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A Critical Analysis of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

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Abstract

The paper discusses the most troubled aspects of the relationship between caste and gender in post-colonial India. The play *Kayadaan* is about the inter-caste marriage. Arun Athavale is a Dalit who marries Jyoti Devalikar, a Brahmin woman. He is abusive towards Jyoti even during her pregnancy but she stays committed to him. Ultimately, she goes back to her own family. The play portrays domestic violence of a Dalit husband on his Brahmin wife. This play indexes the various stances on caste politics itself.

Keywords

Vijay Tendulkar; *Kanyadaan*; Inter-caste marriage.



Vijay Tendulkar, known as Arthur Miller of Indian theatre, is a life-long resident of the city of Mumbai in India. He wrote thirty full length plays and twenty - three one act plays, several of which have become classics of modern

Indian theater. His well-known plays are *Gidhade (The Vulture)*, *Silence*, *The Court Is in Session*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Kamala*, *Kanyadaan (Giving Away of a Daughter in Marriage)*. Women play a key role in his plays. They are drawn from day to day life. His female characters are mainly from the lower and middle classes. They bring a broad range of emotions into the plays. The characters struggle between emotions and intellect, espoused values, conflicting actions and seek independent yet submissive identity. The dramatist tends to minimize the personal influence on the characters in his plays, and that they are in the play with their own minds, ways and destiny.

His play *Kanyadaan* (1983) was originally written in Marathi. The play portrays the struggle of a girl Jyoti, who is born in a Brahmin family and gets married to Arun Athavale, a Dalit. The play points out how social strata of life play a very crucial role in the life a person. Jyoti's father is a politician with a progressive view. He is not rigid about caste. He wants to break the caste barrier. Her mother Seva is a social activist. Jyoti's brother Jayaprakash is in the favor of none.

The play has two acts with a total of five scenes. Act I, scene i begins with a discussion in the small drawing-room of Nath Devalikar where he enquires about the bus to Asangaon. Jyoti wants to disclose her love for Arun to her family. Her mother is not at home. Her father and brother wait for Jyoti's mother to come back home. Jyoti likes to tell it while her mother and father are at home together. In this scene, Jyoti avers that she likes Arun and wants to marry him. Nath and Seva ask details of the boy. Jyoti replies that he is a Dalit, doing his B.A., and his father is a farmer. Nath is ok with it, but Seva dislikes the union.

The next scene deals with Arun's visit to Jyoti's home. Jyoti brings Arun to her home. They are alone at her home. Jyoti talks about her brother Jayaprakash who is doing M. Sc. When her brother comes, she introduces him. Then her mother Seva comes followed by her father Nath. They know

Arun is at their home. Jyoti is very firm and wants to marry Arun. Without fear she remarks, “But right or wrong, what does it matter anyway? I made a commitment and now I can’t run away from it.” (42). But Seva is not influenced by the liberal attitude. She being an orthodox opposes the marriage and she avers:

I will oppose this marriage. In your words I shall break party discipline and revolt. Does Jyoti’s resolve seem sensible to you? Tell me, as a father, with your hand on your heart. Don’t beat around the bush. (43)

In Act II, scene i, Arun and Jyoti marry each other. The scene starts with a conversation between Seva and Jyoti. Jyoti comes home after her wedding. Seva asks her about her staying out late because she does not permit her to stay out late in night. Jyoti is very unhappy and perplexed about the situation. The dramatist brings out the harsh reality of caste system prevalent in the Indian society which makes life hard for every Dalit. These differences remain and affect the life of Jyoti and Arun. Seva’s statement is very sarcastic over the the choice made by Jyoti:

After your marriage the atmosphere of this house has changed. And do you think you are still the same, Jyoti? You live here like a stranger in this house out of sheer necessity. You are no help to us, nor are we able to count on you. (46)

Jyoti suffers from the painful condition of her life. She is beaten by her husband. She says that he is a wife-beater, an idler, and a drunkard. But Nath does not want her to leave Arun because, Nath wants them to set an example for others to intermarry. Sometimes, Jyoti will start crying and say, “...I must learn to live without tears. I mustn’t even complain. It was I who made the decision, I must find my own strength to bear this, alone...” (51-52). This portrayal of Jyoti’s life is sure to terrify a caste-Hindu and he would dare not think outside the accepted norm of the life in the caste based society. Later,

this tricky situation gets another justification. Nath with his son Jayaprakash and wife Seva tries to resolve the problem of Jyoti. While Nath asks Seva what do you think in this matter. Seva's attitude is again very distressing and she says "In this matter my stand has been very clear from the beginning. This marriage is really no marriage at all. But since you ask for my help, I am with you. Tell me what is to be done. I will do it" (53).

Then Arun comes to Jyoti's home. He asks Nath and Seva for Jyoti. Seva rebukes him for beating Jyoti. Arun is ruthlessly and rudely questioned by Jyoti's parents. Finally, Jyoti ignores everyone and wants to leave with Arun. Seva is shocked over by Jyoti's behaviour, but Nath feels proud of his daughter.

Further, Act II, scene ii depicts the autobiography of Arun, where he talks about the oppression and exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes. But for himself, he exploits Jyoti, who is now pregnant. Seva meets Jyoti's doctor Kumud, who tells her that there is nothing to worry about her bleeding, but she requires much care. Arun asks Nath to preside over the discussion of his autobiography. Nath is annoyed at this. But Seva makes him to agree to go to the discussion. She tells Nath to appreciate his autobiography, as her daughter's life is in his hand. Seva remarks, "First listen to me, then do what you like. Look, we are badly trapped. If we go against his wishes, it will be more suffering for Jyoti..." (67).

The final scene of Act II illustrates the departure of Jyoti from her parents' home permanently. She decides to live with Arun and calls herself Jyoti Arun Athavale. The scene starts with a complex situation where Nath's idealism turns into realism. His lofty idea does not save his daughter from harsh reality of life. Tendulkar's portrayal of a Dalit marrying a Brahmin girl is a hypothetical phenomenon. A Brahmin giving his daughter's hand in marriage to a Dalit is totally unheard. A Brahmin with a progressive ideology that

transcends caste is rare of the rarest. For the sake of constructing a different plot, he twists facts and creates an impractical plot.

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