



KANYADAAN: THE ADMISSION OF DEFEAT AND INTELLECTUAL CONFUSION

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan* (*Daughter Gifted Away*, 1983), translated by Gouri Ramnarayan is not the story of a victory; it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion. The play deals with psychological study of the social tensions caused by casteism in India side by side with the development of Jyoti's character from a soft-spoken and highly cultured Brahmin girl into a hardened spouse of her Dalit husband. Likewise, it portrays transformation in Nath's attitude. Bitter experiences of life turn the stubborn idealist into a disillusioned realist. According to Shailaja B. Wadikar the play is "an indirect comment on the evil consequences of father's obsession with idealism and husband's obsession with caste-consciousness" (3). Tendulkar deals with the emotional upheavals of family. The play highlights the complexities of solving sociological problems through a progressive framework.

INTRODUCTION

The play, *Kanyadaan*, explores the texture of modernity and social change in India through a marriage between two people of different castes and backgrounds. According to V. M. Madge, through such matrimonial relationship, the playwright, very sensitively, locates family and gender relations in the larger context of "the caste-conflict" and "the corrupt nature of State." Jyoti becomes a site, a battleground on which the clash between the upper caste and the Dalit castes takes shape. Madge finds that, "Jyoti becomes the vessel in which the conflicting caste ideologies pour their aspirations for power" (70).

Kanyadaan is perhaps the most controversial of all the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar. It reveals a Dalit poet's psychological, physical and verbal violence, which exists in his ethos, familial background, and caste-consciousness. The play is criticized as "anti-Dalit" and has provoked a great deal of anger and protest (Wadikar 110). Though nowhere, Tendulkar is asserting whether this play is anti-Dalit. He has always been controversial,

because he has always been contemporary in his concerns, both social and political. One should not look at the play, *Kanyadaan*, from such point of view because this is the requirement of the situation in the play. So it doesn't matter whether it is anti-Dalit or anti-Brahmin, what matters is its purpose that neither one should be over-idealistic as Nath, nor as much caste-conscious as Arun. The play depicts the want of harmony in the inter-caste marriage of a Brahmin girl and a Dalit boy.

In the play we have the story of a couple, Yadunath Devlalikar an MLA and his wife Seva, who are socially conscious and politically active. They have two children, a son and a daughter, Jayaprakash and Jyoti respectively. The story is set in 1970s as can be seen by the reference to the Emergency which Mrs. Gandhi has fear to impose upon the country. At the end of Act II, scene I, Nath receives a call from one of his political associations, when he says to the caller, "Don't tell me she is going to impose Emergency. Okay, if you hear anything more let me know, will you?" (Tendulkar 44-45). Mrs. Gandhi declared Emergency on 26 June 1975. So, that

enables one to locate the action with some precision. The story is, thus, set at a time when politics was the order of the day and also an intellectual fashion.

Nath and Seva can not spare sufficient time together with their children, because of their preoccupations. Jyoti has to discuss the question of her marriage--a matter of life and death to her--in fifteen minutes, as the father has a bus to catch, which will take him to his speech-making tour and the mother has just returned home tired after a rally. This, in its own way, as Madge observes, is a comment on the quality of the family life these two social reformers have been able to give to their children, despite their observance of democratic norms. In fact, the children are seen not as individual with their own aspirations, but as mere extensions of their parents' social experimentations (155).

When Jyoti tells her parents about her decision of marrying Arun Athavale, a Dalit poet, Nath feels rather very happy on being boy a Dalit, and says, "If my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn't have pleased me as much . . . well, I'm telling you the absolute truth" (Tendulkar 8). This shows that Nath is not thinking from the absolute side of a father, rather from the politician point of view, for whom, now, his integrity as public advocates of inter-caste marriages and casteless society is on test. Seva becomes serious at her attitude for marriage and tries to convince Jyoti that decisions about one's life must not be made so lightly. When a girl thinks of marriage, she has to look for some kind of stability, for some compatibility in lifestyles. After all, it is a matter of a lifelong relationship. But Nath does not agree with Seva, and suggests: "lifestyles can certainly be changed. And the idea of stability can be different for every man" (Tendulkar 12). Nath also says that in case Arun is not able to fulfill his responsibilities, Jyoti will start earning. He is in such a hurry to marry Jyoti that he does not want to consider the pros and cons of this marriage.

One can also find that there are some intellectual confusions in Jyoti's decision to marry Arun, as when Seva asks her, "Do you think you have done a wise thing?" in having the decision of marrying a person whom she knows since two months, Jyoti replies: "Sometimes I do. Sometimes I think I have acted like

a fool" (Tendulkar 12). But finally, Jyoti decides to marry Arun, and it provides Nath an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the old social reformers who not only delivered speeches and wrote articles on the remarriages of widows but also married them. Jyoti and Arun get married, but "what follows is a sequence of violence, misery, and disillusionment" (Wadikar 26).

Arun always remains conscious of his lower class origin and inflicts on Jyoti inhumane cruelties. Constant awareness of the suffering which the Dalits have undergone such as eating stale, stinking bread, flesh of dead animals etc., renders him violent. He is of the opinion that there can not be any give-and-take between the Dalits and upper-class people. Thus, their marriage, instead of being a source of happiness, proves a nightmare. Seva's fears and anxieties come true. Arun's consciousness of Jyoti's upper-class origin makes him feel inferior and restless. To get rid of his inferiority complex and to show his manliness, he gets drunk and beats her inhumanly. Even he kicks her on her belly when she is pregnant. This really affects one's heart that how can one become so much cruel to his wife? Being a graduate, a poet, if Arun does so just because he wants to take revenge from the high-caste people, for the ill-treatment with his ancestors, he himself is becoming the same victimizer and destroying his own married life. If Arun wouldn't have so much conscious of his low origin and the difference between him and high-class people, their marriage could have been a successful marriage. But excess of everything is bad.

As Nath is so over-idealistic that when he finds Jyoti's marriage, his dream is coming to an end, he wants to save it, not for the sake of his daughter's life, but for the success of his ideological experiments. As Nath says, with passion, that:

Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail! This dream which is struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust before our eyes! We will have to do something. We must save this marriage. Not necessary for our Jyoti's sake . . . this is not just a question of our daughter's life, Seva, this has . . . a far wider significance . . . this experiment is a very precious experiment. (Tendulkar 41)

Seva is ready to help Nath for her daughter's happiness. When she asks Arun, "WHY DO YOU BEAT JYOTI?" He replies:

What am I but the son of scavengers. We don't know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives . . . we make love to them . . . but the beating is what gets publicized (Tendulkar 44)

Arun calls barbarism his traditional way of life. He is not ready to change. He is very stubborn. He says, "I am what I am . . . and shall remain exactly that" (Tendulkar 44). Here, Tendulkar is giving an idea through his character Jayaprakash, who says, "Everything changes. Those who are able to adjust to the changing conditions survive. This is the law of life" (34).

Hence we acknowledge Nath's concern for his daughter when she is going back to Arun, he says, "If only I believe in God, then Jyoti, this is the moment I'd go down on my knees and pray for you . . ." (Tendulkar 45). The ideological scales finally fall off Nath's eyes when Arun publishes his autobiography and portrays himself as a good human being; but in real life, his six months pregnant wife is in hospital because the bleeding started, for there is an internal wound in her stomach, as Arun kicked her on her belly. From now on Nath's liberal view of Arun changes to a realistic one. For the first time, as Madge observes, Nath confronts the ineluctable human element involved in his social experimentations (161).

Nath becomes more pathetic than Seva as he compels Jyoti to go with Arun. His daughter becomes painful and miserable for having sincerely adopted his scale of values on the path of humanism (Prasad 100), while rejecting her mother's and brother's rational arguments. Towards the end of the play, her father also implicitly suggests to her to give up the ideals, but she rejects it for she thinks it cowardly to succumb to circumstances. She opines that, ". . . one must not turn one's back upon the battlefield." Jyoti has changed from a simple, sensitive girl into an assertive, determined lady. She cannot reject Arun, as "Arun is both the beast, and the lover. Arun is the demon, and also the poet. Both are bound together, one within the other, they are one" (Tendulkar 68).

The play ends with the charge that her father has rendered Jyoti mentally crippled by his false, hollow idealism. She says to her father that, "Someone said these people kidnap little children, break their limbs and make them cripples. Bhai, forgive me for my words, but you have made us . . ." (Tendulkar 69-70). Thus Jyoti accuses her father of being failure in his duties towards his children.

She leaves her father's house with a firm decision never to return and to accept life as it comes to her, as she says:

I am not Jyoti Yadunath Devlalikar now; I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger. I don't say harijan. I despise the term. I am an untouchable, a scavenger. I am one of them. Don't touch me. Fly from my shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable values. (Tendulkar 70)

Drained of life, Nath breaks down and buries himself in the sofa. He feels defeated and confused. The scene of father's helplessness reminds the reader of Shakespeare's famous lines from King Lear: "Pray, do not mock me. / I am a very foolish fond old man" (qtd. in Wadikar 66). Tendulkar portrayed his characters as the victims either of their inherent evil nature or of hostile circumstances. Nath's kanyadaan has turned out to be a sacrifice of his daughter on the altar of his socio-political ideology. Nath and Jyoti become mindless in playing the progressive role of reformers and Arun becomes mindless in his effort to overcome his awareness of low-class origin. Thus, it can be concluded that the play, *Kanyadaan*, is not the story of a victory; it is the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion.

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