

Representation of Caste and Gender: A Critical Study of Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

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Abstract: *Gender consciousness in Indian English drama is one of the most flaming issues which can be seen in the plays of Indian playwrights. Throughout about six decades of post - colonial narration of Indian English fiction, a wide variety of novelists have emerged focusing awareness on a huge number of divine issues, economic, political, spiritual, and social confronted by three corresponding periods of human experience. As we know that Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar (1928 - 2008) is a leading and television leading Indian playwright. He is a movie and television writer. Besides these, he is a literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator too, primarily in Marathi. It cannot be negotiated that his many plays derived inspiration from real - life incidents or social upheavals which provide a clear projection of the harsh realities.*

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It is useful to discuss *Kanyadaan* with the ideology of Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) is a milestone to criticize caste and gender. As it has been mentioned in this book, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women in society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent to that institution". (Beauvoir 405)

Kanyadaan is the best work that reflects caste and gender at a broad level. It is involved in Maharashtra, an Indian state that had early on marked the cause of the Dalits. K. C. Das, in his book *Indian Dalits: Voices, Visions, and Politics* (2004) has rightly said that 'Maharashtra has been the site of the most radical Dalit assertions. From the turn of the present century, Dalits here have shown signs of awakening and protest' (Das xviii). Here one may get that *Kanyadaan* does not depict the societal circumstances of the Dalits but depicts the uselessness of idealist Gandhian philosophies within the contemporary Indian social construction. Nath Devalikar, a character in the play is a socialist who adept Gandhian philosophies in his family and inspired his two children with his idealism. As a political visionary, he wants to create an idealistic world founded on Gandhian philosophy. However, the play touches on the voyage of Mr. Nath from being the personification of arrogance in the idealist Gandhian viewpoint to a state of unpleasant disappointment about the social actuality. In the end, Nath's idealism dissolves as he has to admit the actuality that societal revolution in India is intolerable to achieve through his fundamental viewpoints.

'Caste and Gender' are such issues that have been bringing radical changes in all kinds of conceptualizations of life in cultural terms. The term 'gender' has been used so frequently in women's context that we take for granted what it does not actually mean. Of course, the meaning of gender is likely to vary depending on the context but mentioning the word gender usually refers to gender concerns, and the phrase 'gender concerns' refers to gender discrimination against women. The term 'gender' is not to be confused with

another term 'sex' as sex refers primarily to an anatomical distinction between man and woman made at birth. On the other hand, gender refers to social and cultural interpretation that turns sexual difference into more than merely a biological distinction. In a way, sex has social repercussions only because of gender: it is on the basis of the latter, that the worlds and activities of women, as opposed to those of men, have been demeaned. So, gender comes to be associated with a set of separated characteristics, dividing this entire universe into separate but unequal spheres. Women, in general, are excluded from positions of power and dominance. Such a system founded on inequality has apparently been sanctioned and approved by society and domination becomes the entitlement of patriarchy.

Through the play *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar tends to unearth the deep - rooted malaise of casteism and class division of our society. With the zeal of a reformist, Tendulkar intends to bridge the gulf between the upper and lower caste by advocating inter - caste marriages. Casteism is ingrained in the blood of the two castes so much so that neither of the 'Savarna' nor 'Shudra' accepts each other. Nath Devalikar and his daughter Jyoti were influenced by the Gandhian ideology of casteless society and in order to bring reformation in the society, Jyoti decided to marry a Dalit boy Arun. Jyoti assumed and believed that Arun will change into a better person keeping aside his vent against all the upper caste people who lashes out inhuman treatment upon Dalits from time immemorial. Jyoti inspired by her father's idealism views the marriage with the Dalit boy as an opportunity to be a catalyst in creating a casteless society.

Like many reformists, Jyoti and her father were disillusioned by the ideology of casteless society by the end of the play. Her parents advised her to get a divorce from her Dalit husband. She is used as an instrument in her father's experiment of creating a casteless society and for her Dalit husband Arun, she is the representative of all the upper caste people who had exploited and tortured his ancestors. Through the play, Tendulkar illustrates the fact that whatever may be the position of a woman, she is prone to violence and victimization. Jyoti's firmness on sticking to her decision and ideology to marry the Dalit boy and be with

him left nothing for her but remorse for a lifetime. Despite being a Brahmin girl, she suffers unfathomably in the hands of her Dalit husband. She became a victim of her own ideology and choice which creates such a situation that she cannot escape and suffers by being a Situational Subaltern. An analysis of the selected plays of Vijay Tendulkar reveals that the subaltern sensibility of Tendulkar is grounded upon casteism, class consciousness, gender discrimination, inequality which cripple the post - independent Indian society. Tendulkar has left no stone unturned to bring to the fore the social inequalities, discrimination based on class consciousness and casteism, and the atrocities inflicted upon women by patriarchy on the one hand and gender hegemony on the other through his plays. The readers get a sneak peek of his subaltern vision in his plays and it seems to be more attuned to the marginalized condition of women in contemporary Indian society. It is precisely the reason why Tendulkar's dramatic corpus has no scope for representation of male subaltern at least in the plays under discussion. His silken sympathy for the helpless and marginalized women of contemporary society is poignantly expressed through the plight and sufferings of female characters such as Sarita and Jyoti who can be critically acclaimed from the standpoint of 'gendered subaltern'.

It can be said that the essence of *Kanyadaan* is domestic violence which represents caste and gender clearly because the play opens and ends with it for the violent pleasure of Arun. In his very first get - together with Jyoti's parents, he shows his yearning for domestic violence. He grabs Jyoti's arm and curls it. She groans in agony and attempts to blow upon the arm to decrease the pain. When Jyoti comes back to her parent's home after her wedding with Arun, her father's eye falls on the mark on her arm. When he asks how she got it, she hides the arm. She astonishes everyone by revealing that she has left Arun. This displays the passion for which domestic violence is done. He mentions his 'fucking' hands with which he blows Jyoti and takes a knife out of pocket to cut them off. When Seva expresses to him that wife - beating is brutality, he confesses that he is cruel by birth and will always continue so. He saw how his father cruelly hit his mother. After Jyoti comes back with Arun, he does not restore his ways. He remains to shattered her and even kicks her so much so that Seva has to acknowledge her in a treatment home because of bleeding from an internal wound. Seva calls Arun a shameless parasite living on her daughter's blood (though in his absence). Nath says that Arun is taking vengeance for the harassment done by the caste people on the Dalits for centuries. Jay Prakash comes and puts it symbolically that people who are victims once are satisfied if they oppress others when they get a chance later just as the Jews having agonized massively at the hands of Hitler took the chance of paying the same coins back to the Palestinians. The play finishes with Jyoti determining to live with Arun for good or for bad and cuts off her relatives with her parents. She chooses to cheerfully undergo domestic violence which Arun may resolve to impose on her.

In *Kanyadaan*, Jyoti's situation changes from being a woman of the upper - caste to that of a wife of a Dalit. On account of caste diversity and gender discrimination, she subjugates a further lower rank in the people and her spouse is now

placed higher than her. In this regards Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1985) rightly says that 'the women in the Third World countries are doubly oppressed by colonialism and patriarchy' (Das 143). In *Kanyadaan*, Jyotirecaps the readers of Spivak's concept of the gendered subaltern whose individuality is finally removed in the speech of the text, making one memory Spivak's observations: Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject - constitution and object - formation, the figure of the woman disappear, not into a pristine nothingness but a violent shutting which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World Woman.' (Spivak 306)

In the end, Tendulkar shows Jyoti as admitting her individuality as a Dalit woman, as prepared to conform to the Dalit communal through her wedding, and eager to seek social housing and self - liberation within that public by separating herself from her parental family, philosophy, and power. In this regard, Aparna Dharwadker rightly says that 'Jyoti...embodies a female will that breaks free of parental constraints, and becomes fully autonomous in the course of the play, capable of challenging and dissolving family bonds. This unqualified superiority makes her a radical modern figure' (Dharwadker 308). Examining the communal significance of *Kanyadaan*, Samik Bandyopadhyay concludes that in this play, 'Tendulkar has focused on a problem that there is no bridge between the various sections of society and that the attempt to overcome a taboo often leads to greater pitfalls than one can handle' (Bandyopadhyay 597).

At last, to sum up we can say that *Kanyadaan* (1983) is a remarkable play that depicts caste and gender issues explicitly. *Kanyadaan* is a story of Jyoti. She becomes a victim of sadistic pleasure by her Dalit husband as she implements the arrogant principles of her father in her life. He pursues to take retaliation for the dominance of the Dalits by the Brahmans earlier by persecuting her. He does not spare her even when she is on her way to the family. For the relief of her parental home, Jyoti favors living with him. It is a severe shock to her because her father does not live up to the arrogant principles which he had taught her. Through the representation of Dalit and Brahmin Tendulkar has portrayed the real image of exploitation in the name of caste and religion. In this way, we can say that the title of the play is appropriate and justified.

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