

Study of Caste Politics and Women in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

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Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar has special sympathy with the female sex and this resulted in so many plays which express woman's predicament through the deep rooted ideologies and beliefs which are established by our culture and society and which need a rethink in today's society. *Kanyadaan* published in 1983 represents struggle of woman with idealism and long established beliefs that our treatises had made sacred. This is an important play in Tendulkar's career which deals with the conflict of Dalit caste and upper caste in which woman is made a scapegoat in man's evil purposes.

The play is a story of Jyoti, daughter of Nath Devavlikar- a Member of Progressive Association and Seva- Member of a Social Worker's Association. It is the story of Jyoti's marriage with Arun, a boy from Dalit community who has done his BA and is also a writer. The play focuses on the consequences of such modern marriage. As the play opens, we see that both Nath Devavlikar, the father and Seva, the mother, rarely stay together at home because of their preoccupation. If mother is at home, father has to go out for making public speeches and if, father stays at home, mother goes out to attend rallies. They have hardly enough time for their children. Both the children, Jyoti and her brother Jayaprakash, remain at home conveying messages of father to mother and vice-versa. The children as Nutan Gosavi observes, "are seen not as individuals with their own aspirations, but as mere extensions of their parent's social experimentations." One could guess the kind of married life in family where instead of family life, other questions are more important. With the modernity, man-woman relationships are reduced to mere formalities. (Gosavi 155)

Jyoti express her desire of marrying Arun and the parents feel inner uneasiness though their liberal attitudes prevent them to express it. Now their ideals of casteless society and intercaste marriage are on test. Naturally the reactions are reserved and guarded. Mother openly expresses her objection on this marriage because of the incompatibility of their life styles and secondly as Arun is earning nothing and has the family responsibility also. Tendulkar mocks at such modern and traditional ways of marriage where marriage is decided by the economic standards and the

harmful results of this are obvious in man-woman relationship. The woman remains attached to household work providing man an edge over woman. Catherine Thankamma says: "In the patriarchal set up marriage is not only a means of regulating sexual and reproductive behaviour but also a means of upholding male dominance." (Thankamma 82)

It becomes one of the many reasons in woman's exploitation. (It is the case only in marriage and outside marriage there are many). Jyoti has seen the atmosphere of her own home. She has no idea of the outside society where woman's freedom is regulated by the laws made by the society. Father's reaction to Jyoti's marriage is based on his prejudices. It will increase his respect in the society because he would set up an example before the society by this intercaste marriage and secondly it will also fulfill his dream of casteless society. Seva was aware with the fact that a woman's life in our society is difficult and full of hardships in reality and that marriage is a matter of life and death for a woman and once the decision is made there is no escape. That's why she says to Jyoti, "Saying something is easy, but doing it is very difficult...and later there is no chance for a woman to hide or to run away." (Tendulkar 115) Jyoti was unable to evaluate the situation and both the parents failed in making her realize about the matter. In contrast, the false ideals of democracy and equality of Nath Devavlikar, instead of saving, pushed an innocent girl into a situation where she could not blame anybody but herself for it was her own decision to marry Arun.

Jyoti's life became an idealistic experiment of the modern democratic views and presuppositions of Nath that covered the facts. One could see easily that Jyoti would suffer in this marriage because such marriage will bring obstacles in her life and because it will be against the understanding of both of them. Even the social set up is also against such intercaste marriage. Tendulkar through his plays shows that whether it is intercaste marriage or same caste marriage, women are the natural sufferers. Although Seva and Nath were responsible to some extent for Jyoti's downfall through this marriage, Jyoti also could not help herself in escaping from the inevitable. At last the inevitable happens. Jyoti could not escape from the bitterness of marriage. Without home, she and Arun

spends nights in one or another friend's houses. Having dead drunk, Arun often beats her and ill-treats her with physical and mental tortures. Pains and cries became an important part of her life. All her energy and enthusiasm before marriage turned into tiredness with pale and defeated face. All her liberal mindedness was disappeared with her sufferings. Arun's attitude turned into crude behaviour towards her. Jyoti became a victim of oppression. Her married life becomes a battlefield. She is treated like a pat dog. Her pain, her anguish towards Arun can be seen when Nath, to solve the problem forever, advises her to keep Arun in their house and Jyoti replies, "(Agitated.) He...he will not enter this house. Because... (With great effort.) I have left him... I am not going back to him again ...ever ...It's ...all...over ...I am fed up with him. Fed up! Fed up! (She breaks into uncontrollable sobs. With great difficulty she restrains herself (Tendulkar 39). It was evident that Arun was not exploiting Jyoti for any hatredness of her but because he wants to avenge from the upper caste the humiliation of lower castes and Jyoti had become a scapegoat to carry out his hatredness. Most importantly, he was not willing to work and it was Jyoti who is working to support the family and thus suffers from an unjustified burden of labour and oppression and miseries. It was Jyoti's own will to marry Arun. But this marriage has obvious effects on parents also. They were worried for her. Their sleep was gone and an atmosphere of distress was before their eyes. Seva complains that Nath has himself brought this trouble. They should have opposed this marriage. But Nath's attitude is liberal - a dream of our forefathers before independence and Jyoti has acted according to these ideals.

Vijay Tendulkar in the play has questioned the liberal views of society. Although he has firm faith in the equality of every individual yet he is hinting the dangers of such freedom and insists that one should act with his intellect in taking decisions in such society otherwise the person will himself be blamed for the consequences. Jyoti has returned to her parent's home when such sufferings became unbearable. Arun followed her and asks for forgiveness. He pretends to repent for his behaviour and says;

It is not her fault, nor her fault at all. It is I who am at fault. I am the offender, a great offender in her eyes. Whatever I do, I will not be forgiven. I am a great scoundrel, rascal, motherfucker,...I...I beat her, with these very hands. I beat her badly, with these very hands. I beat her up. I beat Jyoti. I make her suffer. I behave worse than an animal (Tendulkar 42).

Seva asks from him the reason why he beats Jyoti and he gives one after another excuses and even takes out a knife

to cut his hand to show his regret for. Once again she decided to go to Arun to avoid the complications and with a thought of not troubling her parents. This time she has decided not to return back or in other words to bear those tortures endlessly. Nath is delighted at this decision of his daughter and says, "(Looking in Jyoti's direction.) Jyoti, I feel so proud of you. The training I gave you has not been in vain. (Suddenly dejected) If only I believe in God, then Jyoti, this is the moment I'd go down on my knees and pray for you..." (Tendulkar 45).

The attitude of Nath once again questions the role of parents. He is proud to see that Jyoti has followed his ideology. He has firm belief in Gandhian doctrine of non-violence and has taught the same to his children. In this play, the ideology takes up the form of class struggle taking woman as weapons and thus affects the unity and progress of society. JayaPrakash reminds Nath about the oppression of Jyoti by bringing into account the truth of Arun's violent behaviour because Arun's ancestors were victims of violence and exploitation and these victims go on to perpetuate it on others. He indirectly gives a clue to Nath and warns:

"Let other not endure oppression like we do, at least not because of us, and never by our hands.... In other words, yesterdays' victim is today's victimizer...Therefore, there is no hope of a man's gaining nobility through experience, he can only become a greater devil" (Tendulkar 15).

Arun is making the situation worse without any guilt. Instead of accepting his mistake, he is giving all credit of Jyoti's harassment to her. Nath becomes himself victim of his own decision. Arun without consulting from him printed his name as a speaker to speak about his autobiography. He was aware that Nath would not come. But he has his own plan. He blackmails Nath by telling "What's to stop people from saying that I got your daughter thrown out of her house? Other gossip will have it that the rise of the son-in-law could not be endured by the father-in-law" (Tendulkar 57). He does not accept the invitation but has no alternative before him because his refusal will increase the problems of his daughter as Seva tells to him:

Look, we are badly trapped. If we go against his wishes, it will mean more sufferings for Jyoti. He will take it out on Jyoti. (Nath wants to say something; she stops him.) Wait, let me finish. Jyoti's condition frightens me. It is a question of her life and death. And Jyoti is our daughter. Your refusal will make him find new ways to torment her. If you don't go to the meeting, God knows what he...in his madness...will do to

Jyoti... (She cannot speak further.) Therefore, you will have to go. You will have to preside over the function. You will have to praise the book, because that is the only option left to us (Tendulkar 58).

The situation reminds us of the dowry system in our society. If the bride brings insufficient dowry, she not only suffers herself, parents also suffer because for the sake of their daughter, they took this burden on them. Perhaps, Tendulkar wants to satirize this tradition of our society and the title *Kanyadaan* (the gift of a daughter), is used by him in a symbolic way. Despite the fact that now Nath hates Arun, he praises him in his speech. He himself acknowledges now that he has pushed Jyoti in fire. He confesses before Seva, "...I put our social commitments to the test. Told her 'well done go ahead! This is also a revolutionary method.' I closed the doors upon her return...I pushed my own daughter into a sea of misery..." (Tendulkar 61).

Jyoti becomes an instrument in perpetuating the clash of upper and lower class cultures. In the end, she accepts her fate and says to her father: "(harshly) I have my husband. I am not a widow. Even I become one I shan't knock at your door. I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devavlikar now, I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger" (Tendulkar 70). Rashmi Gaur has said in this context: "The continued exaltation of self-effacing norms creates an environment which pressurizes a woman to accept or at least not to resist them. Often silence is only option to women in such situations. They suffer and die without uttering a word." (Gaur 183)

Through this experience, Tendulkar wants to draw our attention towards new ideologies that take new forms in modern democratic society. The ending of the play has raised certain questions. Why this passive acceptance by Jyoti? Can there be no escape from it? Can in *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar wants to depict Jyoti as submissive? Will Jyoti be a sufferer for the whole life? Should a woman not retaliate? Must she quietly submit? These are some questions that Tendulkar left unanswered. One can say, "The complete submission of the girl's gendered self to the violence perpetrated on her by the caste politics leaves no scope for even an ideological alternative." Can it be called a pessimistic outlook of Tendulkar, Certainly not? Through the subject matter Tendulkar is advising society to cope up with the new challenges which obstruct an individual's path of progress and by choosing real incidences from the society, he is emphasizing that a great effort is needed to eradicate those challenges. He is also warning the society against the degrading man-woman relationships and is suggesting to look into the matter of marriage so that instead of living together, as foreigners, the coexistence of the individuals can be attained to

complete the ideals of liberal mindedness and democracy which Nath and other persons like Vijay Tendulkar himself has seen. Tendulkar has himself said:

Nath Devavlikar the protagonist of *Kanyadaan* is me and many other liberals of my generation whom I understand completely. The pain of these peoples today, the defeat they have suffered, the fundamental mental confusion and naiveté that has led to their pain and defeat, these form the theme of *Kanyadaan*; and I wrote about it because it came so close to me. (Tendulkar 135)

In the end we can say that Tendulkar through the story of a modern Indian family has brought out certain significant questions before the society, asking for a solution of them.

References

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- [3]. Vijay Tendulkar, *Kanyadaan*, trans. Gowri Ramnarayan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p13. (All the subsequent references to the text of the play are taken from the same edition and page number in such cases are given in the parentheses immediately following the quotations.)
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