

**KANYADAAN: THE CULTURAL AND COMPLEX UPHEAVALS OF  
A FAMILY – NATION A PLAY BY VIJAY TENDULKAR**

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*Kanyadaan* (Gift of a Daughter) (1983) Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan* is his most complex creation about the cultural and emotional upheavals of a family and also the play tries to explore the extremely sensitive issue between upper class and Dalit caste that is still prevalent in Indian society. The play addresses the acculturation substantial attributes as inherited from ancestors to the status quo. Social practices, religious faiths, family traditions, ethical commitments contribute to childhood insecurities and discontents and these discontents furnished a suitable material to Tendulkar to rock the contemporary Indian theatre with new awakening. 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 which continues to evade easy solutions.

It is hardly surprising that dalit intellectuals and others reacted negatively to the play. In 1988, when Tendulkar was inaugurating at the All India Dalit Drama Convention, a dalit writer hurled a sandal at the playwright. (1 mail 12-3-14) But Tendulkar was also criticized from the opposite direction: one commentator in a mainstream English-language newspaper pronounced that he should have 'known better' than to try and 'rationalise' Arun's brutishness. (2). *Kanyadaan* eventually won the Saraswati Samman award; Tendulkar confessed that he was 'confused' by the award, since the play was 'not the story of a victory; it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion. It gives expression to a deep-rooted malaise and its pains. (3 mail 12-3-14) The play won him the Saraswati Samman award but for the same play he was criticized and faced the anger of the audience. Tendulkar stated the *Kanyadaan* is not the story of victory; in reality it is acceptance of defeat and intellectual confusion. Tendulkar, in his speech, remarked,

"You are honoring me with the Saraswati Samman today for a play for which I once has a slipper hurled at me. Perhaps it is the fate of the play to have earned both this honor and that insult. As its creator, I respect both verdicts." (*Kanyadanam*: 71)

The title *Kanyadaan* is an irony. It spells out the contradiction between the play's statement and the scriptural meaning of the word. The giving away of the daughter to someone as a philanthropic 'gift' where the right of ownership is passed on from the girl's (*kanya*) father to her husband. This can be regarded as a befitting recognition of the play's potentially of an effective intervention into the preset definitions of social configurations.

*Kanyadaan* translated into English by Gowri Ramnarayan is awarding winning play. It is a distinctive kind of the play in which he seeks possibilities of the ground for defense and justification for perversity of behavior. The play is a dramatic account of the horrors of caste

system. Most of Tendulkar plays are based on real-life incidents. The play *Kanyadaan* is perhaps supposed to depict on the life of the Dalit Marathi poet Namdev Dhasal.

The play revolves round the theme of marriage as indicated by the title. The word '*Kanyadaan*' refers to the giving away of a bride to the bridegroom by her parents. Tendulkar explores the texture of modernity and social change in India through the forces this marriage unleashes. The tense gripping play, *Kanyadaan* is charged with an undercurrent of violence, uncertainties and anger.

The action of this Two-act drama, containing five scenes in all, each placed in the same locale in Pune revolves around five characters: an inept but idealist father Nath Devalikar, an independent minded but realist wife Seva, skeptical son Jayaprakash is an M.Sc student and an educated naïve but would-be-willing-to-suffer daughter Jyoti all belonging to Brahmin family but all votaries of socialism dedicated to the cause of the upliftment of the untouchables or Dalits. To this list must be added the fountain head of all the creation, a talented and educated Dalit Arun Athavale.

The play is comparatively a shorter play is divided into Two Acts each of which is further divided. Act I is divided into two scenes, and Act II is divided into Three scenes. Jyoti is a daughter of Nath Devalikar, who is "*Gandhivadi*" democrat MLC. Seva is also busy with her social activities and all the time she is also busy with social services and the movements which take place in upliftment of women. Jyoti, the 20 years old educated working Brahman girl brought up in a highly cultured Brahman family falls in love with Arun Athavale a dalit youth from a village, which she has known only for two months.

The action takes place in the drawing room of Nath Devalikar, the protagonist's apartment in an old building in a middle class colony. The play begins with a commonplace incident. Nath is trying to know the timing of a bus telephonically but fails to get a proper reply from the controller of the bus service. Jyoti tries to pacify her father by telling him that there is nothing unusual about such mismanagement of the bus service. But Nath refuses to take the reality into account and keeps harping on the duties of the controller and his negligence of them. Nath wants his children to understand his point of view. He complains that the dreams that his generation had seen about post-independence India have not materialized.

The couple is so busy that they hardly spend much time with their children, Jayaprakash and Jyoti. At the beginning of the play we are given a vivid picture of the everyday life of Devalikar family. Nath is a busy man who is out almost always in travelling from one place to another in connection with his political activities and delivering public speeches. Seva is also busy organizing women's rallies and camps. Jyoti and Jay try to help them as much as possible. It is only on rare occasions that the whole family is able to sit together.

Jyoti and Jay always stay at home conveying their message to each other. The dialogues of the members of Devalikar family are soft and the language used is simple and straight forward and respectful. Nath calls Jayaprakash as Pakya and Jyoti as Jyotyia. This indicates that Nath and Seva are very responsible, loving and wants to be friendly with his children. Even Nath's wife Seva instead of showing the pompous respect by calling her husband 'Aho', she speaks with him in a friendly manner 'Are'.

Jyoti has to almost take an appointment from Nath and Seva when she wants to tell them together something important. In the first scene of the first act, On Seva's arrival Jyoti informs her parents her decision to marry Arun Athavale, a Dalit *mahar* youth who is a poet and writer whom she has met in the Socialists' study group. She does a part-time job in 'Shramik Samachar'. Nath and Seva react differently to the information about Arun's background. Nath is

congratulates her without knowing about the boy. But Seva is shocked at this unexpected news, she inquires about the boy, his social position and family. Jyoti tells Seva that Arun's parents live in a village with six children. Arun has to send money home every month. The entire responsibility of the family is on Arun's shoulders. Seva asks Jyoti, what is special in Arun? Jyoti replies that he writes poems and he is writing his autobiography. Seva reacts differently to the information about Arun's background. Seva expresses her apprehensions due to Arun's not having a secure job and the vast cultural difference between them.

Jyoti is haunted by doubts and is unsure about marrying him but her idealistic training helps reach a decision. Jyoti tries to allay her mother's fears by telling her that she will manage.

“But right or wrong, what does it matter any way? I made a commitment and now I can't run away. (*Kanyadanam*: 525).

However, it appears that she had made a commitment without giving it much thought. Jyoti's attitude for marriage appears very childish when Seva comes to know that Jyoti is acquainted with him for the last two months she thinks that Jyoti has taken the decision in haste. Seva advises Jyoti to reconsider and decide carefully. But Jyoti who has already made up her mind and is not ready to change her decision under any circumstances. The truth of the situation emerges soon when Arun proves to be violent husband. Jyoti's marital and social experiences teach her that it is almost impossible to change either people or society. In this first act, the attitudes of Seva, Jyoti and Nath distinctively show that their sentiments were controlled by caste consciousness.

In scene 2, Act 1, Jyoti comes with Arun Athavale to her house to introduce him to her parents and her brother. Arun is dark complexioned and has a harsh face but good-looking. On entering the comfortable middle-class house Arun feels nervous because the house is different from him. He doesn't want Jyoti to leave him alone. Here the playwright artistically describes actual feeling of discomfort. Arun tells Jyoti that he is afraid of large buildings of cement-concrete. His heart shudders when walls of cement and concrete surround him. He feels he must get up and run away and get lost in the crowd. Arun narrates about the lives of his forefathers and about himself.

Arun projects his insecurity in the family of Seva. He accepts that they have better sense of security and belongingness in the alley streets breathing with common man. In Arun's confession, the image of 'crocodile' and 'sharks' indicate the idea of devouring capacity of the elitists. With a sadistic sarcasm, Arun exposes that their grandfather and great grandfather used to roam barefoot miles and miles. He feels secure and safe on the streets with crowds, where his whole childhood has passed. He also tries to give the actual picture of own society. Arun becomes more eloquent on the subject of untouchability. His words express hatred for upper class people.

He challenges Jyoti if she could have taken breath in the stinking hut. At this stage Arun becomes a symbol. These words reveal how inferior he is in thoughts. It may be because of his own circumstances. In Arun's mind the resentment is not for Jyoti but for the whole class and his resentment assumes the proportion of absolute solution.

The beast in him comes out when he is challenged by Jyoti that he can't beat his wife. Arun who is an angry young man and he reacts against the class and caste system. He wants to take revenge of the injustice done to his family, his community in the past. Each and every word he utters is full of anger and he speaks in a filthy language. He even dares to abuse the high class. Later in the presence of Jayaprakash, Arun grabs her hand and twists it. Jyoti moans in pain. It

also suggests the kind of life Jyoti is venturing into by marrying Arun. This is the indication of what is to happen in the future after the marriage.

Everyone hit very hard, Jyoti is extremely nervous. Seva and Jayaprakash are shocked by his mannerism. Unmindful of their shocked reactions, Arun goes for talking in a rather obscene language about the advantage of brewing illicit liquor. After Nath's arrival the atmosphere changes and he appreciates Arun's creative ability. After his departure Seva and Jayaprakash reject him as Jyoti's partner. Though Nath speaks in defense of Arun's vile behavior, he advises Jyoti to think the matter over. Jyoti is in dilemma about Arun's complex nature but determined to marry him as she is committed to her words and now she cannot run away from it. The dramatic conflict is *Kanyadaan* is more convincing because the conflict of interpersonal relationship and social convention go simultaneously.

The darkness that sets in now, as the stage direction indicates, seem to be suggestive of the darkness is that going to descend in the married life of Jyoti and Arun. In scene I of Act II open to show that Jyoti who becomes tired of the domestic violence at the hands of Arun after few a months of married life. Jyoti decides not to take economic and social support from her parents and chooses to remain with Arun all her life, constantly struggling with poverty, domestic violence. Jyoti after marriage has realized that she made a wrong choice as she was disillusioned by misery. Unable to bear the physical and mental torture Jyoti after months returned to her parents home and she has declared that she has left Arun forever.

When Nath comes in and learns of Jyoti's tales of woe, he shocks the family by his suggestion that Jyoti and Arun should come to stay with them rather than wander. He condones Arun's ill-treatment of Jyoti as the result of the harsh environment in which he has been brought up; if he get a better surrounding he will definitely improve. Next day Arun comes to take Jyoti with him. He realizes that he is an offender, but while begging for Jyoti to return with him his true colors emerges-he draws out a knife to chop off his own hands. He justifies his violent behavior by saying that he has grown up watching his mother get beaten by his drunken father every day. These actions are sufficient to change Jyoti's mind and she decides to go back with Arun. Nath feels proud and wishes, against all odds, that her daughter would be able to lead a happy domestic life with Arun.

As the scene II Act II opens, Nath is immersed and admiring his Dalit son-in-law's recently published autobiography. Arun's release of autobiography based on his personal experiences is a turning point in the play *Kanyadaan*. The idea of the press release of the autobiography of Arun by Nath is dramatically significant to lead the action to apex. It has been employed as the indirect mode of inflicting pain on others. The attitude of Arun in the play exhibits the misuse of power and violence. He thought that as a husband he had complete control over his wife- body and minds both. Few months later in Act II, Scene II it is presented that Jyoti is expecting a baby, and her mother admits her at the nursing home in the sixth month due to internal bleeding as Jyoti has been brutally beaten and kicked by Arun in the belly and in that way he is returning all the kicks aimed at the generations of his ancestors by men of high caste. When Nath learns this, he fails to understand and explain Arun's behavior.

Arun, in his autobiography, deals with the theme of oppression, miserable condition of the suppressed people and lower class, but the irony is this he himself exploits his wife who having absorbed the socialist principle of human equality marries Arun. His ill-treatment to Jyoti, particularly during her pregnancy. Is a kind of answer back from the Dalits to the upper-class?

Dalits have been condemned and discarded by the high caste people for a long time as Jayaprakash quotes, shows the same, “Yesterday’s victim is today’s victimizer” (*Kanyadaanam*: 51). He quotes a news item that the Jews who were once persecuted have now become the merciless murderer of Palestinians, with this news Jayaprakash indicated towards Arun’s behavior. This role-switching, from victim to victimizer in the case of Dalit and from victimizer to victim in the case of upper class, leaves a question in the audience’s mind as to what is the future of this class division and caste discrimination. Tendulkar has supported the philosophy of how a victimized becomes a victimizer by giving the example of the things in between Israeli forces and Palestinian.

Nath realizes the hollowness of his idealism. From now on his liberal view of Arun changes to a realistic one. Arun comes to meet Nath with his friends Hammeer Rao Kamle, noted essayist of Dalit literature and Vamanseth Nevrgaonkar, a critic of Dalit literature. They insist Nath to preside over the discussion of Arun’s autobiography. Nath does not want to deliver the speech. He goes to the function and delivers a hypocritical speech, under pressure from his wife who thinks that such a gesture would save their pregnant daughter from any further misery. In order to praise the book he had used the most beautiful world and writer like Byron and Kusumagraj only for the sake of his daughter.

In *Kanyadaan* the idea of the press release of the autobiography of Arun by Nath is dramatically significant to lead the action to apex. It has been employed as the indirect mode of inflicting pain on others. In the last scene Nath’s hypocritical action receives a boomeranging reaction from his own daughter, Jyoti who comes to hear him speak on Arun’s autobiography. She does not favor her father’s idea of passing undesirable remarks on the book of Arun, “Why did you make speech on Arun’s book” (*Kanyadaanam*: 65).

Nath, who is determined to uproot the Casteism from the society, is confronting the blame of being a hypocrite from his own daughter. Jyoti, in spite of being educated girl, is forced to accept her fate as Arun’s wife even though she does not like it. She comes to know that it is not possible to change people. She disowns her father for having failed in his duties towards her and leaves his house never to return. Tendulkar uses a subtle device to suggest the total defeat of Nath’s idealism. With the spotlight on Nath’s face, the audience can hear sounds of huge Buildings hurtling down and the sound gets louder and louder till Nath breaks down and falls on the sofa in a listless manner.

### CONCLUSION:

Hence the above play gives a clear picture of how the gift of a daughter used to be a pivotal custom in the Indian tradition. This custom lead to the deprival of the value of traditional Indian girl who was always subsumed basing on the cultures and traditions of the Hindu society. Though, a boy is given dowry for marrying a girl, still he receives the treatment of a maharaja and he leads an upper standard life. In case of *kanyadaan* or gift of a daughter also the standards of a girl child are always less and she is treated as a peripheral being in the society. This is a social evil which need to be eradicated from the grass root levels for the well being of the society.

### Reference:

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. Gowri Ramnarayan. Trans. New Delhi: Oxford University Press: 1996.