India" (SS I 43).

In order to guard against essentialist views of subalternity, Guha himself has acknowledged that the 'people' or the 'subaltern' is a group fundamentally defined by difference from the elite but willingly conceded on the diversity, heterogeneity and overlapping nature of subaltern groups. He thus suggested further distinctions to be made between the two main opposites: the subaltern and the dominant. In the *Sakharam Binder* Laxmi, and Champa are lower subaltern whereas Sakharam is from middle class peasantry. Ideally speaking thereby the category of 'the people' within the context of

postcolonial India would be made up of different types of ‘subaltern classes’ ranging from the lowest strata of the rural gentry to the upper-middle peasants. Moreover, the elite itself would come to be defined according to three different geo-political positions (the dominant foreign groups, the dominant (all India) indigenous groups and the regional or local elites generally acting on behalf of the former.)

Undoubtedly, Subaltern Studies seeks to “rewrite the nation outside the state-centered national discourse that replicates colonial power knowledge in a world of globalization” (20). Subaltern Studies, therefore, has brought a major change in the elitist perspective of historiographies as the play records the exploited history of the margin. As a result of that, subaltern people are now identified as the agent of change in society as reflected through Laxmi and Champa. They possess the potential to bring about change so as to counter the elite hegemonic values.

Subaltern Studies, as a new kind of national history, “consists of dispersed moments and fragments, which subaltern historians seek in ethnographic colonialism” (Ludden 20). This kind of historiography, of course, “constitutes subversive politics because it exposes forms of power/knowledge that oppress subaltern people and also because it provides liberating alternatives” (Ibid 20). In the process of inquiring colonialism, and its aftermath “the historians and postcolonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern people, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past” (Ibid 20). The historians should aspire to create “a liberated imagined community” (Ibid 20) which “can come into its own in subaltern language and memory. They, not unlike magical realists, should

make themselves free from “the shackles of chronological, linear time” (Ibid 20). Indeed, it has developed into a cultural history as it is based on the culture of the subaltern people. In the process of its multicultural take off, it has been “more detached from the history project” (Ibid 20). As a postcolonial cultural critique, Subaltern Studies aspires “to restore the integrity of indigenous histories that appear naturally in non-linear, oral, symbolic, vernacular and dramatic forms” (Ibid 20). As we know, Subaltern Studies has already moved away from people’s politics to the study of the culture of the subaltern people. Now it tends to take resort to cultural as well as literary modes to inquire into history. It, too, is a great shift in the people's perspective to know history. "The first emancipating act that the Subaltern Studies project performs in our understanding of tribes, castes or other such groups”, as Veena Das writes in her article “Subaltern as Perspective,” “is to restore to them their historical being” (314). In all, its commitment to restore history of subaltern people is rather genuine aspect about Subaltern Studies. Indeed, David Ludden says that Subaltern Studies has become “an original sight for anew kind of history from below, a people's history free of national constraints” (12).

### **Subaltern Consciousness in *Sakharam Binder***

As subaltern people have now become more conscious of their situation, subaltern consciousness is another hotly debated issue about Subaltern Studies. Spivak, in her seminal essay “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, gives a deconstructive reading to the activities of Subaltern Studies Group in their third volumes. She tries to assess their work in her writing. Like many other critics, she, too, finds problem with their compartmentalized views of consciousness. While assessing their work, she comes to realize that it somehow resembles deconstruction, which puts the



binary oppositions like elite/subaltern under erasure. Their project, in her view, is a rather positivist one as it aspires to investigate, discover and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness. It somehow assumes that this empirical project will lead to a firm ground or truth that can be disclosed. It conspicuously reflects European Enlightenment project because the latter, too, aspires to recover consciousness. For consciousness is considered to be the very ground that makes the disclosure of truth or firm ground possible.

However, their attempt seems to be more of an idealistic. Spivak thinks that “consciousness, here, is not consciousness-in-general, but a historicized political species, subaltern consciousness” (338). She, therefore, regards their effort to recover peasant consciousness as a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest. She suggests “that its own subalternity in claiming a positive subject-position for the subaltern might be reinscribed as a strategy for our times” (345). This would allow them to use critical force of anti-humanism. However, this consciousness must be used in narrow sense, as self consciousness, if they really want it to be a fruitful strategy. She, again, reinforces their strategic use of “peasant consciousness” by saying that they (Subaltern Studies Group) should be “concerned not with consciousness-in-general but in this crucial narrow sense” (342). This narrow sense means that subaltern people should become conscious of themselves first.

As the subaltern people are always marginalized, they are easily motivated for rebellion. The academics who write about subalternity endeavor to establish the subaltern people as the subject of insurgency. So, they intend to focus on subaltern consciousness as their central theme. Otherwise, the

subaltern people's experience of insurgency would be turned into a history of events without a subject.

Despite adverse situation, Sakharam gets success in the press as a book binder because of his strong determination which is reflective of subaltern character. In this business, he gets helps from the women whom he has given shelter in his house a lot because the other European traders try to cheat them. He does not tolerate injustice and ill-treatment against the marginalized people, because he is aware of the hegemonic power's interest in the third world countries. Sakharam thus rises to affluence struggling against the odds. As a subaltern, he consciously works hard for himself as well as others.

Meanwhile, we should not forget that “defiance”, as Gautam Bhadra says, “is not the only characteristic behavior of the subaltern classes” (63) but also “submissive to authority” equally important feature of their behaviors. Although “defiance” and “submissiveness” reflect the subaltern mentality, it is very clear that subaltern consciousness possesses the potentiality to challenge the elite class as Laxmi challenges Sakharam:

Why do you look at me like that? What am I worth round here?  
 After all, I'm just a caste-off wife. Who cares if my foot  
 burns black? What are you staring at? Aren't you ashamed of  
 yourself? Go away. Don't dare show me your black face again.  
 Go on, get out Ooch. . . . Go on, go. Or else I'll hit you . . . you. .  
 . . (140)

Certainly, the very notion of the subaltern has become an issue in post-colonial theory when Gayatri Spivak takes on the main assumptions of the Subaltern Group. This she did in the seminal essay “Can the Subaltern speak?” (1985) where her first criticism was directed at Gramsci's claim for autonomy

of the subaltern group. This essay is credited to have brought the subalternity into postcolonial domain. In this essay, she presents women as a subaltern group. From her perspective, Laxmi and Champa as women are subaltern people. This approach would make the concept rather ineffective because it tended to determine the subaltern group and subaltern identity as a homogeneous entity. Instead, the need to conceive subversive agencies would require that identity should be thought of as being fragmented to allow for multiple alliances to take place.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” – by the means of an extended discussion of sati, Spivak presents as emblem of the subaltern in the case of a political activist who sought to communicate her personal predicament through her suicide, but whose communication was foiled by the codes of patriarchy and colonialism in which her actions were inevitably inscribed. Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She hanged herself in 1926 at the onset of menstruation so that her death would not be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. But her death was remembered as a case of illicit love. Since her actions are not only inscribed, but also read in terms of the dominant codes of British imperialism and Indian patriarchy, Spivak concludes that the subaltern cannot speak. This applies to Laxmi who cannot speak, as a result she shares her sorrows and pains with the ants. The subaltern characters Laxmi lacks agency in Indian society in the postcolonial period. As a result, they are compelled to share their happiness and sorrows with the non-human beings like ants. Laxmi talks to the ant:

I had to face the music and all on account of you! That's right.

You eat the sugar and I get the scolding. Nobody believes me.

Ants, sparrows, crows--they all talk to me. What do you talk to me? Eh? Why must you talkee-talkee to me? Go on . . . tell me . . . You naughty fellow . . . Tell me . . . (139)

This shows women in India are relegated to subaltern position. They are treated as like animals on the one hand. But if we look from another perspective, Laxmi's act reflects her ecological or ecocritical consciousness. When Sakharam hears her conversation with the ant, he scolds her. It reveals the male's tendency to subjugate women. Spivak's conclusion is preceded by a critique of Foucault and Deleuze, through which she discusses the dangers of re-inscribing imperial assumptions in colonial studies, and of Antonio Gramsci's and Ranajit Guha's treatments of subalternity, in which her main focus is Guha's analysis of the social structure of postcolonial societies.

While portraying the subaltern as female, Spivak seems to be arguing that the subaltern's voice/consciousness cannot be retrieved, and that analysis should indicate this impossibility by charting the positions from which the subaltern speaks, but "cannot be heard or read" (308). In a subsequent interview with Howard Winant, saying that she had been misunderstood, Spivak claimed that the purpose had been to counter the impulse to solve the problem of political subjectivity by romanticizing the subaltern. Instead of treating the subaltern as an unproblematic unified subject, she would apply to the subaltern "all the complications of 'subject production' which are applied to us" (90). Spivak critiques Western poststructuralist theory as represented by Foucault and Deleuze and its tendency to reinstitute the notion of a Western sovereign subject in the act of deconstructing it. She goes on to posit the irretrievable heterogeneity of the subaltern subject, effaced by the orientaling construction of sovereign subjectivity defined by power and desire. Foucault

and Deleuze, she argues, inadvertently impose a Western Subject on the place of the subaltern. Spivak suggests that the term 'subaltern' refers to the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence [of imperialist/colonialist law and education], men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribal, the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat on the other side of the international division of labor form socialized capital.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak's aim is, in her words, "to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the non-elite" (271). Spivak suggests using the term 'subaltern' for everything that is different from organized resistance, justifying this usage by building on Guha's introduction to his *Subaltern Studies* where he is making an analysis of how a colonial society is structured, and what space can be spoken of as the subaltern space. Though Sakharam endeavours to lift the miserable status of women in India, he is so strict in his principles that he never compromises on any mistakes or carelessness. Whenever Laxmi does not act as per his expectations, he drives her out of the house. But Laxmi has become so conscious that she directly challenges Sakharam saying: "Laxmi. A dead hen does not fear the fire! Nothing more terrible can happen to me now. I have been through everything in this house. The whole world knows what goes on here. Even the children talk . . ." (147). This resistance on the part of Laxmi is not organized one, but dispersed one.

Spivak's essay, "Deconstructing Historiography" served as the introduction to this selection. This essay of Spivak's and a review essay by Rosalind O'Hanlon published about the same time made two important criticisms of *Subaltern Studies*, which had a serious impact on the later

intellectual trajectory of the project. Both Spivak and O'Hanlon pointed to the absence of gender questions in Subaltern Studies. They also made a more fundamental criticism of the theoretical orientation of the project. They pointed out, in effect, that Subaltern Studies historiography operated with an idea of the subject to make the subaltern the maker of his own destiny, which had not wrestled at all with critique of the very idea of the subject itself that had been mounted by poststructuralist thinkers.

So, Spivak gives enough insight to deconstruct elitist historiography of India. Subaltern Studies scholars have since tried to take these criticisms on board. The charges about the absence of gender issues and the lack of engagement with feminist scholarship in Subaltern Studies have been met to some degree by some seminal essays by Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, and by contributions made by Susie Tharu on contemporary feminist theory in India. Partha Chatterjee's 1986 book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* creatively applied Saidian and postcolonial perspectives to the study of non-Western nationalisms, using India as an example. Kamala Visweswaran distinguishes between the figure of 'woman' as subaltern and the question of subaltern women when considering the gendering of subalternity. She claims that there are two problems that mark the theorization of gender by the Subaltern Studies group: "either gender is subsumed under the categories of caste and class or gender is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns" (16).

According to Said's reading of Michel Foucault, Orientalism characteristically implies that the dominant power successfully "maximized itself at the expense of the subject peoples, who were rendered almost entirely passive and silent by conquest" (Tejero 85). Unsurprisingly, then, Said's text

focuses almost exclusively on the discourse and agency of the colonizer.

Spivak remedies this imbalance by a consistent attention throughout her career to the less privileged sectors of the colonized peoples and to their successors in the neocolonial era. To describe these social formations, she “adapts the term ‘subaltern’ from Gramsci (to whom Orientalism is also heavily indebted conceptually), in whose writing it signifies subordinate or marginalized social groups in European (more specifically, Italian) society” (Tejero 86)

Spivak’s principal concern is the degree to which the (post)colonial subaltern, in particular, enjoys agency, an issue which she characteristically explores in terms of whether subalterns can speak for themselves, or whether they are condemned only to be known, represented, and spoken for in a distorted fashion by others, particularly by those who exploit them but also by ‘concerned’ outsiders like aid-workers or seemingly ‘disinterested’ scholars, such as anthropologists. The conclusion arrived at by “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is that there is no space from which subalterns can speak and thus make their interests and experience known to others on their own terms.

In order to illustrate this argument, Spivak concentrates much of her attention on the mechanics of what she calls the ‘itinerary of silencing,’ which, paradoxically, accompanies the production of the (post)colonial subaltern as a seemingly freely speaking subject/agent in the discourses of the dominant order. Indeed, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” begins with an analysis of the silencing of the contemporary subalterns by western ‘radical’ intellectuals who ostensibly try to uplift those who are most oppressed by neocolonialism. Spivak’s critique is partly methodological, partly political, in nature. First of all, she accuses figures like Deleuze and Foucault of assuming that they are transparent vis-à-vis the objects of their attention. In other words such

'radicals' too easily suppose that they are outside of the general system of exploitation of the 'Third World' in which western modes of cultural analysis and representation (including 'high' theory itself) and institutions of knowledge (such as the universities in which such theory is characteristically developed) are in fact deeply implicated. Secondly, while critics like Foucault and Deleuze announce the death of the (western, liberal, bourgeois, sovereign, male) subject of traditional humanism in the postmodern episteme, they retain what Spivak sees as a "'utopian' conception of the centered subject/agent in respect to marginalized groups, such as prisoners, women, or the Third World subaltern, who purportedly can speak for themselves despite all their various disadvantages" (Tejero 88) However, in ascribing a voice to the subaltern, according to Spivak, such intellectuals are in fact themselves representing (in the sense of speaking on behalf of or standing in for) the subaltern. This is not simply a problem in western radicalism. In "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (1989), Spivak discerns a similarly 'utopian' vision of the resistant historical subaltern in the counterhegemonic work of the Subaltern historians of India with whom she and Said collaborated in the 1980s.

Laxmi labours hard for Sakhara who also works as a worker in the press. As a subaltern person, Laxmi seems to settle in with this way of life, working hard and making amends with her loneliness by talking to insects and birds. In her own simple ways she seems to bring about some changes in Sakharam, peeling the outermost layer at most. The inner demon however keeps coming out at the slightest instigation. He seems to hate religious discrimination (an incident involving Laxmi and his Muslim friend, Dawood), appears tender enough to want to listen Laxmi's laugh but the effect is painful and chilling. A year or so passes and Laxmi feels settled enough to complain



about the hard work and any lack of regard. Sakharam in turn decides it is time to send Laxmi packing. The departure is painful for Laxmi as she has almost started accepting this as her house.

And again there comes another new woman, a fiery (rebellious) woman named Champa. She too is an abandoned woman like those before her. But unlike Laxmi she is not timid, silently obeying orders. Surprisingly Sakharam seems to take this in, if only dumbstruck by Champa's oozing sexuality. But she is not interested, telling him "I am not that kind of woman" (156). On his insistence though she agrees, but drowning herself in alcohol first to hide the disgust. Things seem to settle in for Sakharam once again until one day Laxmi returns back, with nowhere else to go. He throws her out only to find Champa and Laxmi in alliance together, mutually in agreement for Champa to handle him and Laxmi to manage the house. Such a 'marriage' of convenience can only have disastrous effects. Feeling that she has lost Sakharam and the house to Champa, Laxmi starts suspecting and secretly criticizing Champa's character. Champa in turn accuses Sakharam of losing his 'masculinity' in presence of Laxmi. Riled by this accusation he tries throwing Laxmi out of the house. In a final twist Laxmi tells Sakharam of her suspicion about Champa (an affair with Dawood) which leads him to kill Champa in rage. The play ends with Laxmi convincing a shocked, mutely stricken Sakharam to bury Champa so no one finds out. This act of Laxmi reflects subaltern consciousness.

Laxmi's behavior at the end makes us question whether everything is just a game of survival, where love, innocence and gratitude are at stake. Champa's so-called affair is never truly proven. So did Laxmi just make it up, drawing it up as an ace to win the final game? Did Champa agree to take in

Laxmi hoping to divert Sakharam's attention from herself? Does the society hate Sakharam for being a wolf, calling himself a wolf and wandering as such? What about the wolves (husbands) who hide themselves in a lamb's skin (marriage) silently preying on the flock, that is poor peasant women? Tendulkar quite relevantly asks through the play whether the society purposefully turn a blind eye towards them, licensing any abuse under the garb of marriage. The study explores these and much more questions that one is made to ask themselves. That is the strength of Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder*.

However, we can notice some flaws in the play: one such is the presence of Champa's husband. I doubt how much value his character adds to the play. I don't think anything would have lost with the total absence of that character from the play. Second is Champa's blatant physical display, almost making it a tease, in spite of her own admittance of disgust at physical relationship. She just seems to be unaware of her sexuality. Her character seems smart enough that she would be conscious of it. Laxmi's dialogues with the insects and birds seem to be somewhat overdone in the script. Maybe it is so to bring out her feelings to the audience or to emphasize her loneliness as a subaltern character.

Gail Hershatter states that one could generalize Spivak's observation and propose by saying that it makes more visible the workings of other markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, and not just 'across the class spectrum,' but in their mutual interactions, illuminating, in turn, the process of class formation itself. The inclusive definition of subaltern is emphatically not meant to suggest that all oppressions (or resistances) are equal, and that everyone is a subaltern in the same way. According to

Hershatter, her hope is not to "render oppression uniform and thus somehow less onerous, but rather to trace the ways that oppressions can be stacked, doubled, intertwined" (19).

Fernando Coronil proposes that we view the subaltern neither as a sovereign subject that actively occupies a bounded place nor as a vassal-subject that results:

[F]rom the dispersed effects of multiple external determinations, but as an agent of identity construction that participates, under determinate conditions within a field of power relations, in the organization of its multiple positionality and subjectivity. (95)

In his view, subalternity is a relational and a relative concept; there are times and places where subjects appear on the social stage as subaltern actors, just as there are times or places in which they play dominant roles. So, Sakharam is presented as an experienced, well-traveled person. He is knowledgeable about the plight of poor marginalized people. In India, he becomes aware of the gap between the rich and poor because he takes interest in the internal activities of the Elites. When the English were captured by Indian, Sakharam goes there particularly to observe how the high class people live, through he accompanies other people, who go there.

Moreover, at any given time or place, an actor may be subaltern in relation to another, yet dominant in relation to a third. Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations. Subalternity defines not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being. Yet because enduring subjection has the effect of fixing subjects into limiting positions, a relational conception of the subaltern requires a double vision that recognizes at one level a common ground among diverse forms of subjection and, at

another, the intractable identity of subjects formed within uniquely constraining social worlds. While the first optic opens up a space for establishing links among subordinated subjects (including the analyst who takes a subaltern perspective), the second acknowledges the differentiating and ultimately unshareable effects of specific modalities of subjection. This relational and situational view of the subaltern may help anticolonial intellectuals avoid the way they see polarity underlying Spivak's analysis and listen to subaltern voices that speak from variously subordinated positions.

In this way, at its core, the play presents the well-documented history of Vijay Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder*, a study of violence and depravity, which had made elite groups very uncomfortable back in 1972. The play recreates these events it is a revelation to today's audiences to Disturbing excerpts from *Sakharam Binder* intersperse the narration of this episode and remind us of the he power of Tendulkar's play script.

However, that is only half the story. My argument of this play owes a great deal to the structure and meaning of several other arguments, the subaltern mingling with the main narrative, the little traditions and folklore of the times appearing both as narrative and comment in a timescale from then to now. The representation of subaltern character like Sakharam is the reality in Indian society. His cases are filled with seemingly casual references to the changes within the (tamasha) format in Maharashtra (155). Other characters who are instantly recognizable in this milieu are the Delhi-based academic who has offered the dancer and the (shahira) project seeking to document their survival in contemporary India, and her intermediary the historian (155).

Sakharam is never influenced by the Western way of living, though India remained a colonized country under direct rule of Britain at the time. He

wears typical Indian dress, follows all rituals and traditions. He goes all the way from different places in India In this way, by relating the saga of subaltern characters' family story and their contribution, Tendulkar depicts the history of subaltern mass.

The following chapters reviews the findings of this study that Sakharam Binder and other peasant women who show the subaltern consciousness of the playwright, Vijay Tendulkar through the major characters: Sakharam, Dawood, Laxmi and Champa.

## Chapter III

### Affirmation of Subaltern Consciousness

This research focuses on Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* in order to explore the subaltern consciousness in the postcolonial India. Tendulkar deals with the topic of complication of human nature and exploitation of marginalized characters. The title character of the play Sakharam, who is himself a subaltern character as comes from low social strata, takes in other men's discarded women – widows, castoff wives and untouchables who would otherwise be homeless, destitute or murdered with impunity – and gives them shelter and works. He even provides them with necessary clothes and bus fare if they want to leave his house. However, despite his service and attempt to speak for the marginalized, activities seem questionable.

Though his act of trying to rehabilitate the subaltern people, he fails to work for them altruistically as he sometimes tends to exploit the women Laxmi and Champa for his material benefit. He makes them work very hard all the time, as a result of which Laxmi challenges him. However, he stands for the non-elites whether they be Muslims like Dawood. Sakharam Binder, a bookbinder takes in a succession of women who have been thrown out of their homes by their husbands. He offers them food, shelter and living essentials in exchange for domestic services and companionship.

Sakharam fiercely opposes the hypocrisy he sees in the institution of marriage and practices this alternative arrangement in his home. So, he never gets married. In this regard, he presents an antithesis to the general conception of a member of his community. He keeps women as wives but not married. As a subaltern person, he attacks the institution of marriage in which women are subjugated. He Laxmi & Champa like other six whom Sakharam kept in his

house) homeless and their husbands have kicked them out. Now Sakharam brings Champa who runs away from her husband. She runs away because her husband, Fauzdar Sindhe, becomes more of an animal than a man to her. He treats her like a beast, and gratifies his sadism and sexual needs in unnatural ways. Champa bursts out in violence as soon as she sees her husband and beats him.

Laxmi and Champa are the real subaltern characters as they are much more exploited lots. They lack agency as result Laxmi finds a companion in a non-human beings such as ant. On the other hand, Champa seeks to take solace in drinking to lessen her sufferings and frustration. Though they are conscious about their subaltern position, they cannot do anything for each other as they are hegemonic to elite male ideology. When Sakharam scolds and tries to beat her, Champa keeps silent, which suggests, according to Spivak, that subaltern women lack agency as cannot speak for their rights.

In the play, the voices of women, the downtrodden and other exploited groups have always been subdued. In the after math of colonial period in India, these groups who were once under severe exploitation at that time have still lacked agency in society and access to social power. Though the binder, Sakharam gives voice to the marginalized and excluded from societies, he fails to fully work towards empowering them in terms of social, political and educational field as he himself gets inclined to take some advantage of their situation. So, he largely works for the betterment of the subaltern groups. In *Sakharam Binder*, though he cannot work altruistically, Sakharam's attempt of rehabilitating the poor and social outcastes reflects the need of recognizing and uplifting those who lack agency in society, which testifies to Tendulkar's subaltern consciousness. The play is a brilliant study in working-class man-

woman relationships Sakharam, who 'rescues' women from the depressed and miserable situation nonetheless he uses them to satisfy his own appetites. Most importantly how the power play shifts from man to woman towards the end reflects the focus on subaltern working class women, which is shown with astonishing dramatic force.

Thus this study of Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* contributes to studying the predicament of marginalized people from diverse socio-cultural background. So, the question comes of relevance of the play in the present context. In Hindu society people are not allowed to have physical relationship or cohabitation out of wedlock. However, divorce and remarriages are much more common. As a result more women are independent, so as not to fall prey to any social vultures of elite groups. Society is much more aware of women's plight, their rights. So at least that aspect seems somewhat dampened if not totally eliminated. However the survival game of every living being where money, relations, emotions are freely traded, is very much in play as it has been throughout the history. So as long as there remain subaltern people, every generation is bound to have Laxmi, Champa and Sakharam amongst it, in some form or other no matter what. The liberation of subaltern or working class (proletariat) lies, according to Gramsci, in their subordinated consciousness. But



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