

# Plot Structure of Tendulkar's 'Sakharam Binder': A Study

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## Abstract:

'Sakharam Binder' abounds in Brechtian themes. Tendulkar has invested Brechtian themes in his play but the life experiences depicted are from Indian life. Tendulkar is not a blind follower of Brecht in the sense that what is not suitable in Indian context he has avoided it. His play is rooted in the cultural ethos of India. Tendulkar invested selected and suitable Brechtian themes and techniques so skillfully that the play comes out to be essentially Indian. It is a new drama, but it becomes a true Indian drama both in form and content.

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## Keywords:

'V- Effekt Techniques', 'Distancing Technique', 'Tradition', 'Modernity', 'Social Realism',

## Introduction

This research article on interpretation of Tendulkar's 'Sakharam Binder' from the perspective of 'Brecht's V-Effekt Technique' is a new attempt of interpreting Tendulkar's popular play. Aristotle says that literature is a reflection of life in embellished language; and criticism is analysis, explanation, and interpretation of the work of art. In this context 'Sakharam Binder' is a socio-literary document on changing scenario of Indian life in the post-independence era. This article is a critical study in socio-economic and cultural changes taking place in the life of contemporary men and women including various socio-political issues as reflected in the play. Brecht, in his plays, delineates life situations from social perspective. He wants to bring out that the situation is outcome of the contemporary social constraints. His works of art reflect that literary men transform social situations into aesthetic experiences; and if the situations are painful they hint at certain remedies also. Like Brecht, Tendulkar also exhorts to tell men and women that excessive adherence to traditional virtues is a sign of stupidity in modern life, and that people suffer in life because they don't comprehend reality objectively. It further reveals that education, tolerance, and a will to work for social good can make human life happy and meaningful.

In this article Brecht's dramaturgy in general and his *Verfremdungseffekt* Techniques in particular is used as perspective to interpret 'Sakharam Binder'. Usefulness of these techniques as prominent literary and dramatic devices in communicating the social ethos of the post-independence Indian life and the contemporary men's sensibility has also been discussed with necessary illustrations. Vijay Tendulkar's 'Sakharam Binder' has been selected for analysis, explanation, and interpretation from the perspective of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* Techniques. Tendulkar is looked upon as a representative playwright of the post-independence era who has expressed the contemporary Indian life through the devices of Indian classical and folk traditions and has given a new identity to Indian theatre abroad. Known as 'Modern Classics of Indian Theatre', the plays of Tendulkar are based on Brecht's dramaturgy but for material they fully rely upon theatrical devices of Indian classical and folk traditions to give effect of 'Distanciation'.

Tendulkar's 'Sakharam Binder' is new, as new concepts of Brecht's dramaturgy are invested in it; it marks extension of Indian classical and folk traditions in regard to historical and mythical settings expressive of contemporaneity.

This article will be of immense help as a manual to the researchers, playwrights, directors and the men associated with repertory groups.

### **Brecht's Epic Theatre Theory (Non-Aristotelian Theory of Drama):**

Brecht's 'Non-Aristotelian Theory of Drama' demanded a performance to be "presented quite coldly, classically and objectively. The primary method of achieving such detachment was the 'Verfremdungseffekt'"<sup>2</sup> It denotes a form of narrative running in series of episodes which is dialectic not restricted by unity of time. Notable features are anti-cathartic approach, alienation, complex seeing, chorus, a narrator, slide projection, film, placards, songs and music, etc. Among playwrights practicing Brecht's dramaturgy in German theatre one has to mention the names of – Durrenmatt, Dorst, Frisch, Hacks, Hildesheimer, Walser, and Weiss.

Brecht says that the concepts of the Aristotelian drama such as: 'The Plot' 'Characterization' 'Tragic Flaw' 'Unified Spectacle', 'Catharsis', 'Dramatic Unities' 'Tragic Hero' 'Catastrophe' etc. characterize the Greek Classical drama. Brecht calls this theory of Aristotelian drama a suitable form for a bourgeois play. In the modern age of democratic spirit and scientific reasoning the form of the classical drama is absolutely inadequate as it tends to involve the spectators into the emotions of the character and hampers the process of reasoning. In his view the Aristotelian form of drama is not suitable for his theatre called 'The Scientific Theatre'. Brecht's note to the opera 'Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny' published in 1931, lists the following shifts in emphasis from the dramatic to the epic theatre

#### **Dramatic Theatre**

#### **Epic Theatre**

The stage embodies an event

narrates the event

Involves the spectator in an action  
and

turns the spectator into an observer  
but

exhausts his capacity for action

arouses his capacity for action

engenders feelings in him

forces him to make decisions

allows him experiences

grants him knowledge

the spectator is transplanted into an  
action

confronts the action

it operates through suggestion

it operates through argument

sentiments are preserved

brought to the point of recognition

the human being is presumed known  
investigation

the human being is the object of

he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to change
tension focuses on the conclusion	the tension of process
each scene generates the next	each scene exists for itself
linear development	curves
natura non facit saltus facit saltus	
the world as it is what man ought to do	the world as it becomes what he must do
his instincts	his reasons for action
thought determines being	social being determines thought <sup>3</sup>

### Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* in Epic Theatre Theory

It is stated that Brecht borrowed the concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* enshrined in his Epic Theatre from Eastern traditional theatre. It is very often contended that Indian theatre always had alienation in the theatrical presentations and that Brecht invented nothing new. But Anjala Maharish has scrutinized these generalities in her research thesis entitled 'A Comparative Study of Brechtian and Classical Indian Theatre' and concluded that Brecht borrowed the concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* from the Chinese play-actor: Mei Lan-Fang's dramatic performance, and then developed it with the help of Marx's theory of 'Dialectical Triadic Progressions'. "Brecht, who was immensely influenced by the performance of Mei Lan-Fang, the great Chinese actor, imbibed the element of actor-character duality from Chinese theatre and used it as one of the important methods to bring about Alienation Effect in his productions"<sup>4</sup> Maharishi explains Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* in following words,

Alienation Effect or *Verfremdungseffekt* in Epic Theatre was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of enquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident shown on the stage. Particular rehearsal methods adopted by the actor helped him not to create the illusion of transforming himself into the character as was prevalent in the Western Realistic Theatre. The Epic actor tried to adopt the behaviour of the character to the best of his ability without making the audience forget his individuality. Thus he enabled himself the opportunity of commenting on the character's behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Post-independence Indian plays have been interpreted in terms of themes, autobiographical elements, dramatic techniques, and from linguistic perspectives. Very scanty material i.e. only a few critical reviews are available on the subject of interpreting the plays of Tendulkar from the perspective of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. This research study aims at making a study of Brecht's V-Effect theory and then to develop a concrete mechanism of techniques with which alienation effect is brought about in Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder'.

## Vijay Tendulkar as a Celebrated Playwright

Tendulkar's protagonists evoke pathos and make an appeal to the audience to think for remedy. He devoted his life for the world of theatre. With regard to this facet of his personality he says,

What I like about those years is that they made me grow as a human being. And theatre which was my major concern has contributed to this in a big way. It helped me to analyze my own life and the lives of others. It led me to make newer and newer discoveries in the vast realm of the human mind which defies all available theories and logic. It is like an ever intriguing puzzle or a jungle which you can always enter but has no way out.<sup>6</sup>

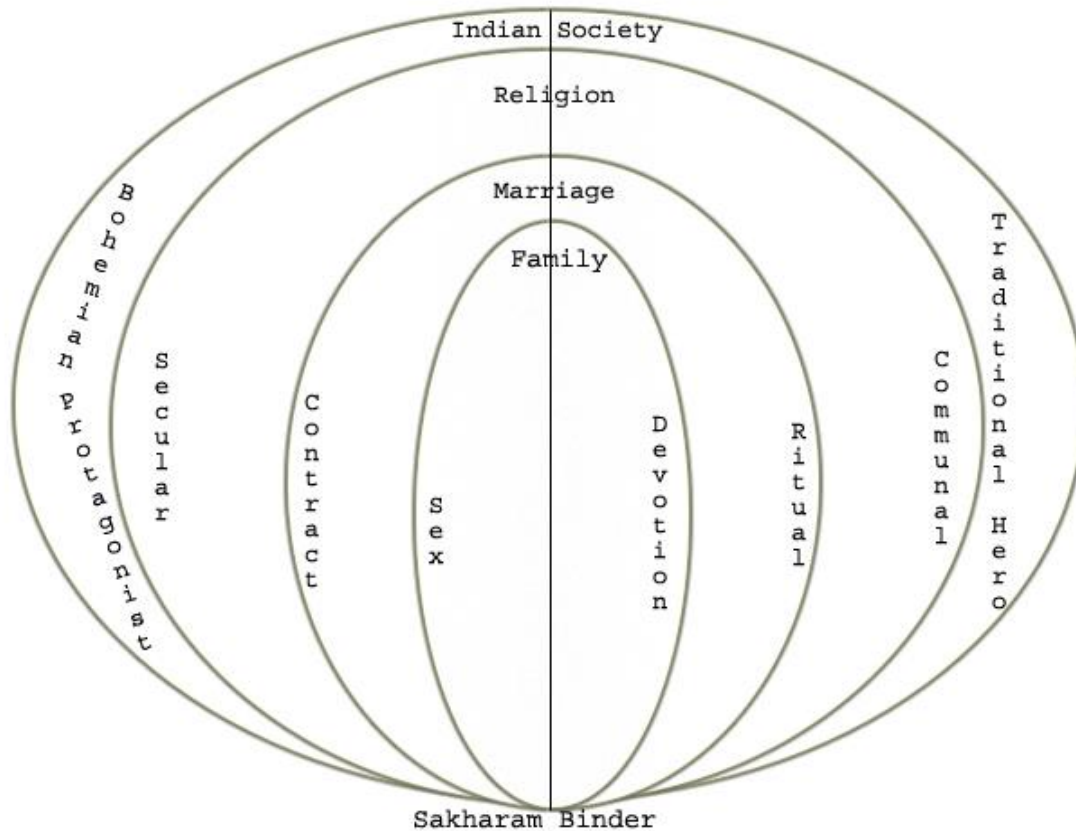
Tendulkar's burning naturalism highlights his plays in the sense that they present raw chunk of life with all its ugliness and crudity. The most important that disturbs the audience and readers of his plays are the underlying sympathy and his tenderness towards mankind. Such a prolific and versatile writer has been felicitated with many awards and honours.

### Diagram Showing Form and Content of *Sakharam Binder*

The following diagram is a pictorial representation of *Sakharam Binder*'s plot-structure comprising many thematic frames. The play doesn't have mythical or historical frame to wrap the themes and social ethos. The play presents a realistic picture of the contemporary social life along with the bohemian life style of the protagonist. A vertical line going across 'Family', 'Marriage', 'Religion', 'Indian Society' in the diagram shows the loss of 'Organic Unity' in Indian life during the post-independence times.

'Sakharam Binder' is a new drama in the sense that it presents the life situations of middle-class man. Those days middle class was growing in cities but there was no adequate dramatic tradition in the pre-independence theatre to present life-problems of them. This play presents change in attitude of the contemporary middle-class men who try to find substitute to marriage in 'Live in Relationship'. This ethos of contemporaneity of the post-independence Indian life has been vividly delineated by Vijay Tendulkar in 'Sakharam Binder'.

The diagram very graphically presents the comparative estimate of the 'Traditional' and 'Modern' attitudes prevalent in Indian life.



Under the auspices of 'Sangeet Natak Akademi', conscious attempts were made to liberate Indian drama from the foreign influence and provide to it the base of Indian classical and folk traditions. The contemporary playwrights including Tendulkar noticed the emergence of middle class in urban society and they noticed that the value-system and aspirations cherished by the people of new class were highly self-centred. That time, unfortunately, they had inherited no dramatic form suitable for communicating the contemporary social ethos. So knowingly or unknowingly, they turned to Brecht's dramaturgy which was popular those days in the Western theatres. Acting upon the guidelines of the 'Sangeet Natak Akademi' they discarded the traditional dramatic form of 'Realism' and adopted the concepts of Brecht's 'Epic Theatre'; but for content they fully relied upon the Indian classical and folk traditions. Consequently, the post-independence Indian drama has become altogether a new drama: a drama in which contemporary Indian life is expressed in terms of the classical and folk elements adapted to Brecht's dramatic techniques.

The diagram shows four round-shaped frames in the manner of a china box. All the four frames have been vertically divided into two. The left half-side of the frames shows traditional value-system of Indian society and the right half-side represents the post-independence value-system of the Indian middle-class people living in cities. During the post-independence era Indian society with its basic component institutions such as religion, marriage, and family began to disintegrate and new social order based on pleasures started taking their place.

**Inner Circle:** The inner most circle displays the disintegrated contemporary Indian family life. Traditional family life was characterized by devotion and organic unity; but the new life of middle-class people was pleasure centred. In *Sakharam Binder* the protagonist refutes the traditional family life in which husband and wife live together for fashioning better future of children. Therefore, Sakharam enters into contractual

marriages with the women discarded by their husbands; he wants a woman in his house for his comforts and sex only.

**Second Outer Circle:** The second outer circle shows the disintegrating marriage institution in the post-colonial era. As per the tradition, marriage is a ritual in which gods and goddesses are invited to bless the couple for happy married life. But the newly emerging middle-class culture doesn't believe that marriage is a ritual. For middle-class people marriage is something like a contract for man's comforts and pleasures which can break and end someday. In *Sakharam Binder* the protagonist has no caste identity as his father was a Brahmin and mother, a low caste woman. He believes that god who has created us knows everything; therefore one should not be secretive about immoral doings. He is indomitable in spirit and thinks that a woman begins to dictate her husband after a year or two of the marriage. Therefore, he prefers contractual marriages with married women discarded by their husbands.

**Third Outer Circle:** The third outer circle shows that the communal spirit prevalent in social life in pre-independence times begins to disappear from the life of the middle-class people. In this play Sakharam allows his friend Dawood to participate in the *Aarti* performance; but on the contrary Laxmi: his seventh concubine objects to it. The playwright has noticed that in middle-class society communal spirit is not observed strictly.

**Outer Most Circle:** The outer circle displays the forces of disintegration at work in the post-independence Indian society. Organic unity at social life is fast losing its hold; and individuals like Sakharam, Champa, and FauzdarShinde are portrayed as typical representative characters of the emerging new social order. They recognize no conventional morals and uphold their personal likes and dislikes above all social considerations. Their lives are going well initially but after a passage of time they begin to experience miseries in their lives. They become victims of their own inconsistencies and finally Champa loses her life, Sakharam and FauzdarShinde become alienated characters, and Laxmi reiterates the claim of her self-righteousness.

The social ethos as noticed by Tendulkar in the life of his contemporary middle-class people was totally a new experience. He was upset with his observations, and he had no adequate dramatic form to express them. Considering his pet themes of 'Violence', 'Sex', and 'Exploitation' as invested in his major dramas it seems that he found the tenets of Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', Beckett's 'Absurd Theatre', and Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' most useful in writing his plays.

In *Sakharam Binder* the protagonist is a bohemian character who suffers pangs of alienation at the end of the play. For effective delineation of the scenes and episodes of alienation Brecht's V-Effect devices such as 'Dialectical Triadic Progressions', 'Complex-Seeing', 'Gestus', 'Narrative Voice', 'Dialectical Situations', etc have been abundantly used in writing of the play.

*Sakharam Binder* is a portrayal of Sakharam's character who is committed to live the life of a free lancer with his asperity, bohemian and stubborn lifestyle. With Brechtian techniques Tendulkar has elaborately delineated many scenes and episodes in the form of dialectical situations. So, his play runs through situations of opposites which stimulate the audience to think.

## Conclusion

'Sakharam Binder' abounds in Brechtian themes. Tendulkar has invested Brechtian themes in his play but the life experiences depicted are from Indian life. Tendulkar is not a blind follower of Brecht in the sense that what is not suitable in Indian context he has avoided it. His play is rooted in the cultural ethos of India. Tendulkar invested selected and suitable Brechtian themes and techniques so skillfully that the play comes out to be essentially Indian. It is a new drama, but it becomes a true Indian drama both in form and content.

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