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**CRITIQUING TENDULKAR'S INTENTION: A FOCUS ON  
KANNYADAAN**



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**ABSTRACT**

*The present paper focuses on the issue of representation of Dalits by the main stream dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar, and attempts to pinpoint the underlying cultural motives of such representation that delineate the image of Dalits in an idiosyncratic way and project them as uncivilized, vulgar, and who are undeserving to live in the main stream society. The paper argues, therefore, that the derogatory and grotesque projection of Dalits by the upper caste writers, dramatists, film directors and intellectuals seems to be an age old phenomenon, and, a part of hegemonic agenda that finds its expression in various art forms and media.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Drama, hegemony, representation, caste, religion, culture*

## RESEARCH PAPER

Grotesque portrayal of the low caste/class masses by the upper caste/class artists and media in various art forms is not a recent phenomenon, rather, it has been a part of ideology, since time immemorial, which establishes and perpetuates every sort of hegemony. Ideology basically seeks to naturalize the stereotypes created and established by the ruling castes and classes in any society, so that, there remains least possibility of doubts and questions from the side of the masses regarding the authenticity and validity of the cultural-religious construct which dominates, regulates and governs the life of the masses. Ideology becomes, in this way, an instrument for the dominant castes/classes to hegemonize, and further the agenda of domination. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, on the part of artists, ideology finds its expression in various art forms and other cultural products and influences the psyche of the masses. Many artists claim that their artistic creation does not belong to any ideology- religious, political or cultural per se, and, at the same time, many readers, teachers and scholars naively believe that art does not belong to any ideology, it's neutral. As a matter of fact, believing innocently means being vulnerable to the ideological designs and scholarly strategies of the dominant and ruling castes/classes which are meant to victimize and exploit the masses. Apart from other art forms, drama has also been used, by the so called main stream artists, to propound and disseminate certain hegemonic ideology. Most of the times, the upper caste writers and directors deliberately and consciously propound the hegemonic ideology, and, sometimes unconsciously this is done by them, as they are also the victims of naturalized stereotypes. Therefore, art cannot be conceived as neutral, it certainly projects certain ideology, that too political, and becomes complicit in the larger subterranean agenda of that ideology to which it advocates.

Ruling castes/classes always portray the essentialist picture of the society, its castes/classes and their world view, the characters from upper and lower castes/classes and disseminate a certain kind of message that designs the mindset of the people that upper castes/classes are noble, generous, compassionate, and humanitarian while the lower castes/classes are brutes, beasts, uncivilized et cetera. Attribution of certain characteristics to certain castes/classes emerge as the perpetual paradigms and historical –sociological facts which are cherished for generations together, emphasized, repeatedly, through educational institutions, course contents, cultural products, state agencies et cetera. Such attribution assumes the form of discourse in course of interpretation and reinterpretation, projection and re-projection, and plays the key role in

establishing and perpetuating the power of the dominant caste/class. Depiction of the Dalit person as a brute is also a part of the larger agenda of attribution of certain characteristics to certain castes, and image formation through certain cultural codes which are strategically designed and laid down and endorsed by the main stream media and literary/cultural practices. Vijay Tendulkar, the most seminal name in the province of Marathi Drama, depicts a Dalit youth as a stereotype and projects him as uncivilized and unfit for the mainstream society in his much acclaimed play, *Kanyaadan*.

Mainstream Marathi theatre, generally, never touches the life and the issues of the lower castes, however, the strong wave of Dalit literature and theatre and Dalit movement compelled the mainstream to take cognizance. However, the prejudiced and biased mainstream started to project the Dalit people in derogatory manner, and Tendulkar's *Kannyadaan* is the best example of this. *Kannyadaan* is a story of a Dalit youth Arun Athavale who is a creative writer and engaged in love affair with a Brahmin girl Jyoti. Jyoti is daughter of well-known socialist leader and thinker Mr. Nathrao Devlikar. Jyoti loves the poetry and autobiography of Arun declares that she is going to marry him. Being a socialist leader Nathrao apparently appreciates Jyoti's decision, but Seva, his wife and a stereotype Brahmin middle class woman opposes it. She is doubtful about the future of Jyoti, she does not like Arun and his culture. But she is left helpless before the strong will power of Jyoti and support of Nath as well.

Post marriage life of Jyoti is just a hell. She is frequently beaten up by Arun. He emerges as a heavy drunkard. Even when Jyoti is pregnant he beats her in stomach. Nath becomes angry with this but he is also helpless and repents for his decision to support the marriage. He wants his daughter to live in his own home, but in the end, Jyoti declares to continue to live with Arun as his wife. This is the theme of the play so far. In the note on *Kannyadaan*, it has been registered that "At the end, Jyoti is forced to come to terms with her fate as Arun's wife, as she realizes that it is not possible to improve people and change society. Tendulkar has focused on a problem that there is no bridge between the various sections of society, and that the attempts to overcome taboo often lead to greater pitfalls than one can handle."(597)

Tendulkar wrote *Kannyadaan* during those days when Dalit literature and Dalit writers were being acclaimed across India. Dalit intellectuals had started to interrogate the authenticity and validity of the Hindu sacerdotal scriptures which were discriminating and exploitative. Their

writing was truly Indian writing with realistic depiction of the caste society. They rejected the whole tradition of Brahmin dominated literature established their own, which gained the nomenclature as Dalit literature. At the same time, Dalits had acquired the self consciousness and self esteem on account of reading Phule- Ambedkar philosophy and started a sort of rebellious self assertion which was exposing the hypocrisy of the Brahmanic culture and religion. This might be one of the reasons behind Tendulkar's derogatory portrayal of Dalit writer Arun Athavale in *Kannyadaan*. Elite media has been continuously projecting and depicting lower caste characters as is depicted by Tendulkar. Tendulkar, though a rebellion among the Brahmanic theatre world, strategically accomplices in the age old conspiracy of Brahmanic cultural code designing. Arun is depicted as vulgar, bully and cultureless brute throughout the play. Entry of Arun with Jyoti at her home and interaction with Seva is important to understand Tendulkar's Brahmanic mind set. When Seva asks Arun about the future responsibilities after marriage Arun very shamelessly replies:

Arun: (patience running out) we don't worry about such problems.

Seva: You have to worry. How can anyone escape them?

Arun: No problem. We shall be brewing liquor.

Seva: (Shocked) What?

Arun: Yeah, there's good money in brewing liquor, only you must know the technique. (Seva is shocked and silenced)

Arun: It is a first class profession for two persons. The man bribes the police and the wife serves the customers. People call her aunty. The more striking the auntie's looks, the brisker the trade..... (517)

Tendulkar wants to project Dalits as brewers of illicit liquor, this seems to be covert motive. Dalits cannot be the noble professionals like Brahmans. But, if Arun is a poet, how can he talk like this? How can he ask his wife to serve the customers? There are innumerable dialogues including Arun's perverted culture. He is projected as the rarest rare violent husband in the world. The scene two of the second act also underlines the same mentality of the playwright:

Seva: I have just returned from Dr. Khare's nursing home after getting Jyoti admitted there.

Nath: (Getting up at once) Why? Our Jyoti is alright, isn't she?

Seva: You can say that..... But the bleeding has started again. She is in her sixth month now. I got her admitted to the nursing home to avoid complications later. Jyoti refused to come. She has only come because I insisted. Kumud says there is nothing to worry about, but she must be kept under observation until evening.

Nath: What was the reason? Did Kumar say anything?

Seva: What could Kumud say? He had come home drunk as usual. Jyoti didn't say anything much. She said it was no big matter. There's an internal wound in her stomach. The neighbors told me not to allow the girl to stay there. They said, take her away, he beats her and even kicks her. (542-43)

Arun, despite being a sensitive poet, is a violent beast who frequently assaults his wife. This is, in fact, a contradiction in the personality of Arun. Tendulkar suggests that the Dalit poets are uncivilized and don't fit in a civilized society. As mentioned above, Dalit writers were gaining wide acclamation and appreciation during those days when *Kannyadaan* appeared.

Hindu mythology depicts the lower castes as Rakshas, Daitya, Asur, Danav, et cetera. They are projected as the villains in the Vedic scriptures. The contemporary media continues this tradition of derogatory projection of the lower castes. This could be experienced in various T. V. serials, and the interesting thing is that when the Rakshas, in the serial, beaten up and defeated by the Aryan Gods, even the lower castes clap and enjoy. This is the success of the Brahmanic media which conditions, regulates and dominates the masses. Tendulkar's *Kannyadaan* is the part of this age old conspiracy of Brahmanic culture for every sort of domination.

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