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**RECONSTRUCTING DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS: AN ANALYSIS OF**  
***KANYADAAN***

“The end of law is, not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom.” by John Lock

The experience of marginalization and oppression makes an individual deeply mute, socially disabled and mentally down-trodden- the age old flaw of hierarchical society; and this social malaise of marginalization and caste discrimination happened to be examined by Tendulkar’s humanistic perspective- the vital, reformatory and widely humane to expand the frontiers of thoughts across the society and the nation. Hence, “Tendulkar can be called a complete playwright in the tradition of Shakespeare. There is a total experience of life and he holds up a heightened reflection of society.” (*SUNDAY HERALD* 2003) Tendulkar, endowed with dramatic genius and vigilance of a cultural squad, probes deeply into the layers of the caste psychology in presenting before us the conflicting and traumatic relationship between Indian middle class and socially outcaste and marginalized communities. The postcolonial subject in India and elsewhere is oscillating between two kinds of rationality: one represented by traditional culture and thought, and the other by the modern Western discourses. It is Tendulkar who, on the stage, acknowledges that “The caste spirit has become dangerous in modern India, the various caste groups are not complementary to one another nor do they contribute to the integration of the community”. (Ravindarnathan 143) This conflict between two cultures, traditions, and civilizations becomes apparent in the works of Mahesh Elkunchwar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani and many others. To prevent society and humanity from shrinking and degeneration Tendulkar pleads for caste eradication and abolishment of caste subjugation. The playwright’s commitment of human values buttresses the philosophy of his theatre.

*Kanyadaan*, contextualizing Dalit consciousness in Indian theatre, has marked Tendulkar off from the contemporary playwrights. The attempt of the paper is to throw light on Tendulkar’s

humanistic vision of reconstructing dalit consciousness for the welfare in his wizardry of theatre, particularly in his *Kanyadaan*. Tendulkar says about the play *Kanyadaan*:

You are honouring me with the Saraswati Samman today for a play which I once had a slipper hurled at me. Perhaps it is the fate of the play to have earned both this honour and that insult. As its creator, I respect both verdicts. (Tendulkar Afterwords)

Ananda Lal opines that “*Kanyadaan* brought criticism from Tendulkar’s own constituency, the liberals, for in it a Brahmin’s daughter chooses to marry a Dalit who beats her up regularly.” (484) *Kanyadaan* has earned insult and honour both and has provoked a great deal of protest. Tendulkar’s one of the most controversial plays, *Kanyadaan* deals with psychological study of the social malaise emanated from the caste-mechanism in our contemporary hierarchical society. Tendulkar’s vision of reconstructing Dalit consciousness forms part of their larger, more generally humanistic vision, which believes in the essential humanity of all people and subscribes to an ethos of dignity, respect, freedom and justice for all human beings. When these principles are violated, the colossus playwright uses his humane wisdom through his pen particularly in his *Kanyadaan* to speak for the violated and the victimized. The play, as its title suggests, centers around the matrimonial theme but the play moves beyond that issue as Tendulkar has devised the matrimonial relationship as an ‘objective correlative’ to provide a critique on the class conflict and caste struggle.

On the ground of human values Vijay Tendulkar opines that neither the potentialities of the marginalized nor the marginalized themselves are the subject to look down upon and their potentialities should not be sidelined and incapacitated. The play *Kanyadaan*, which touches the psyche of a Dalit, stresses that the gruesome horrors of caste discriminations are such conditions that generate the feeling of deprivations and it subsequently transforms into hostility towards people and against people. Tendulkar rejects the idealist philosophy and attains the complete accuracy in realistically presenting the ‘evils and discontents of our social mechanism’. Along with his *Kanyadaan*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Kamala* and *The Vultures* demonstrate filthy vices, drawbacks, reservations and limitations of contemporary society. Browsing over contemporary Indian playwrights with special reference to reconstructing Dalit consciousness in Indian English literary texts, Tendulkar’s *Kanyadaan* is very prime and laudable venture since the voice of the marginalized in India yet to be heard. *Kanyadaan* does

not appear to carry the burden of intellectual speculation or philosophical discourse but it depicts Dalit, the people from the backwaters of the society, and their traumatic journey. In this play Tendulkar deployed the angst and resentment of the marginalized as the literary instrument to investigate the far reaching consequences of the 'discontents of our social-mechanism'.

The protagonist of *Kanyadaan*, Arun Athvale is a scavenger by caste and by the dint of misfortune he appears a sadist and a rebel. The cumulative wrath and angst born out of caste discrimination spoil all the graces of his life. Arun, being a son of scavenger, was endowed with sharp intelligence and keen sensibility. However, he develops his relationship with Joyti, a daughter of socialist politician, Nath Devalikar, an MLC from Brahmin community. Nath Devalikar and Seva are an old socialist couple, very active in their socio-political crusade. Their two children Joyti and Jay Prakash are quite sensible and young. Nath and Seva, who remain socialist activists, are fighting against the untouchability and class struggle; they try to uplift marginalized sections of the society. Joyti is more or less tamed and fed by the idealism of her father, Nath and she is resolute and undaunted to marry a Dalit youth, Arun Athvale. Seva, Joyti's mother, in spite of being a social activist, expresses her reservations about her daughter's decision:

SEVA: (To Joyti) My anxiety is not over his being a dalit. You know very well that Nath and I have been fighting untouchability tooth and nail, God knows since when. So that is not the issue. But your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or to change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not able to handle it.

(Act I, scene i, p.509)

Seva seems to be afraid of her daughter's decision because her attitudes about the inter-caste marriage more or less, are controlled by the caste consciousness but Nath is elated on the decision of his daughter. Because the marriage for him was not the subject of mutual harmony but he takes it as a method for caste annihilation. Tendulkar seems to be convinced that culture and manners are not ancestral property and in their absence every one of us will appear in the same boat:

NATH: Look, Seva, society can not be transformed through words alone. We have to act as catalysts in this transformation. The old social reformers

did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow remarriages. Many of them actually married widows.

(Act I, scene ii p.524)

Nath seems to be Tendulkar's stronger instrument in reconstructing and making space for the marginalized in the mainstream. It is quite remarkable that "Nath and his daughter Joyti play the role of rescuers for Arun by lifting him up out of the mire of orthodoxy and casteism... (Wadikar 130)

The problem starts arising in the second act of the play *Kanyadaan* when Seva, Arun, Joyti come in direct confrontation on the issue of relationship with Arun. In this meeting there is direct encounter of the alternative ideologies presented by Arun, the Dalit boy and Nath, an MLC from the Brahmin community whereas Joyti stands between two extremes. Arun approaches the scene when his consciousness is moved by the feeling of 'otherness'. Arun's sentiments for Joyti are not strong enough to subdue the suppressed rage concealed in his subconscious mind. The proposal of marriage with Joyti was taken as an unconscious humiliation of the class of which Arun was representative. Arun finds himself uncomfortable in big houses and as a compensation of his humiliation he tries to impose his authority on the whole family. Arun is very critical of the sophisticated, high caste people and calls the big houses the 'bellies of sharks and crocodiles'; and he also terms the civilized and polished society as 'unwrinkled tinopalworld'. The situation is reminiscent of the huge gulf between Jimmy Porter and his wife, Alison in *Look Back in Anger*. Like Arun, Jimmy is well educated and pours out all the frustrations and anger of a lower class person on his wife, Alison. When Seva insists on Joyti's ties to Arun, Nath thinks that with the passage of time he will be transformed and will leave his beastly behaviour. Nath is also much influenced by Arun's '*Autobiography*' and believes that Arun is not bad by nature but the product of his adverse circumstances. Nath argues that if such downtrodden people, like Arun, are provided with proper environment and opportunity they can amend themselves.

Arun, representative of the marginalized class of society, suffers social malaise as the part and parcel of his mental antagonism in which he wanted to abolish the whole social structure. Agrawal pinpoints that, "In Arun's mind the resentment is not for Joyti but for the whole class and his resentment assumes the proportion of absolute annihilation". (185) The destructive visualization of Arun in his following confessions is the objective manifestations of

the contempt rooted in his subconscious mind:

ARUN: I want to set fire to the whole world, strangle throat, rape and kill. Drink  
up the blood of the beasts, your high caste society...

(Act I, scene ii, p. 514)

In the play, *Kanyadaan* the encounter of Arun with Seva is Tendulkar's astute mechanism to give an insight into the hegemonic power structure of higher society. Tendulkar proceeds to expose traumatic journey in context of caste and class conflict through the recurring meetings. Seva humiliates Arun on the ground that in his limited income he would not able to lead a comfortable life. While Nath accepts the position of Arun because he believes:

NATH: ...He is like unrefined gold, he needs to be melted and moulded. This is  
the need of the hour. Who can perform this task if not girls like Joyti.  
Of course it is difficult, but needs to be done...

(Act I, scene ii p. 527)

As the play moves forward we see that Joyti becomes the worst sufferer. Maya Pandit, a theatre critic opines, "Joyti becomes a site, a battleground on which clash between the upper caste and the Dalit takes shape. She becomes vessel in which the conflicting caste ideologies pour their aspirations for power". (70) She becomes the victim of the gruesome horrors of caste discrimination and Tendulkar seems to seek a justification for the violence that born out of caste discrimination as Jay Prakash utters:

JAYPRAKASH: ... The very victim of the violence may go on perpetrate the same  
brutal violence upon others. Perhaps who are haunted derive great  
leisure in haunting others when they get opportunity to do so. The  
oppressed overjoyed when they chance to oppress others.

(Act II, scene ii, p. 547)

As for as Joyti is concerned, she becomes the symbol of Indian womanhood and she works as instrument in reconstructing Dalit consciousness and transformation. Her life symbolizes the fact that social transformation is not possible by the overnight but it requires exceptional patience. Joyti seems to have realized the sparks of violence burning within the consciousness of Arun and that is why she does not favour her father's idea of passing undesirable remarks on Arun's book. She asks her father, "Why did you make speech on Arun's book?" (Tendulkar 561)

Vijay Tendulkar imparts the potential in Joyti as the vital-voice of his own point of view

to seek redemption for Arun. Dharan's keen observation is that "The evolution of Joyti from a soft spoken, highly cultured Brahmin girl into a hardened Dalit girl is really incredible and distressing. One can not but wonder if such a sacrifice, as Joyti's, is possible among modern women". (88) Her realization on the nature of human will is significant and she expresses her resentment against the inhuman practice rooted in our social infrastructure:

JOYTI: No man is fundamentally evil, he is good. He has certain propensities towards evil. They must be transformed. Completely uprooted and destroyed. And then the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the god slumbering within man... Putting man's beastliness to sleep, and awaken the godhead within is an absurd notion. You made me waste twenty years of my life before I could discover this. I had to learn it on the strength of my own experience.

(Act II, scene iii, p.563)

Vijay Tendulkar, the chronicler of violence of the contemporary society, has portrayed Joyti as an objective correlative through which Arun's suppressed unconsciousness comes on the surface and it provides almost a cathartic relief in his life. The portrayal of Joyti depicts to reflect the impossible appreciation of the real human self without a comprehensive realization of humanity. In his play *Kanyadaan* Tendulkar constructs the chain of events with the assumption that the representation of the voice of Dalit requires the transformation into conscience because it obstructs and undermines the natural growth of individuals.

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