

# Father-Daughter Relationship in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

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**Abstract:** Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, one of his most controversial plays, besides having the theme of casteism, dwells on the issue of devastating impact of the ideology of a father on a dutiful daughter. Jyoti, an educated daughter of a socially and politically active Brahmin family, informs her parents about her decision of marrying Arun Athawale, a dalit whom she has known only for two months. Whereas Seva, being a conscientious mother, is naturally worried to hear it, her father Nath Devlalikar takes it to be a radical step on the part of their daughter, for it will serve their purpose of eradicating the evil of untouchability from the society.

Though during the very first meeting of Arun with Jyoti's family his ill manners and prejudices against upper caste people come to fore, Nath supports her decision in his zeal for expedition against casteism. He even considers it to be 'a very precious experiment'. After the marriage takes place, Arun's alcoholism and his violent behaviour towards Jyoti make both the father and the daughter realize the difference between idealism and reality. Jyoti finds herself engulfed in the sea of misery. Apprehending the amount of torture Arun may inflict upon his daughter, Nath accepts his invitation to preside over the discussion on his unrealistic autobiography, and praises the book in his speech. Jyoti, being a staunch follower of the ideals of her father since her childhood, is completely shattered to see his hypocrisy. She accuses him for rearing her as a 'guinea pig' for his 'experiments' and leaves her home to let him burn in the fire of repentance forever.

The research paper attempts to delve deep in the psyche of the characters to understand the playwright's skill in delineating the intricacies of father-daughter relationship.

**Keywords:** casteism, hypocrisy, idealism, prejudices, reality, relationship, social reform.

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I have written about my own experiences and about what I have seen in others around me. I have been true to all this and have not cheated my generation. I did not attempt to simplify matters and issues for the audience when presenting my plays, though that would have been the easier option. Sometimes my plays jolted society out of its stupor and I was punished I faced this without regrets:<sup>1</sup>

– Vijay  
Tendulkar

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, one of his most controversial plays, won him *Saraswati Samman* and this is the play for which once a slipper was hurled at him. As a creator, he respected both verdicts. The play having the theme of casteism, also dwells on the issue of father-daughter relationship.

Nath Devlalikar is an MLA. Seva, his wife, is also an active social worker working for the upliftment of women's causes in society. Their daughter Jyoti is a working woman and their son Jayapraksh is doing his BA. Jyoti informs her parents about her decision of marrying Arun Athawale, a dalit whom she has known only for two months. Nath Devlalikar is elated to hear it. Ignoring Jaya's concerns about his family background and his career he supports Jyoti. He takes it to be a radical step on the part of their daughter, for it will serve their purpose of eradicating the evil of untouchability from the society.

In act I scene II Jyoti brings Arun to introduce him to her parents. Arun is dark- complexioned. His face is harsh yet he is good looking. During the conversation his ill manners and deep rooted hatred against upper caste people come to fore. He asks Jyoti:

Will you marry me and eat stinking bread with spoilt dal in my father's hut? Without vomiting? Tell me, Jyoti, 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!...Our life is not the Socialists' service camp. It is hell, and I mean hell. A hell named life.<sup>2</sup>

Jyoti begins to weep. On seeing her crying Arun asks her forgiveness for being rude:

Sorry! Mood's out! Happens often, but new to you. At times a fire blazes- I want to set fire to the whole world, strangle throats, rape and kill. Drink up the blood of the beasts, your high caste society. Then I calm down like the taastric when he comes out of his trance. Like a corpse, I live on...What am I but a troublemaker...<sup>3</sup>

When Jyoti tells him that she is not a touch-me-not girl, 'Arun grabs her arm and twists it. Jyoti moans in pain.' Her shock is greater than her pain. When Seva asks him about his career he says, "No problem. We shall be brewing illicit liquor." Arun goes on talking in an obscene language. At this juncture Nath comes and is impressed by Arun's appearance. He says:

Seva, until today, 'Break the caste system' was a mere slogan for us... But today I have broken the caste barrier in the real sense. My home has become Indian in the real sense of the term. I am happy today, very happy.<sup>4</sup>

On Arun's departure Seva and Jayapraksh tell Nath about his rude behaviour. In spite of the warnings of Seva and Jayaprakash regarding Jyoti's future he supports her in her decision:

Look, Seva, society cannot be transformed through words alone. We have to act as catalysts in this transformation. The old social reformers did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow remarriage. Many of them actually married widows. Why did they do it...? That was also an experiment, a difficult experiment. But they dared to risk it.<sup>5</sup>

Remember, it is we who are responsible for the age old sufferings of these people. We have betrayed them for generations. We should feel guilty about this. And now if Jyoti breaks her word, if she wriggles out of her responsibilities, it would be a kind of treachery. It would amount to running away from the challenge. As a father I would feel ashamed if my daughter were to run away...I am with you Jyoti. What you are doing could be both wise and foolish. But one thing is certain. It upholds the norms of civilized humanity, and therefore, I stand by you. Go ahead my child, let us see what happens.<sup>6</sup>

Act II depicts the disastrous result of this marriage. Now Jyoti is seen 'tired and crushed. She appears thinner and as if she has suddenly become older.' In order to restrain Arun's violent behaviour Nath proposes both of them to live with them. Jyoti retorts:

... He... will not enter this house. Because...(With great effort)I have left him... I am not going back to him again...never. (Everyone stunned.)It's... all... over...I must tell you, Bhai, I must. I am fed up with him. Fed up! Fed up! (She breaks into uncontrollable sobs. With great difficulty she restrains herself.)<sup>7</sup>

In spite of Jyoti's miserable condition Nath says:

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 must save this marriage. Not necessarily 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.<sup>8</sup>

Arun comes fully drunk asking for Jyoti's forgiveness. He takes out a knife saying that he is going to cut off the arm with which he beat Jyoti. Jyoti leaves the house with Arun to save her parents from further embarrassment. Nath becomes very happy and says: "Jyoti I feel so proud of you. The training I gave you has not been in vain. If only I believed in God, then Jyoti, this is the moment I'd go down on my knees and pray for you..."<sup>9</sup>

In scene II of act II we find Nath praising Arun's autobiography : "Seva! I have not come across anything like this in years! Such a powerful autobiography. Hats off to Arun Rao!"<sup>10</sup>

When Seva tells him about the internal wound Jyoti has because of Arun's beastly behaviour Nath is shocked.

Nath: Here in these pages he describes the humiliation he has undergone with extraordinary sensitivity...and the same man kicks his pregnant wife on her belly? How dare he do it to her? How dare he?

Seva: Why not? Doesn't his wife belong to the high caste? In this was he is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste, It appears that this is the monumental mission he has set out to fulfill.

He says I... am ...a procuress who supplies girls from the Seva dal to the Socialist leaders...says he... and you are not Jyoti's father. Like guruji... an eunuch... her real father...<sup>11</sup>

Arun Athavale comes to invite Nath to preside over a discussion on his book. He seems to threaten and blackmail Nath. As soon as Arun leaves Nath bursts out:

I was nauseated by his overweening arrogance. And he's the same man who wrote that autobiography. I can't believe. Seva, he... his visit has polluted this drawing room, this house, and this day...It stinks. Seva- you know- you see- I feel like taking a bath, like cleaning myself! Clean everything! This furniture, this floor... all this... he has made them filthy, dirty, polluted! Why did I have to come into contact with a man like this? A man like this...Why?<sup>12</sup>

Seva persuades Nath to preside over the ceremony in order to avoid more suffering to their pregnant daughter. "Now Nath's fortitude cracks. He feels helpless. Drained of energy, he buries himself in the sofa."

He goes to the ceremony and praises the book against his will. He returns from the ceremony completely shattered. Jyoti comes there to ask the reason behind his hollow speech. She accuses him for rearing her as a 'guinea pig' for his 'experiments':

'Hatred, not for the man, but for his tendencies. No man is fundamentally evil, he is good. He has certain propensities towards evil. They must be transformed. Completely uprooted and destroyed. And then, the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the god slumbering within man...' All false, vicious claptrap! The truth is, you knew very well that man and his inherent nature are never really two different things. Both are one, and inseparable...You made me waste twenty years of my life before I could discover this... Arun is made of all these things bound together and I have to accept him as he is, because I cannot reject him.<sup>13</sup>

Now Nath says that he would support her if she wishes to leave him. Jyoti says:

It will not happen, Bhai, because you yourself have taught us that one must not turn one's back upon the battlefield...To save one's self by running away may ne the smart thing to do, and other people may get away with this kind of cleverness. Nut even if running away was the general rule of conduct. We shall continue to recite "March on. Oh soldier!" and continue to lose our lives as guinea pigs in the experiment...<sup>14</sup>

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? I haven't been able to forget an image I saw years ago on my way to school. A man opened the lids of two baskets slung upon the pole he carried on his shoulder. And from them, two shaking, saying, staggering creatures slipped out, human in appearance, their wrinkled skin covering twisted bodies. 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...<sup>15</sup>

Hereafter I have to live in that world, which is mine... and die there. Say sorry to Ma. Tell her none of you should come to my house... this is my order.<sup>16</sup>

She leaves her home to let him burn in the fire of repentance forever.

Jyoti holds her father responsible for her life but let us see whether she herself was not at all responsible for it. She doesn't inform her parents about her desire to marry a dalit. She in fact informs them

about her decision. She had known Arun only for two months and that too only on the basis of his autobiography and few poems. She says:

‘He is writing his autobiography, I have read some parts of it. I felt that I could do anything to make him happy...His poems and his autobiography have inspired me with complete faith in him.’<sup>17</sup>

She herself accepts that she took the decision lightly:

Nath: You mean you didn’t fall in love?

Jyoti: I don’t know. Arun asked me, isn’t the very idea of marrying me dreadful to you? I said, what is dreadful about that? Arun said, you don’t think that I am an absolutely worthless fellow? I said, no! He said, this is incredible, and added, in that case let us get married. And I nodded...I too am surprised. It was as if someone had asked, ‘Shall we have some tea?’ After that I kept feeling that it was all my imagination.<sup>18</sup>

Her confusion in her decision is reflected in the following talk:

Nath: Does it occur to you Jyoti, that you have perhaps made a mistake in saying ‘Yes’?

Jyoti: ( Pausing a little) Once in a while. But right or wrong, what does it matter any way? I made a commitment and now I can’t run away.

Seva: Why not?...A promise given in a weak moment can certainly ne reconsidered. If you find it difficult, we can tell him on your behalf that...

Jyoti: I would hate to do that. I will marry him.

Jayaprakash: Even if Ma doesn’t like it?

Nath: (At once.) Prakshi! Don’t pressurize her! Let her decide on the strength of her own judgment.

Jayaprakshi: The decision has been made thoughtlessly, she herself has admitted it...

Nath: That she herself has said it means that she is capanle of thinking it over. With that she can change her earlier decision.

Jyoti: I don’t want to change it, Bhai.

Seva: Jyoti, I tell you, don’t let a wrong move spoil your life.

Jyoti: Ma, my decision is final.<sup>19</sup>

Her mother and brother try their best to warn her about the consequences of such a marriage without any compatibility in lifestyles. Still Jyoti does not listen to them.

Arun’s behaviour on his first visit to her home was uncultured and uncivilized. After the marriage when Seva asks him the reason of his violent behaviour. He says:

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... I am a barbarian, a barbarian by birth. When have I claimed ay white collar culture?...I am what I am... and shall remain exactly that. And your Jyoti knew what I was even before she married me. In spite of that she married me, she did it out of her own free will.

Seva: She thought you would improve after marriage.

Arun: If she thought so your Jyoti is a stupid fool.<sup>20</sup>

He did not hide anything from her. Still she could not foresee her future. Her mother Seva asked her to think twice about continuing this relation even after the marriage takes place. But she was adamant in her decision.

Her leaving the house forever is a kind of suicide. She wants her parents to suffer in the fire of repentance. She does not realize that though this decision of her father proved wrong still he was her father who had loved her so much. In the opening scene we see him worried for not being able to give his children sufficient time: “We do so much for the world, and we don’t have time for our own children! We should be ashamed to call ourselves your parents.”<sup>21</sup>

He is a proud father who thinks his daughter to be capable of difficult tasks. He believes that Jyoti can change Arun. He says: “He is like unrefined gold, he needs to be melted and moulded. This is the need of the hour. Who can perform this task if not girls like Jyoti? Of course it is difficult, but it needs to be done.”<sup>22</sup>



He had given Arun so much respect because he was Jyoti's choice. He wanted to support Jyoti. Even if he did not oppose Jyoti's decision, the decision was taken by Jyoti. She could have changed her decision any time. On hearing about her miserable condition after marriage he was so sad. He had invited them to live in their home in order to restrain the wild behavior of Arun. He did not want to go to preside over the book release ceremony of Arun. He says: "I will be the last person to submit to his blackmail... Nath Devlalikar has never been under anyone's thumb, and never shall be..."<sup>23</sup>

He accepted the proposal after Seva's request in order to save their daughter from more tortures at the hands of Arun. His words of repentance are genuine:

I put our social commitments to the test. Told her 'Well done, go ahead! This is also a revolutionary method.' I closed the doors upon her return. I realize all this now... You warned me several times. But I didn't pay any attention. I had this maniacal urge to uproot casteism and caste distinctions from our society. As a result I pushed my own daughter into a sea of misery... If she has committed any crime it is this: she took her father's words for gospel truth. She adopted her father's values. She was guided by her father's humanism and liberalism. Jayaprakash, do me a favour. Reject your father. Learn to see through his naivete and idiocy. Don't ever rely on his wisdom. If you do, you too will ruin yourself.<sup>24</sup>

Human beings can never be flawless. Their decisions are at times wrong. But on the basis of those wrong decisions the character of a human being cannot be assessed. Further if a man repents on his wrong actions he is to be forgiven. Every human being is responsible for his life. Fate plays a part in his life. Still the actions or karmas of human beings are most important.

Jyoti herself is also not flawless. Though she was an educated woman education has not rendered her capable of independent thinking. His brother Jayaprakash could see very clearly where his father was wrong. He put before him his objections on several occasions. Being an educated working woman she should have raised her voice against the beastly behaviour of her husband. But she showed neither courage nor willingness to oppose him. By not opposing him she could put the whole responsibility on her father very easily. It is human weakness to put the blame of one's faults on others. Jyoti seems to be guilty of this human weakness.

Jyoti herself made a mistake in assessing the character of Arun. She never blames him for his misbehavior. It seems as if being a dalit he has been given a license to behave in a beastly manner. In fact the problem was not related to his caste but to his uncultured and rude behaviour. Even Jaya has made it clear:

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.<sup>25</sup>

Had his behavior towards Jyoti been good his caste could have lost the meaning. She took the decision hurriedly ignoring the uncivilized and violent behaviour of Arun. Moreover, the ideals of Nath were not completely hollow. Nath did not intentionally play with the life of his daughter. He was thinking to bring a change in society.

The matrimonial ties were also not too sacred for Jyoti. After knowing the stark reality of Arun no one was there to pressurize her to continue with this relation. Everybody was there to support her.

Tendulka calls this story 'the admission of defeat and intellectual confusion.' Why was it difficult for Jyoti to break the nuptial ties? Did Tendulkar want to show the suffering of woman in a patriarchal society? Why did she leave her home and made her family suffer for ever? Why did the father-daughter relationship fail? All these questions can also have as many answers as are the readers. As Tendulkar himself says:

Each one of them (audience) understands and interprets the play in the light of his or her experience and understanding of life which in nine out of ten cases is different from the playwright's experience and his understanding of life which has led him to write the play...What the play means to the playwright is no more of any consequence. What the play means to its audience matters. And all this is in the game of the theatre.<sup>26</sup>

Human mind itself is very complex and inexplicable. Theatre assisted Tendulkar in his attempt at understanding human mind. To conclude in the words of Tendulkar himself:

Theatre helped me to analyze life- my own and the lives of others. It led me to make newer and newer discoveries in the vast realm of the human mind which still defies all available theories and logic. It is like an ever-intriguing puzzle or a jungle which you can always enter but has no way out.<sup>27</sup>

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