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## Stereotyping Dalit Masculinity in Vijay Tendulkar's Play *Kanyadaan* (1983)

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### Abstract

**Aims:** *The paper aims to study the intricate relationship between Dalit dispossession and mental deformity. It explores the role of social experiences and expressions in shaping Dalit Masculinity as unfolded in the play Kanyadaan. It studies the stigma of the caste, the plight of Dalit women, and Dalit politics and unravels stereotypical representations of Dalit masculinity.*

**Methodology and Approaches:** *The research is qualitative and analytical. The paper uses existing Dalit literature and R.W Connell's concept of Multiple Masculinities as a theoretical framework and uses feminism and psychoanalysis approaches for textual analysis.*

**Outcome:** *The study presents Kanyadaan as an anti-Dalit play and unveils the milieu of class and caste to scrutinise gender and emotional conflict through language and behaviour. It interrogates liberal reformism as an experiment in terms of inter-caste marriage and its impact on women who are doubly marginalised. The study takes into cognisance the role of the Dalit Panther movement and the resurfacing of Dalits in social spaces.*

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** *The article focuses on discarding the one-dimensional treatment of hierarchy, highlights inherent violence and lack of agency for women and brings us closer to the sufferings of an idealist father who sacrificed his daughter at socio-political ideology. In the future, a study of multiple masculinities in other literary texts where the intersectionality between caste and gender exists can be done to develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved.*

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The term Dalit made its appearance in 1920s and acquired prominence in 1970s. In 1911, the British Government called them Depressed Classes, and since 1935, the term Schedule Caste has been used. The history of Dalits traces unheralded violent accomplishments and their exclusion from Chaturvarna system as avarna or 'untouchables' in Manu's *Manusmriti*. Though the caste system has existed in Indian society for a long time, it has been an area of inquiry. Various studies retrieve the caste system from multiple perspectives. Louis Dumont, a French scholar and author of *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implication*, discussed the attributional approach to the caste system. He believed hierarchy was the underlying idea behind inequality and hierarchical judgements based on collectively inherited moral qualities rather than personal endowments or attainments (Bayly, 35). On the contrary, William Ward, who served as a Baptist in colonial India, in *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos*, considered Hindu faith the fabric of superstition concocted by Brahmans and their systematic oppression of Dalits and Brahmans as arbiters (ci-ii). Similar views were shared by Gerald Beereman, who interpreted the caste system as institutionalised inequality and inaccessibility to material things (25-26).

Joan Mencher viewed the caste system from an upside-down approach. Rupa Viswanath, in her book *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*, interpreted caste as a means to subjugate the Dalit in the form of labour control and slavery (28). Risley studied caste based on the descendent of pure Aryan invaders and aboriginal Dravidians. The stigma of caste appeared to be a fatal accident by birth. Further, the dichotomy of pure or contaminated and the landowner or landless constructed two hierarchies: first kept the Brahmin at the top and Dalit at the bottom. The second kept the landowner economically and politically sound and Dalit landless labourer as a wretched of the earth. (Chakravarti, 33). The permanent assimilability sanctioned by religion resulted in social inequality and the ascription of Dalit identity. Besides this, caste becomes a parameter for the purity of the soul and an outcome of previous birth. Dalit birth is their failure to fulfil their caste dharma in the previous incarnation,

which debarred them from salvation and non-twice born. Knowledge of the scriptures was another arsenal to this cardinal sin ('untouchability'). Scriptures underline the concept of purity and pollution and their knowledge as a shield against the oppression of Dalits. Marriage ties within the same caste and jati have narrowed down and strengthened the caste system.

In the 18th century Maharashtra, Chitpavan Brahmin became the elite under Shivaji. His regime discriminated against Mangs, who was at the bottom. Maharashtrian B.G Tilak considered the reformation movement an attack on the national faith. Propelled by the colonial modernity and anti-caste thought prevalent during the British Raj, Dalits took this as an opportunity to serve as soldiers and police officers. They mobilised to define their condition and demanded amelioration. The 1931 census explained their debarment from using reservoirs, wells, temples, and other public places. Such wretched conditions left Dalits for gradual reform, perceiving the Poona Pact of 1932 as a betrayal. Jotirao Phule, in his seminal work *Gulamgiri*, contested the views of the upper caste, discussed the racial theory of caste and revitalised the Dalit claim to dignity. He focused on creating a fused community of the oppressed and the formation of Bahujan Samaj. He was against the sanscritisation of Kunbis and focused on acquiring more government jobs and education. This stigmatised society was able to create political space and social worth under B.R Ambedkar, who realised that as one goes up the caste system, the power and status of the caste group increases; as one goes down the caste system, the contempt for the caste decreases (Chakravarti, 28).

The epics of Alhakhhand created cultural space, and their caste genealogies helped Dalits claim their personhood. Articles 17 and 18 of the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability to construct a protective space for Dalits. From the 1970s, the term Dalit acquired a new meaning; the passive resistance of Dalits turned into radical demand for self-identification, and there exists a lacuna even in the reformation that provided protective discrimination. Dalit assertion became an essential aspect of contemporary politics. Dalit women who lie at the

bottom of the hierarchy face brutal attacks, effaced with punishments and execution. Women were stereotyped as filth and of dangerous sexuality and could not claim their bodily integrity. Material deprivation interlocked with forceful hegemonic discourses in the hands of males resulted in the formation of the Dalit Women Federation in Maharashtra. In the 20th century, B.R Ambedkar focused on making provisions for the suffered deprivation. In 1972, the Dalit Panther movement began and was shaped into a political movement. It was started by Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, Raja Dhale and Arun Kamble in Bombay.

Mass conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism, called Neo-Buddhism, was a means to escape such atrocities. The Little Magazine movement provided literary space to discuss issues beyond the issue of caste and created a language that defined their plight appropriately. The Dalit Panther Manifesto 1973 established the movement as a radical attempt to critique caste issues and brought Dalits closer. In the 1980s, Dalit leaders submitted their legal petitions to the state to stop their harassment, and in the 1990s, its base expanded to the economic, social, and political structures. Women's rights advocate Madhu Kishwar observed the ceremonial burning of Manuscripts at the precincts of Rajasthan High Court on March 25, 2000, due to the belief that the ancient text is the defining document of Brahmanical Hinduism and is the critical source of gender and caste oppression in India (Olivelle 4). Surinder. S. Jodhka, in his book *Caste in Contemporary India*, argued that the connotation of caste varies from tradition and culture to contemporary dynamics. It offers new modes of discrimination.

Another dichotomy is based on gender, a persistent binary of men and women that defines roles, behaviours, and societal expectations, resulting in unequal power dynamics. By the turn of the 20th century, the clinical inquiry by Sigmund Freud into adult sexuality the concept of Oedipus complex and superego focused on gender construction through long and conflict-ridden processes and superego deals with prohibition. This unconscious agency representing ideals, serves as the basis for patriarchal theories and the culture of male rule and dominance. In 1980s, Australian sociologist contributed significantly to the field

of gender studies, focusing on masculinity studies. Connell sees gender as the configuration of human relationships and social relationships and focuses on social structures such as family and institutions such as education, politics, and the economy as critical determinants of gender roles.

In *Masculinities* (2005), Connell argues that there are multiple masculinities, and each masculinity has a different position of power. She contested various approaches to masculinity, such as an essentialist approach, as it uses core masculine features to define masculinity that Freud uses to equate masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity. A positivist approach focuses on facts found to define masculinity, but it makes certain assumptions about gender itself at the beginning of the research. Normative masculinity sets the social norm for men's behaviour, where different men approach it to different degrees but suffer at the personality level. The semiotic approach sees everything that is non-feminine as masculine, but it does not take into consideration the concepts of class, race, and others. In *Masculinities*, Connell defines "Masculinity, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture" (Connell, 71).

Multiple masculinities includes Hegemonic Masculinity where term 'hegemony' is used by Antonio Gramsci in relation to class and cultural dynamics where one class sustain an upper hand in social role. So, for hegemony there need to be a correspondence between power and cultural ideals. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women". Hegemonic masculinity changes with the change in patriarchal structure. Subordinated Masculinity deals with the gender relation between men. In heterosexual society, heterosexual men acquire dominance over homosexual men who faces cultural and political and economic exclusion, abuse

and violence. Homosexual men acquire low position in the hierarchy of men. Complicit Masculinity focused on a group of men who do not embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, they are ‘slacker version of hegemonic masculinity’ (79) and draw on patriarchal dividend without being on the frontline. Marginalisation Masculinity refers to the relation between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated and classes or ethnic group. It is in relation to authorisation of hegemonic masculinity and changes over time (80).

In the 19th century, the social reform movement in India advocated for women’s rights. Women’s participation in India’s freedom movement, the formation of the All India Women’s Conference in 1927, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, and the Forum Against Oppression of Women in the 1970s and 80s show their activism in a patriarchal society. Vijay Tendulkar, an avant-garde Marathi playwright, wrote the play *Kanyadaan* in 1983, when the issue of reservation was the topic of debate in Maharashtra and society was reforming. The title of the play, *Kanyadaan*, deals with the ritual where the father acquires the greatest merit by gifting his daughter in marriage (Chakravarti, 51). The play is written in two acts where Tendulkar constructs two cultures, one of upper caste and the other of lower caste, and depicts the process of balancing tradition and modernity through the reformation process and how inequality invades the human body and mind. *Kanyadaan* begins with Nath Devalikar, a Brahmin liberal social reformer and MLA, exhibiting complicit masculinity. He has a son, Jayaprakash, and Jyoti, an idealist like her father, who decided to marry Arun Athavle, a Dalit poet, after being inspired by his autobiography and poems.

Arun Athavle is a Dalit boy with a stern face and a dark complexion exhibiting hegemonic masculinity who describes the occupational structure of Dalits, their daily struggle, malice, and efforts to tell their story, to reshape their broken identity and write their own experiences, and their desire to avenge what their generations have faced. He is in contrast to Nath’s middle-class manners and psyche and is stereotyped as bestial, reflecting a ‘culture’ of dispossession and Dalitness through his behaviour, his discomfort in a big house, his subject of



conversation, and his language. He associated his manners with those of a scavenger, sat in an uncouth manner, shared their living style, such as feeding on dead animal flesh, going for sanitation in an open, eating stale bread, and living in a hut of eight by ten feet without rags on their backs, and equated his life to living in hell. He boldly discusses the business of brewing illicit liquor as one of their sources of survival in the future and feels safer on the street than in Jyoti's big house. His male chauvinism led him to describe a man in the kitchen as a 'pansy' and feel his masculinity challenged when Jyoti discounted his statement of beating her.

The play presents Dalit vengeance through Arun, who shares his intention to set the whole world on fire, strangle the throat, rape, kill, and drink the blood of high-caste society, which has marginalised them for ages. He cracked the joke of catching a Brahmin dame and twisted Jyoti's hand. As a reformer, Nath takes pride in Jyoti's decision to marry Arun without having a love affair. Inter-caste marriage was considered one of the outcomes of B.R. Ambedkar's shedding of the caste system. However, Nath perceived it as the solution to breaking the caste system, which brought more pitfalls into Jyoti's life. The play presents her life as turning into a nightmare as she is repeatedly beaten by Arun, who exudes masculinity and sent back to Arun by her complacent masculine father, who insists on carrying on the marriage. This inter-caste marriage was a remarkable experiment that Nath wanted to see as a successful project without failure and to set an example.

The play also distinguished itself from the standard norms of society. Jyoti is the breadwinner in the family instead of Arun. Jyoti earns, and Arun spends on drinking. This stereotyping of Dalit masculinity is strengthened by Arun's claim of not being a civilised man, describing himself as a scoundrel, rascal, scavenger, wife-beater, and condemning that he is destined to rot in sh\*t. At the same time, Seva accused him of a lack of gratitude. The play reverberates the plight of Dalit women and herald sexual violence at the hands of Dalit men, which strengthens their depiction of hegemonic masculinity. Arun took pleasure in beating his

pregnant Jyoti, falsely accused Seva of supplying girls to socialist leaders, and alleged Nath for not being a father to Jyoti. Nath finds Arun's autobiography a hoax and compares him to the devil, who picks opportunities.

Additionally, *Kanyadaan* also reflects on the mental deformities that Arun and Jyoti suffered. The harrowing experience of caste has also turned Arun into a heartless man. The negative strokes that he witnessed made him loveless, joyless, and heartless. Jyoti suffered due to Nath's teachings: "One should not turn one's back upon the battlefield". "It is cowardice to bow down to circumstances". He taught Jyoti poems like "I march with utter faith in the goal", "I grow with rising hopes", and "Cowards stay ashore; every wave opens a path for me" (Tendulkar, 565). She kept marching like a soldier on the battlefield in her relationship with Arun and accepted her marriage as a destiny.

Gender deformity adds another level to stereotypical representation. Jyoti, an educated and independent woman, struggled with brutal ways of life and failed to bring about any positive change. Her submission to the Dalit ways of life, as shown in the play, adds misery to her pain. She failed to separate the personality of Arun from a lover to a beast and accepted the demon and God in Arun together. Marriage, as an essential institution, is presented as nothing but a bundle of blows and misery. Dalit women also faced discrimination based on gender at the hands of Dalit men. Jasbir Jain, in her book *Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture, Subjectivity, and Agency*, shared the criticism of Pawar, who openly criticised the discriminatory treatment that Dalit women face at the hands of Dalit men. Dalit men, like upper-caste men, treated their women as subordinates and expected them to have self-sacrificing and self-effacing voices. She accused them of following the same double standards as upper-caste men. (Jain, 225). The outcome of such discrimination and prejudice eroded the dignity of women, and it snatched from them the aspiration to bring improvement.

Arun's autobiography represents rising education in the lower rungs of society. Literature is used to raise their voices and speak of injustices. Discussion of such work created a social space for them, but division and hierarchisation of



society brought alienation to Arun, who overcame his powerlessness, joylessness, and lovelessness through liquor and loveless sex with Jyoti. His madness to reach the top and his work to be the talk of the town dehumanise him further. Arun presents baser human qualities who love Jyoti, then showers blow on her, followed by ardent kisses. Bestiality is presented as something ingrained in him. The play exposes power conflict and the destructive shifting roles that characters play. Like a Karpman drama triangle, Jayaprakash explained the shifting of the roles of persecutor, rescuer, and victim. Arun was the victim of the upper caste. After marriage, his role shifted to persecutor. Nath, in the beginning, was the rescuer for Arun; later, he wanted to rescue her daughter and suffered from mutely watching the suffering of his daughter. Dalits were victims at the hands of Brahmins. As the play progresses, Arun becomes the persecutor, and Nath becomes his victim. Arun blackmailed Nath to preside over the function of autobiography while Nath finds himself in an apologetic situation, being hypocritical, flat, and into meaningless drivel while showering praise on Arun. Arun, the oppressed one, turned into Jyoti's oppressor. Jyoti, who decided to rescue Arun from caste victimhood, falls prey to him.

Conclusively, the play is branded as anti-Dalit by critics such as Vijay Tapas (Babu 119). The play through Arun and his dialogues highlights Dalit atrocities and their plight and his desire to avenge for wrong being done turns him into violent hegemonic masculine. The role of childhood scripting plays a crucial role in masculinity building. Jayaprakash and Nath present complacent masculinity and Dalits men in caste ridden society represent marginalised masculinity. The reign of blows and Arun's abusive language stereotyped him as toxic hegemonic masculine. *Kanyadaan* brings us closer to the sufferings of the father, who sacrificed his daughter on the altar of his socio-political ideology.

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