



POWER PLAY IN THE VIJAY TENDULKAR'S KANYADAAN

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ABSTRACT

Might is right is an age old saying. Despite so much progress of human civilization, human beings exercise various forms of power structures to dominate other, especially on the bases of gender, caste and class. Equality is still a Utopian ideal. Vijay Tendulkar is a very close observer and perceptive critic of Indian society. In his plays he has presented the realistic picture of Indian society which keeps looking backward even while moving forward. In his play Kanyadaan he has highlighted the fact that woman is the worst sufferer in a patriarchal society. Jyoti, the female lead of this play, has to suffer inhuman cruelty and violence from her husband Arun Athavale, a dalit poet and writer whom she marries out of her own misconceived notions of a socialist to abolish caste system by marrying a dalit. She is a victim of her father's impractical social reformer's idealism which he wants to experiment at the cost of his own daughter's life by provoking and supporting her in inter caste marriage without ever having put his idealism to the acid test of the social realities.

Keywords: Power-politics, hegemony, subordination, discrimination, exploitation, sadistic, cruelty

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INTRODUCTION

Power politics or power struggle refers to an overtly evident or covertly subtle maneuvering or competition in a relationship in order to exercise control, influence or dominance. Various forms of power dynamics and hierarchies are devised, established and legitimized for the perpetuation and promulgation of the hegemony enjoyed in the name of natural difference and power structure. Worst among the various forms of such power structures or dominances is male dominance exercised not only to manipulate woman's sexuality but to perpetually keep her in a subordinate or slavish position. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and critic of repute, is of the opinion that power is immanent in all social relations, whether in a family or in the layers of government and other social institution. Power has the character of a network and that its threat extends everywhere. Power also lies in almost all those social institutions in which man has edge over woman.

Male dominance is as old as the genesis of the concept of family and society. But male dominance as a term evolved in the twentieth century as a conceptual label to characterize the unequal power relations between men as a group and women as a group. However, this categorical approach to gender relations is not something a bolt from the blue but it has been a part of a long history of thought regarding the political relations of the sexes beginning with the early Greeks. A correlative of this system of thought has been the relative exclusion of Western women from the public sphere of economic, occupational, and political opportunities compared with their male peers and a tendency to value traits associated with masculinity over those defined as feminine.

Perfect equality is only a Utopian ideal because in the real world we live in human beings are nowhere equal. Discrimination has always been there on one basis or the other, but the worst and almost universal discrimination is gender discrimination which is naturally imbibed and unquestioningly accepted by both victim and the victimizer. Religions also give secondary position to woman. According to the Bible, God created the man first, and when he felt lonely the Lord God created the woman from the man's rib only after all the animals proved inadequate companions (Gen 2:18-23). The words, "suitable helper" in verse 18 have traditionally been interpreted to imply a functional subordination of the woman to the man as part of God's design in creation and even the emphasis of Adam's outburst that she is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23) also clearly indicate that man is possessor and therefore has the right to control, regulate or dominate. Moreover, considering Eve responsible for Adam's fall, God utters a three-part curse on her promising her increased labour pain and further adds, "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Thus, it was from here that the relationships of dominance and submission appeared for the first time. Almost all the religions believe that woman was created to give



assistance and company to men in performing essential duties and to facilitate procreation, preservation and continuation of family lineages.

Hinduism also uses the authority of ancient literature to keep woman at a lower rung of the society and deprive her of an independent existence or to deny her the status of an independent entity. Manu, the first Hindu law giver is often quoted in this regard. He mentions in Manusmriti that in childhood a woman should be kept under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her son's. She should not have independence. However, this translation and interpretation/misinterpretation are debatable.

The above translation, which is generally accepted, clearly indicates that in the ancient Hindu code the physical as well as psychological identity of women is defined through the role and control of men—the terrible triad of father-husband-son. Men decided everything for women and allowed her to exist only within male-defined boundaries. Life of Indian women also has been interpreted and regulated by male devised demarcations and social constructs. Therefore, control is the key word to understand the patriarchal mentality still prevailing in contemporary India.

Vijay Tendulkar, through his plays, created an intellectual debate in society and thereby changed the face of Indian drama. Being an insider, he intelligently and quickly visualizes the complex human problems. His plays deal with the instinctive human relationship. All the characters seem to be trapped either in their own cocoon or the vicious plots and conspiracies of the opponents. Thus, they have to struggle against the unfavourable conditions that they come across at different levels. With a broad range of complex behavioural factors, Tendulkar's characters appear unique even while being from the common rung of life. Tendulkar states in an interview with Gowri Ramnarayan, "My characters are much more complex than those of other playwrights or scriptwriters. This complexity itself becomes a problem as it makes them difficult to understand. But I can't forget or leave out the inner contradictions when I develop a character. I am impartial in my acceptance of the good and the bad in them" (Madge 173). Tendulkar is aware of the position of modern woman in the society and therefore in most of his plays, particularly in his *The Vultures*, *Encounter in Umbugland*, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Kamala* and *Kanyadaan*, he has not presented stereotyped traditional image of woman as is depicted in the mythologies. Prof. Veena Noble Dass's remarks are apt:

The image of woman in contemporary Indian literature has changed drastically. No more is woman considered or portrayed as a weak person, or falling at the feet of her husband or trying to please him always. Traditionally, a good woman is synonymous

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with a good wife. This is reflected in the most popular and well-known myths about women, for example in the stories of Savitri and Sathavan, Nala and Damayanti and above all in the Sita-Rama legend. Others like Draupadi, Gandhari, Arundhati and Ahalya are all seen in the contexts of their husbands. So overwhelming is this pattern that one is struck by the fact that the mother-child relationship features in the classical mythology, in spite of motherhood being considered a crucial factor in the shaping of feminine identity. (Dass 5)

Tendulkar in his play *Kanyadaan* explores the facile texture of Indian modernity through inter-caste marriage of two educated but socio-economically poles apart modern youth. The play gives expression to a deep-rooted malaise of the society and its hardly ever openly vented pain. The play also shows how difficult it is to bridge the gap between high idealism and multi layered ground realities which constantly thwart all efforts to abolish caste system and economic disparity. The play centers around Jyoti and her predicament in a male dominated society. Jyoti is also one of such women who get so entangled and trapped in their own woven net of love, emotions, responsibilities and social considerations that their emancipation or amelioration seems almost impossible, especially when they themselves decide to remain victims of their own choice and consider their suffering only as their purgation and salvation.

Tendulkar has depicted Jyoti as a typical modern Indian girl whose upbringing has inculcated in her all virtues of truthfulness, commitment, frankness, dedication and devotion. She frankly tells her parents of her decision to marry Arun Athavale, an educated Dalit poet. She is open-minded in every sense and doesn't hide anything from her parents about Arun. She tells them that Arun is from a Dalit family from Pune and that he is pursuing his B.A. along with part-time job in 'Sramik Samachar'. Arun's father works in the fields in the village called Chiroli near Karhad. Arun has to send money to his parents every month. Jyoti and Arun met in Socialists' study group. He was writing his autobiography. Jyoti knew everything about social, economic and familial condition of Arun before she decided to marry him. Seva and Jayaprakash did not like Jyoti's decision to marry Arun Athavale. Though, Seva was the active member of Socialist movement, she was not ready to accept Arun as her son-in-law. Seva did not find trustworthiness in the character of Arun. Seva and Jayaprakash made their wholehearted efforts to convince Jyoti and avoid this marriage. But Jyoti was inspired by Arun's poems and his autobiography.

Jyoti: His poems and his autobiography have inspired me with complete faith in him.
(CP 506)

Her father, however saw his high-minded idealism taking practical shape through this marriage. His own daughter is actually marrying a Dalit, the community for the upliftment of

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which he has led movements, preached and participated in rallies throughout his life. He wholeheartedly supports Jyoti's decision and practically encourages her for taking such a human and daring step. He takes it as a social experiment because he has always supported inter-caste marriage which he believes to be the most effective tool of social transformation. For him the saying that charity begins at home seems to come true. He fails to realize at present how his support and encouragement for this marriage would prove his sacrifice of his beloved daughter at the altar of social upliftment of the deprived castes.

In most of the cases daughters are treated as papa's fairies in their parental home. The same true with Jyoti also. Before her marriage, in her parental house, Jyoti knew no want. She is brought up in a civilized and cultured family of only four members. Her father Nath Devalikar, a follower of democratic principles, allowed each member in the family to express their views, opinions and sentiments without any restrictions. In the harmonious and congenial environment of her parental home Jyoti never experienced any gender discrimination. Even in the spousal relations of her parents or her own relation with her brother or father, she never found any male dominance or any member of the family trying to suppress anybody to thrust needless domination. Both her parents are social-workers in the real manner. Her father Nath Devalikar is not a pseudo socialist; he actually believes in experimentalism and practical life.

Jyoti's married life proves a kind of acid test for her. In real sense, after her marriage with Arun Athavale, Jyoti becomes victim of male-dominance and she has to suffer physically, mentally and emotionally. Arun is rather harsh and rough with Jyoti in his behaviour and temperament, for instance, in Act-I, Scene-I, Jyoti told Arun that she belonged to the Seva dal tradition and was not like those delicate touch-me-not creatures. After getting this reply from Jyoti, Arun grabs her arm and twists it. Jyoti moans in pain and anguish. She remains confused and hurt. It brings lump in her throat. She tries to blow upon the arm to reduce the pain. This instance clearly shows how unkindly and violently Arun used to treat Jyoti.

Reality is never a replica of imagination. Expectations from a marriage partner hardly ever meet the real fulfilment, especially when they or any one of them is not prepared to adapt and shoulder the responsibilities of married life. Before marriage Jyoti expected something good from Arun and judged him only after listening his poems. But life is reality and not poetry or imagination. Arun's past and his upbringing have a strong hold on him. His bruised and indented psyche never allow him to change. She could never imagine this sort of shocking vulgarity and coarseness from Arun. Arun is neither idealist nor romanticist and yet Jyoti's love for him is sincere and genuine. Jyoti's struggle to cope up with Arun is a kind of metamorphosis. Even then, Jyoti doesn't give up her love for Arun.

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Arun Athavale has been brought up in a completely different environment. He has seen his ancestors suffer humiliation, discrimination, abuse and violence in the hands of upper-class society. Similar has been the scenario in his home and his surroundings in which violence, abuse and use of rough and vulgar language is part and parcel of life. Constant awareness of the suffering which Dalit have undergone such as eating stale, stinking bread, flesh of dead animals etc., renders him violent. Arun has seen his father and other male members of his caste and community frequently beating their wives who never objected to that and accepted and internalized all that as the routine course and way of life. Arun proves to be a violent husband who treats his wife as an object of revenge against all the persons of higher caste and class. Arun tries to justify his innocence by showing that he doesn't deliberately and purposefully quarrel with Jyoti and beat her. He says, "One is not tempered. Gets a little drink too. She says something then I say something. The fight begins. I can't bear it. I lose control over my hands... (Gowri 43)

Arun wants to make Jyoti believe that his love towards her is true. He tries to cut his hands by which he has beaten her. He again and again accuses himself and calls himself a wretch. He says, "Give my knife back – let me tear my hands out – at least let me do this much for my Jyoti. Let me die.... I am a wretch Jyoti ... I am not fit to clean your shoes.....My sins cannot be washed away. Kick my face as punishment. Not that it can be any compensation" (Gowri 43).

Though Arun loves Jyoti very much but the Dalit part of his psyche has strong hold on him and most of the time he lives in his tormented past which goad him to unleash cruelty and torment on his upper caste wife. His past constantly haunts him which transforms him every night into an unpredictable savage beast filled with strange malice and a sadistic desire to punish his wife. He derives a crude satisfaction from all this, especially by the thought that he has caught a Brahmin girl. Arun derives sadistic pleasure through this sort of treatment and behaviour believing that this revenge is not only against the daughter of an upper caste girl but against the whole caste and upper class. That's why he frequently abuses her parents and all other members of that caste. He can aptly be compared with Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's play Look Back in Anger. His treatment of his wife and attitude towards in-laws is not much different from that of Jimmy porter. Jyoti's mother Seva is a leader of Sevalal who has been rendering her important social services for decades but Arun accuses her of being a procuress who supplies girls from the sevalal to the socialist leaders. Arun crosses all limits of decency and morality when he accuses that Jyoti's real father is not Mr. Nath but Guruji, the guide and philosopher of Seva. The play reveals Arun's psychological, physical and verbal violence, which exists in his ethos, familial background, and caste-consciousness. The



play depicts the want of morality and ethics in the inter-caste marriage of a Brahmin girl and a Dalit boy.

Arun Athavale succeeded in persuading and marrying a high-caste girl Jyoti by showing his poetic talent despite a few social and familial inhibitions. Even in his relation with his wife Arun always remains conscious of his lower-class origin and Jyoti's upper-class origin which makes him feel inferior and restless and that becomes the cause of inflicting inhumane cruelties on Jyoti. For Arun, like many other male members of his caste and class, getting drunk and beating wife mercilessly is a means to get rid of his inferiority complex. After getting drunk, he forgets everything and becomes so inhumane and merciless that he kicks on Jyoti's belly when she is pregnant. Such inhuman cruelty of Arun compels the readers and audience to think how a graduate poet can transgress all bounds of humanity and use such violence on a wife who married him despite all oppositions and apprehensions. Does he also, like Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* consider his wife a hostage or an agent of enemy who should be subjected to all sorts of revengeful cruelties to settle the score of all that has been done to his caste and class by upper caste and class people. In such cases wife is the worst sufferer and married life is always on the verge of destroying. When Seva asks Arun the reason of the frequent quarrels, abuse and violence, he shamelessly shocks them saying that he has beaten Jyoti for which he does not feel any shy or regret, rather he defends himself saying that abuse and beating are in their blood and therefore knitted in the webs of their lives. It is a part of the routine course of their lives.

Arun's brutality gets exposed in his non hypocritical behaviour when Joyti's mother asks him, "Why do you beat Jyoti?" He shamelessly replies: "What am I but the son of scavengers. We don't know the non-violent ways of Brahmin like you. We drink and beat our wives....We make love to them but the beating is what gets publicized" (Gowri 44). How shamelessly and insensitively he says that barbarism is his traditional way of life and he is not ready and doesn't intend to change that. His haughty, stubborn and orthodox views can be seen when he says that he is what he is and shall remain exactly the same. For Arun beating of the wife does not mean that he hates her; he loves her too, but according to him their love is never appreciated, rather, they are evaluated by their negative sides only. Therefore, he says: "I am a barbarian, a barbarian by birth when have I claimed any white-collar culture" (Gowri 45).

Seva is informed by Jyoti's neighbours about Arun's violence to Jyoti. Arun beats Jyoti in her pregnancy also. She gets severely injured. Seva admits her in Dr. Khare's Nursing Home to avoid further complications. About this Seva says, "...He had come home drunk as usual. Jyoti didn't say anything much. She said it was no big matter. There is internal wound in her



stomach. The neighbours told me not to allow the girl to stay there. They said, take her away, he beats her and even kicks her. (Gowri 47)

Arun's treatment of Jyoti has raised a turmoil of confusion and bewilderment in the mind of Nath who is conflicted between his high-minded liberal ideals and discovery of his latent

despise for the socially under-privileged lower-caste Dalits which has arisen from seeing his daughter subjected to beating by her Dalit poet husband Arun in an inter-caste marriage which Nath had himself encouraged. Despite all his efforts, he fails to understand Jyoti's acceptance of the rough treatment meted out to her by Arun. Nath's fate at the end of the play is not any different from that of Tendulkar's other male protagonists. Nath's confidence is badly jolted and dented. He is bewildered as he is losing the upper hand he had been playing as the broad-minded liberal father. In the last act, the father-daughter confrontation about her decision to continue and maintain her marriage with Arun shows that it is now up to Jyoti alone to face up to her new situation:

JYOTI: It will not happen, Bhai (father), because you yourself have taught us that one must not turn one's back upon the battlefield. It was you who always taught us that it is cowardly to bow down to circumstances. It was you who constantly intoned those phrases which never failed to get the audience cheering. And we also clapped and said, 'Our father is a great man.' You taught us those poems which said: 'I march with utter faith in the goal; 'I grow with rising hopes', and 'Cowards stay ashore, every wave opens a path for me. We shall continue to recite 'March on, Oh Soldier!' and continue to lose our lives as guinea pigs in the experiment, and you, Bhai, you will go on safely rousing the god sleeping in man.

NATH: (In pain) Jyoti, don't say that. Wait, Jyoti. Please don't go away like this. Let's give some more thought to it.

JYOTI: You think about it, I have to stop thinking and learn to live. I think a lot. Suffer a lot. Not from the blows, but from my thoughts, I can't bear them much longer. Forgive me, Bhai. I said things I shouldn't have. But I couldn't help it. I was deeply offended by your hypocrisy. I thought: why did this man have to inject and drug us every day with truth and goodness? And if he can get away from it at will, what right had he to close all our options?

(With certitude) Hereafter I have to live in that world, which is mine. (pausing) and die there. Say sorry to Ma. Tell her none of you should come to my house, this is my order. (CP 540)



M. Sarat Babu scrutinizes this play as a projection of mental deformity on various levels. He states in his study:

Tendulkar's play, *Kanyadaan*, illustrates the mental deformity of an Indian woman caused by her own father. In pursuing the ideal of her father, the protagonist discounts the hard reality and risks her marital life. Finally, she realizes the truth and tells her father in his face how he crippled her mind by setting unrealistic ideals (*Indian Drama Today* 115).

Netra Pal and Alka Mehra, in their perceptive article "The Deprivation of Moral and Ethics in the Male Characters of Vijay Tendulkar" conclude:

Tendulkar's all male characters are found moral less. They are all unsocial human beings. They are the vices of the society like hypocrisy, vulgarity, barbarism, corruption, narrow mindedness etc. They have feudal values in place of real moral values. Pro. Damle forgets his value of a professor, makes Benare pregnant and also thrusts her into the court. Arun, being a Dalit poet, kicks on the belly of Jyoti who is pregnant. Jaisingh is a reputed Journalist but he chooses a trade of buying and selling girls in the flesh market. Sakharam is a binder whose sexual desires are fulfilled not with one but seven-seven girls and Ghasiram who is kotwal of Poona gives his own daughter Gauri to Nana merely for his promotion of Kotwal. (03)

A contemporary and committed writer always keeps the improvement of society in mind whenever he wants to share his experience with his readers or audience. Tendulkar has, through his plays, put a mirror to the reality of the contemporary society. Balwant Bhaneja in support of this view writes:

Ultimately, the inner core of Tendulkar's plays came from his deep compassion and respect for human life – for life in general. Seeing its exploitation and waste, his response came through his unrelenting literary output and non-stop social activism. His plays seeking to comprehend the changing Indian reality showed balance, equilibrium, reconciliation and synthesis. Tendulkar's personal views and thinking in this regard leaned towards championing the rights and individuality of female protagonists. (09).

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