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SOCIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S PLAY KANYADAAN

Abstract

“Kanyadaan” is perhaps the most controversial play written by Vijay Tendulkar. It happens to be the last major play of Tendulkar that was staged. It dwells on an extremely sensitive social, political issue, mainly, the conflict between upper caste and Dalits, a phenomenon still prevalent in several parts of India. Despite sixty five years of independence Dalits continue to suffer at the hands of the upper caste. Tendulkar in this play presents entirely different aspect that the suffering of an upper caste woman and her family in the hands of a Dalith educated young man. Vijay Tendulkar dwells deep into this social evil and presents it as it is. This method of his is truly characteristic of a genuine playwright whose foremost concern is to open his reader-audience’s eyes to a social problem. This paper aims to highlight the issue of Dalit’s psyche in the post independent India as revealed in Tendulkar’s play. They are not ready to mix up with the majority sections of the society. They want to maintain their Identity of Dalit. The genuine concern of the higher class people appears to them merely hypocrisy as they cannot forget their intolerable past. The suppression of them in the past by the “savarna” haunts them and this reality is presented through the male protagonist in the play. Tendulkar has raised the question that if this is the reality then how can the gap between the upper caste and the lower caste be bridged. The ideology of few people to mix up with them will never be the solution so the situation requires new ways to overcome the gap between the upper class and lower class.

Keywords: Inter caste marriage, Dalit, social equality, class conflict, hierarchized society, Brahmin, untouchable, suppressed communities, male chauvinism

Vijay Tendulkar's play 'Kanyadaan' focusses on a socially sensitive issue of inter caste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a Dalit man. Through this play Tendulkar appears as a contemporary Indian English dramatist who is sociologically conscious of the Indian tradition and also the concept of caste as a curse. Through this inter-caste marriage in his play, he tries to expose the causes of its failure. The caste spirit has become dangerous in modern India, and today various caste groups are not complimentary to one another, nor do they contribute to the integration of the community. The vital reason for this situation is that the caste system is believed to be divinely ordained. Therefore, it is not surprising that Brahmins and the high caste Hindus believe in this concept because it is convenient for them to do so. But the irony is that the suppressed people also believe it, accepting any insult or injustice enduring it because they are destined to be so.

The title itself is thought provoking and it literally means "a girl given as gift". She is a commodity given to a man as a gift. Though other gifts are also given in the name of "dowry". This system is of Aryan origin. The play naturally centers around marriage. It is an unusual marriage in the sense that it brings in its wake complex problems-problems at once self-created and unforeseen. Tendulkar takes on the Brahmin community on to the other side of the political spectrum, as political progressives with socialist leanings. When this play was written the time was ripe to launch an attack on the radicals and their nativity and hypocrisy which was always perceived but not openly pointed out for fear of being termed as reactionary. Tendulkar saw the change of meeting the challenge thrown at him by the conservative years before and in the process be with the times killing thus two birds with one stone!

Jyoti a young Brahmin woman comes from a politically and socially active family. Nath Devlalikar, her father is an MLA. Seva, her mother is a busy social worker. Her brother Jaiprakash is a M.Sc. Student. And Jyoti is an educated working woman. Theirs' is an urban middle class family. Brought up in such a progressive minded family, Jyoti decides to marry Arun Athavale, a Dalit youth from a village, whom she has known only for two months. Arun is poor, but talented. He is a B.A. Student and writes poetry-a factor which seems to have influenced Jyoti in her decision to marry him. Jyoti informs her parents and brother about her decision to marry Arun. Nath Devlalikar, the idealist who dreams of a casteless society, gives his

consent immediately. Nevertheless, as the family is used to Nath's ways they finally agree to this decision. And Jyoti and Arun get married. What follows is a sequence of violence, misery and disillusionment.

The play is divided into two acts. Each of which is further divided into scenes. Act one has two scenes and Act two has three scenes. Compared to Tendulkar's other plays, this is a shorter play, but certainly most gripping of all his plays. The evolution of Jyoti from a soft spoken, highly cultured Brahmin girl into a harden Dalit girl is indeed incredible and distressing. one cannot but wonder if such a sacrifice as Jyoti's is possible among modern women. The imperceptible transformation occurring in Nath's attitude to the world is also vividly portrayed by the master playwright. Nath, the idealist, in the end, turns into a disillusioned realist. The play, therefore, is at once a domestic, social and political one.

Nath feels very happy when his daughter decides to marry a Dalit but Seva, intuitively, apprehends the misery that may follow this marriage and forewarns Jyoti about it. When her intention is misunderstood, she clarifies herself to Jyoti that her anxiety is not over him being a Dalit. But her life has patterned in a certain manner and she was brought up in a specific culture. to erase or change all this overnight, is not possible. Arun is a man different in every way and Seva was afraid that Jyoti may not be able not handle it. However, Jyoti sticks to her decision to marry Arun.

When Arun comes to Jyoti's house, she is alone. The feelings of inferiority that he has acquired from the Dalit environment imposed by our hierarchized society surface in his mind and make him uncomfortable in the big Brahmin house. He then requests Jyoti to be with him when she is about to go in the kitchen to make some tea for him. as she requests him to accompany her to the kitchen; the male chauvinist in him comes out. To this Jyoti is shocked, yet she ignores it. Arun feels challenged when she discounts his statement that he will beat his wife. so he twists her arm and she feels more shocked than hurt. Again she ignores it. Jyoti introduces Arun to her brother and later to her mother. When she goes into the kitchen to make some tea, Seva tries to talk to Arun, but he feels nervous and bored. So he makes her restless by being discourteous. He even tells her that he can earn good money by brewing illicit liquor. When Jaiprakash comes he repeats this to make him feel awkward. Jyoti tries to alleviate the situation by saying that Arun is joking. She adds that she knows everything about him, but he ridicules her by asking her to shut

up as she did not know anything, in the presence of her mother. The tension reaches its climax when Nath arrives.

Nath behaves very courteously with Arun, who does not reciprocate his warm feelings. Yet, he praises Arun and expresses his great joy over realizing his ideal of breaking the caste barriers through the marriage of Jyoti to Arun. When Arun leaves, Seva and Jaiprakash complain about Arun's rude behaviour. But Nath ignores their accusation and justifies Jyoti's decision to marry Arun. Thus Jyoti gets Nath's moral support and marries Arun.

Jyoti works and earns while Arun spends it. He often gets drunk and beats her mercilessly. When she cannot bear it any longer she comes to her parent's house. Nath attributes Arun's cruelty to his despair due to their lack of residence. Hence he offers a room in his house for Jyoti and Arun. But Jyoti says that she has left him and she was fed up with him. Her parents support her, but Nath does not give up his ideal. When Arun himself comes and apologizes for his cruel behavior Seva is not convinced of his apology and questions him why he has beaten Jyoti. This leads to an argument between them. Nath intervenes and breaks up the argument, while Jyoti goes with Arun, and Seva breaks down while Nath feels proud of his daughter.

Arun publishes his autobiography, which receives a good acclamation and even Nath praises it. Through his autobiography Nath gets to understand the split personality of Arun. And he comprehends his heinous behaviour despite the fact that he wrote a beautiful autobiography. Seva bursts before Nath claiming that Arun wants to remain an idler and he wants his wife to work. And with her money he wants to drown himself in alcohol and have a good time with his friends. Furthermore, for entertainment he wants to kick his wife in the belly while she is pregnant. Later Jyoti comes and expresses her desire to her father and takes him to the task of his dishonest speech and does not accept any justification. She accuses him of making her mentally cripple and orders her family not to visit her house. She thus becomes mindless and surrenders to her situation playing the role of a Rescuer while Arun plays the Victim. Her role prevents her from perceiving the reality. This role of Jyoti as a Rescuer at first makes Arun behave more helplessly and then triggers his feelings of inferiority. Consequently, he shifts the role of Persecutor in order to feel powerful and beats Jyoti mercilessly. Now Jyoti goes down in the role of Victim. Thus, the Rescuer-Victim transaction ends up as the Prosecutor-Victim transaction.

This not only makes Jyoti but also Arun mindless. He is very cruel because he becomes heartless as well as mindless to feel powerful and in order to overcome his inner feelings of inferiority.

Religions are primarily expected to bring in harmony, but the reality is that religious harmony has become impossible. Of all the religions, Hindu religion seems to discourage people from being equal or united because the caste-system has been, as it is believed, divinely ordained. Any revolutionary, who has tried for religious harmony has not succeeded so far. This timeless conquest of religious fanaticism over humanism brings all culture and history under one frame for discussion. There is a close link between religion and politics. Owing to psychological factors, the suppressed communities could not rise up as they should have. The developed communities did not lend an encouraging hand either. Politicians have played only a dubious role in their efforts towards social justice. Inner conflicts and psychological dimensions of both untouchability and male chauvinism have been well brought out in Tendulkar's play *Kanyadaan*. He presents marriage as a misalliance. Even when Arun proposes to Jyoti he is aware of the incompatibilities-sociological and psychological implications of caste inequalities. The characters also underscore the fact that politicians and people in power will not dare to completely eradicate the system which breathes social injustice. This evil of caste and gender bias will have to be ultimately abolished, but it is going to take a long time. Tendulkar presents a society which is sickening yet he reflects a reformist's zeal. There is "doubleness and subversion" making the play relevant and contemporary.

The last words of the play very neatly sum up Jyoti's rejection of Nath as her philosopher and guide and more painfully as her father. It is often said that in a marriage a father loses his daughter, but in Nath's case the *Kanyadaan*- Giving away the daughter- has been doubly painful; in his giving away Jyoti to Arun he has lost her in more ways than one. His *Kanyadaan* has turned out to be a sacrifice of his daughter on the altar of his socio-political ideology.

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