

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*; Exploration of caste based conflict in Indian society

^aC. Raghavendra, ^aP Sreenivasulu Reddy

^aAsst. Professor of English GITAM University Visakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh India

Vijay Tendulkar's short play *Kanyadaan* which is written-with only seven characters, deals with a sensitive social and political issue. As we all know Daliths suffer a lot many years in the hands of upper caste people of the society. Tendulkar in this play presents entirely different aspect that the suffering of an upper caste woman and her family in the hands of a Dalith educated young man. He impartially portrays the problems as they are but not favour any view.

The institution of marriage is unique in the caste based society of India. Hindus give utmost priority to marriage. They take ever thing, for instance caste, character, occupation, economic status etc. into consideration. Of all these things caste of the bride and the bride groom should be the same. If any one of the above is not good usually marriage doesn't take place. In the marriage 'Kanyadaan' is essential feature. It means giving away bride to bridegroom. The title suggests that the play moves around marriage.

Jyothi, a young woman, is the principal character in this play. She is the daughter of Nath Devalkar and Seva. They belong to urban middle class Brahmin family. Nath is an MLA and Seva, who is a social worker, is always busy in social service. Jyothi has one brother who is studying Msc. We come to know that Nath and Seva do not spend much time with their children. Nath is always on tour addressing the public, Seva is busy organizing women's camps and rallies.

Jyothi takes a decision to marry Arun Athavale, a Dalith young man who writes poetry. She has met him in the socialists' study group. He is poor but eloquent. Jyothi informs her parents and brother that she has decided to marry Arun. Her father agrees at once because his dream is casteless society and for that he has been working. Seva is shocked. Even though she has been fighting against 'untouchability', she thinks as caring mother. Seva speaks about possible consequences:

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's not the issue. You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it (p.13).

Jyoti dismisses her mother's fears by saying that she can manage. Seva's character proves that in spite of modern thoughts she thinks like a traditional mother who takes caste, background, attitude, character, economical position of the bridegroom. Seva and her son oppose at first but they also agree for the marriage.

Jyothi brings Arun to her house to introduce him to her parents and brother. He is dark complexioned but good looking. He is nervous when he enters Jyothi's house because the house is different from his. He asks Jyothi not to leave him. Here the playwright artistically describes actual feelings of discomfort when Arun enters the house. Arun's words here reveal his entire background. He says:

If you see my father's hut you'll understand. Ten of us, big and small, lived in that eight by ten feet. The heat of our bodies to warm us in winter. No clothes on our back, no food in our stomach, but we feel very safe. Here, these damn houses of the city people, they're like the bellies of sharks and crocodiles, each one alone in them (p.16).

Arun becomes more eloquent in his expression on 'untouchability'. His words against Brahmins are full of poison. He asks Jyothi:

Will you marry me and eat stinking bread with spoilt dal in my father's hut? Without vomiting? Tell me, Jyothi, can you shit everyday in our slum's village toilet like my mother? Can you beg, quaking at every door, for a little grass for our buffaloes? Come on, tell me. (p.17)

These words reveal how inferior he is in his thoughts. It may be because of his own circumstances. Jyothi begins to weep uncontrollably. Later Arun apologizes for being rude in his speech. Jyothi accepts and laughs. When Jyothi is speaking that she is not touch me not girl he holds her arm and twists it violently. Jyothi feels the pain not because her hand is twisted but the rude behavior of Arun. Seva sees this and does not reveal her displeasure. She asks about Arun's education. When she asks for economical stability to be free from problems, to her astonishment he replies that for troubles illicit liquor is used. Nath enters and emphasizes the need for breaking the caste system. Arun without touching the tea brought by Jyothi leaves that house.

In spite of strange behaviour of Arun, as Jyothi is firm in her decision she gets married to Arun. The consequence is violence in the form of conflict which is hidden in him for ages. After marriage Arun comes home every night taking alcohol and beats Jyothi as illiterates do in the backward society. Unable to bear this torture Jyothi comes her maternal home from Arun not to return to him. When her father tries to pacify she replies that she has left Arun and she is not going back to him. Nath wants not to break the relationship so he asks that both stay in his house but that is rejected by Jyothi saying that she never be with Arun. Arun comes to say sorry to Jyothi. Seva asks him the reasons for his beating. He replies that he is the son of a scavenger. He doesn't know the non-violent ways of Brahmins. He also says that he loves his wife but drinking wine and beating are common to them. Watching all this Jyothi leaves the house with Arun to prevent further embarrassment. We can find wife and husband relationship between Hindu and Dalit families in a famous Dalit critic, Kanchaiah's words,

man-woman relations among Dalitbahujans do not go beyond natural relationships. For those who not come in touch with letter, for these whose spiritual wisdom is primitive but natural because it has not acquired the character of manipulation and exploitation, the human touch is still retained in these societies, begemonic relations in the forms that are visible among the Hindus are absent. Here even sexual intercourse is an organic need of the body but not a pleasure of the heart. This undefined love retains its naturalness among the Dalit-bahujans. Among the Hindus the man-woman relationship is conditioned by manipulation and receptivity. Dalitbahujan relationships on the other hand are based on openness¹.

The principal aim of Tendulkar is to explore man – woman relationship and bringing out a social problem. The play is purely Indian because castebased conflicts are there only in India. In other countries we can see colour and race conflicts. The play is fruitful and powerful work that expresses social change and conflict between two different races.

One critic observes that the image of women in contemporary Indian literature has changed drastically she observes:

No more is women considered or portrayed as a weak person, or falling at the feet of her husband or trying to pleasure him always... Modern writers have tried to transform this image of women as seen in the myths by portraying them in a more realistic manner. One such writer is Vijay Tendulkar.(Veena)

A discussion is arranged on Arun's autobiography and Nath is invited as the chairperson. Nath denies it first, but Seva informs him that Jyothi is pregnant and advised rest by the doctor. But she has failed in her attempts at persuading her to come home. She also explains practical problems if Nath rejects to attend. Damage will happen to his public image and their pregnant daughter may be in further misery. He understands that the invitation is a kind of black mail. He attends and praises the book.

Jyothi comes to hear her father on Arun's autobiography. She criticizes him for his hypocritical speech. She questions why he has come. When Nath asks her who will take care of her during delivery, Jyothi harshly replies that she has her husband. She emphasizes that she is not a widow. She firmly says that she is Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger. She leaves the house saying that she never comes again. Talking about the play one of the critics says:

Jyoti thus becomes mindless and surrenders to the situation. She like her father plays the Rescuer while Arun plays the victim. Her rescuing, at first, makes him behave more helplessly and then triggers his feelings of inferiority. Consequently, he shifts to the role of persecutor in order to feel powerful..... Jyoti goes down to the role of victim. Thus the Rescuer-victim transaction. This Drama Triangle make not only Jyoti but also Arun mindless to feel powerful. The unreal idealism of Nath and Jyoti

reflects their favorite role of rescuing which impairs their perception of the reality.(Sarath 73)

Jyoti, inspite of being educated girl, is forced to accept her fate as Arun's wife eventhough she does not like it. She comes to know that it is not possible to change people.Thus Vijay Tendulkar remarkably explores the conflict between two different castes in Indian society he also presents violence against a woman in spite of her good education and high caste.

Works cited

1. Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Calcutta: Samya,1996. p.33-34. print
2. Noble Dass, Veena, "Women Characters in the plays of Vijay Tendulkar." *New Directions in Indian Drama*. Sudhakar and Freya BaruaPandey (Eds). New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994. print
3. SaratBabu, Manchi, *Indian Drama Today: A Study in the Theme of Cultural Deformity*. New Delhi: Sangam Books Ltd., 1997. p 73.print
- 4 Tendulkar, Vijay. *Collected Plays in Translation: Kanyadaan*, Translated By Gowri Narayan. Fourth Impression. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.print