

## Emergence of New Woman in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

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### Abstract

The term 'New Woman' does not have any traditional standpoint; it is an attempt of women to come out from the orthodox of patriarchy, ancient social customs and norms. The concept of New Woman was first popularized by Henry James in the later part of the Nineteenth Century. The aggrandizement of feminist study can be seen in the works of Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Virginia Woolf and so on, which was the beginning process of unfolding new woman. The main concern of their works was to uplift and emancipate the women's ideology against the perception of Freudian Phallic ideas. In Indian context, it has been taking a new shape since the 1950s which has different facets in rural and urban areas.

**Keywords-** Patriarchy, Vulnerable, Feminist, Subjugation

The status of women in India has been a subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. In Britain, it is generally considered by thinkers and scholars that the status of women was first elevated by William Shakespeare, who at first gave them important place in his plays. Today, the emergence of new woman in our Indian society has been a burning issue in the ideology of common men. Since India is considered the country of ancient culture and civilization where once there was a time when women were worshipped like deities and considered the incarnation of goddess; apart from it, it had also a belief in them that where they were worshipped God took shelter there. As Usha Sharma cites Atal Vihari Vajpayee's concept in his book, *Indian Women: From Tradition to Modernity*,

Gender equality and women's empowerment are alien concepts for us. Indeed in ancient times, women in India had a status that was no means inferior to that of men; on the contrary, in many matters they had an upper hand. She was Shakti, revered and respected. Our scripture say; *Janani Janmabhoomischa Swargadapi Gariyasi*" (215).

But with the passage of time, this ancient ideology has been scattered down, just because of changing attitude in the society. Again Usha Sharma writes in her book, *Indian Women- From Tradition to Modernity*, "Social customs and practices that have struck deep roots, and

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are sought to justified by citing religious sanction, have resulted in deprivation of disadvantage to and discrimination against women.” (216).

In our modern Indian society the condition of women is still unsatisfactory, because it has been male dominated society or patriarchal society where man is supposed to be head of the family and females are considered sub-marginalized. But now, with the development of science, technology, communication and proper education, this ideology is removing from the mind of common people particular in the urban areas and slowly and steadily they are becoming conscious. Therefore in this Modern Age the outcome of new powerful women are such as Sonia Gandhi, Indira Nui, Mayawati, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, Hema Malini, Angela Markel, Late Indira Gandhi, Michael Obama, and so on, have already occupied the top most places such as Presidents, Prime Ministers, Scientists, Commanders, and Administrators and have become the role model for common women. Now they have started thinking on their individual importance for their equal rights that generates feminist ideology in general sense. Even the Constitution of free India gives an equality of status to the Indian woman with that of man. Now they have found the social, political, and economic right in the society.

In the queue of Indian English dramatic writings, Vijay Tendulkar comes in the ambit of the major writers such as Mahesh Dattani, Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh, and Girish Karnad. Tendulkar is prolific writer, who enriched Marathi theatre by writing originally in Marathi but later his plays have been translated into various languages. He minutely depicts various social, political, and economic issues of modern Indian society in his plays. He has dwelt on the alienation of the modern individual, and satirized contemporary politics, forcefully depicted social and individual tensions in his plays like *Silence! The Court Is In Session*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Kamala*, and *Kanyadaan*. Most of his plays have had their origin in his own personal experience which is generally an endeavor to expose the complacency and hypocrisy of the so called liberal and respected people of contemporary society. With the passage of time, in our Indian society each and every thing is taking a new shape at every strata of the society. But the condition of women has still remained pivotal. In Tendulkar's plays, generally, women are at the centre therefore the whole action revolves around them. He debunks and defies the male hypocrisy and their supposed authority in his plays. His plays deal with middle-class people's agonies, anxieties, and tensions.

The title of play is *Kanyadaan* itself refers 'giving gift' to someone. Originally, the play has been written in Marathi but later on it was translated into English, raises the questions on some serious problem of contemporary Indian society. Indeed it has been one of the most controversial play of Tendulkar, explores the characters becoming victims of their own sham and hollow idealism. The play brings out various socio-political evils of contemporary Indian society such as caste system, exploitation of women, problem of marriage, cultural conflict, identity crisis and gap between upper and lower class. It also deals with psychological study of the social tension caused by casteism in India side by side with

the development of the protagonist, Jyoti whose soft life dispersed after her marriage with a Dalit class person. In the present play, Tendulkar also discloses two modern trend of literature first one Dalit and second Feminism.

*Kanyadaan* is a ruthless criticism over the caste-system and women's exploitation of the well sophisticated Indian society. The story revolves around Nath's family and the protagonist of the play is Jyoti, daughter of Nath Davelkar who is MLA and mother, Seva is social activist who herself works for women's rights. The play, in a sense has been written to elevate the Dalit class and changing the women's psyche. Jyoti is simple, delicate, and good hearted in nature. She is a modern girl who believes in her own will and intuition. She does not bother from any critical condition that appears till the end of the play. Her parents are involved in erasing social evils from the society for which she also becomes the part of it. They are idealist in nature and much supporter of inter-caste marriage. They are very responsible persons who behave friendly towards their children Jay Prakash and Jyoti. This is what, when the play opens, Jyoti is seen as a very intrepid girl who very enthusiastically proposes her parents of her fallen in love with Arun, a Dalit class person for marrying him with her freedom of will. Jyoti's attitude for marriage appears very childish. When Nath asks her if she loves Arun, she replies:

"I don't know Arun asked me, isn't the very idea of marring 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 added. (Act1, Scene1)

It is often considered that a father loves his daughter much more than his son and a mother loves her son much more than her daughter, and it really appears in this play when Jyoti keeps proposal of her marriage with a Dalit-class person before her father, he accepts that by saying her 'congratulation' for doing such a good thing for which he himself has been supporter. Nevertheless, today, still, in our Indian society, the decision of marriage of daughter is taken by parents most probably in the form of arranged marriage. But in this play, Jyoti herself decides her marriage by breaking the orthodoxy of social customs in relation to marriage; in response to her proposal Nath says to his wife, "Why? If she has made a decision, what is your objection to it? She is a major now. Not a child anymore." (Act1, Scene1). So far as the marriage is concerned, Nath himself is an open minded person who always encourages his son and daughter to do their works according to their own way. When he asks Jyoti about name of that person whom she loves and his family background, she tells, "Arun Athavale" (Act1, Scene1). On this Nath speaks excitedly, "Marvellous! But the name sounded like a Brahmin" (Act1, Scene1). He becomes very happy on her commitment and says, "But if my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn't have pleased me much... Well, I'm telling you the absolute truth." (Act1, Scene1). Further Jyoti tells his about Arun's career that he is studying in B.A. and also writes poetry. And currently, he is writing his autobiography, apart from it he is all in all of his family. On the objection of Seva,

for not being stability in Arun's life, Nath says, "If they decide to do so, life style certainly be changed. And the ideal of stability can be different for every man. After all he is doing his B.A., why won't he be able to stand on his own feet?" (Act1, Scene1).

*Kanyadaan*, besides the study of marriage, family and human relationships, has been subjected to Post-colonial and feminist analysis, and given the apparent conflict between the Brahmins and the Dalits as well as delineated the patriarchy and women's condition in the play. Jyoti is very powerful and well educated girl who is the model of New Woman. She breaks the barrier of social customs of arranged marriage by getting love marriage with Arun a lower class Dalit person. She recognizes her individual identity in the society by adopting her will into action and already knew one thing that her father will never object on her proposal of getting married with Arun. Tendulkar shows in this play the mutual understanding between parents and children's relationship. Almost Jay Prakash and Jyoti always share their views to their parents without any hesitation.

However Seva believes in the inter-caste marriage but when her own daughter follows that track she finds herself in a state of confusion and warns her of the consequences of her hasty decision over marriage, she tries to allay her mother's fears by telling that she will manage herself. Nath's attitude regarding inter-caste marriage is that of Tendulkar's main intention to prove through this play. He says to Jyoti that she is his experiment over the inter-caste marriage and it will prove in the society that Nath is not merely an idealist but also a practical person. In Nath's point of view she is just an object of an experiment that he uses for the betterment of the society which is in feminist point of view, is totally negative. Nevertheless, she herself is interested in marrying Arun but did never know about her fortune that in future she will have to face the tyranny of her own husband to whom she loves very much. As soon as she marries Arun, in consequence she is treated like a slave and beaten rudely many occasions by Arun.

Although Jyoti belongs to the upper class of society yet she is exploited and beaten by Arun, a Dalit class person. He beats her like a slave or animal because he hated the upper class living, manner and their treatment to the Dalit class. Since it was already in his mind that how Dalit people were humiliated and exploited by these upper class people for centuries that is why he always wanted to take revenge by humiliating Brahmins (upper class) anywhere. It appears when Jyoti becomes the victim of his frustration. In the beginning her consciousness does not allow her to bear the tyranny of Arun therefore once she leaves the house of her husband and stays at her father's house but later on she has to accept him. She always gets inspiration from her father not to bow down to the circumstances and reminded the lines from one of Kusumagraja's poems that her father often recites, "I march with utter faith in the goal; I grow with rising hopes, cowards stay shore, every wave opens a path for me."(Act2, Scene3)

Really in our well cultured society the voice of women has always been suppressed by men. That appears in the present play when Seva tries to check Jyoti not to marry a person

who is totally uncivilized; she is neglected by Nath and suggests her not to speak against Jyoti's marriage. He says to Seva, "No man is fundamentally evil; he is good. He has certain propensities toward evil. They must be transformed, and completely uprooted and destroyed. And then, the earth will become heaven. It is essential to awaken the good slumbering within man..." (Act 2, Scene3) Nath finds the golden chance to convert his experiment into practical form by Jyoti's conviction of marrying a low caste person Arun.

However as a father, internally, Nath is very much scared just for Jyoti's fortune after getting marriage with Arun and in the course of time he realizes the hollowness of his idealism. He fails to comprehend the split personality of Arun even Jyoti also never tries to see another face of Arun which she realizes after marriage. Nath loves Jyoti very much and finds himself helpless on the critical situation of Jyoti, so he has to deliver the hypocritical speech under pressure from his wife that such a gesture would save their pregnant daughter from any further misery. On doing it, in the last scene of the play, he receives a recoil reaction from his own daughter on the sanctimonious action. But Nath tries to persuade her by affirming that Arun's Autobiography is a very good book, then, in reaction of it she says, "You attended that meeting and made a speech only because you were afraid that if you didn't, Arun would torture me more." (Act2, Scene3). After marriage she looks like very mature that she gets by suffering. However she looks very pessimistic but had the confidence to come out from that critical condition without asking any help from her father. Her appearance is very confident but very rash at the end of the play, when she tells her father,

Putting man's beastliness to sleep and awakening the godhead within is absurd notion. You made me waste twenty years of my life before I could discover this. I had to learn it on the strength of my own experience. (Act2, Scene3)

By suffering she learns how to pass life in any condition. Jyoti's speech pricks Nath, and he appears much vulnerable. His condition becomes like King Lear in William Shakespeare's play *King Lear* who himself becomes the sufferer of his error. On being asked of her health during the delivery, she replies harshly to Nath,

"I have my husband, I am not a widow. Even if I become one I shan't knock at your door. I am not Jyoti Yadunath Davelakar now; I am Jyoti Arun Athvale, a scavenger. I don't say Harijan. I despise the term, I am untouchable, a scavenger. I am one of them, don't touch me. Fly from my shadow, otherwise my fire will scorch your comfortable values. (Act2, Scene3).

Therefore, the present paper is an adumbration of women empowerment and emancipation in respect to modern Indian society. The protagonist of the play breaks the old, customs, and traditional dogmas of arranged marriage in our well cultured Indian society as well as emerges as the pioneer of New Woman. Indeed Jyoti leaves a message to modern Indian women in search of their identity, right and importance by their own way as well as gives a view to express their ideas before anyone without any hesitation. The play sows a seed to revamp the mind of people to change their ideology in respect to women's importance

in the society; Jyoti, the heroine of the play is the burning example of it. She uses all her rights of being a girl for which the Western feminists are fighting for and puts an aspiration to ensure full and equal participation of women in the decision making process. She realizes her potentiality and reached at a place of beyond social customs and traditions.

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