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अनुक्रमणिका

१	Dissenting Voices: Exploring Legal Evolution through J.Subba Rao's opinion in Kharak Singh's case with specific reference to Right to Privacy - Prof. -Aishwarya Peshwe	५
२	The Empowered Women Protagonists in The Shiva Trilogy of Amish Tripathi - Dr. Aniket Bhuyar, Anjangaon Surji, Dist. Amrawati	९
३	Service Sector : A boom to Economic Growth - Dr. Anupama Labhe, Wardha	१२
४	The Quest For Self-actualization In The Sudha Murty's Novel Gently Falls The Bakula And House Of Cards : A Feminist Perspective - 1) Prof. Anupama Lawatre, 2) Dr. Sanjay Urade, Chandrapur	१६
५	Feminism and its Impact on Woman in the Modern African Society - Prof. Anuradha Kumari, Ranchi	२०
६	Challenges and Strength in Teaching Indian Knowledge System in Academic Scenario - 1) Dr. Archana Rohokale, 2) Vaishnavi Kaledhonkar Inamdar, Ahmednagar	२३
७	Role of Literature in Theatre: An overview- Prof. Arun Srivastava, Jaipur	२७
८	Digital Literacy in the Age of Digital India: Education, Awareness, and Skill - Development - Dr. Ashish Mohta, Amravati	३०
९	Practices Of Varna System In Ancient Indian Societies - Dr. Ashish Shende, Nagpur	३६
१०	Effect of use of Mobile Phone on Adjustment of Higher Secondary School Students in Jalgaon District - Dr. Ashok Patil, Jalgaon	४०
११	Reproductive Rights Of Women In India: A Road Ahead - Dr. Ashwini Balki, Chandrapur	४४
१२	The Future of Work: Navigating HR Challenges in the Age of Automation and Artificial Intelligence - Dr. Balaji Kamble, Latur	४७
१३	A Study of Good and Evil in the Shiva Trilogy of Amish Tripathi - Dr. Beena Rathi, Anjangaon Surji, Dist. Amrawati	५२
१४	Identity Crises And Self Realization In Preeti Shenoy's: Tea For Two And A Piece Of Cake - Prof. Chandrakant Sonawane, Chinchwad, Pune	५५
१५	What Persuades Urban Women Electorates To Vote? - Dr. Charuta Joshi, Nagpur	५८
१६	Tendulkar's Kanyadan: A Tale Of Women's Trauma - Dr. Chaturanand Kedar, Anjangaon Surji, Dist. Amrawati	६३
१७	Paratext as a Directory for Textual Encounter in the Target Language - A Case Study on the Select English-translated novels of S. L. Bhyrappa - Deepti Janardhan, Dr. Rekha Bhat, Bengaluru	६७



Tendulkar's Kanyadan: A Tale Of Women's Trauma

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"Man for the field and woman for the hearth,
Man for the sword and for the needle she,
Man with the head and woman with the heart,
Man to command and woman to obey,
All else confusion."¹

- Lord Alfred Tennyson

Abstract :

Vijay Tendulkar was a sensitive artist with a good dramatic vision who modified the shape of Indian drama. His many plays are mainly about the middle class sensibility moving around the axis of women's trauma, agony and suffering. He not only exposes the life of middle-class women but also makes his readers feel the intricacies of their mentality and pitiable plight in the male-dominated society. Like most of his contemporary playwrights, he presents the plight of women in contemporary society where they are the victims of men's hegemony. Kanyadaan presents Jyoti's traumatic experience of married life. Jyoti belongs to a Brahmin family. She loves Arun, a Dalit youth who uses her as an instrument to take revenge on his Dalit community against the Brahmins. Tendulkar has aptly mirrored the problems, issues, traumas, agonies and suffering in the lives of his female characters by projecting the complexities of their relationships with men.

Keywords :

Trauma, suffering, subjugation, agony, plight, hegemony, pseudo-love.

Vijay Tendulkar as a sensitive dramatist tried to unveil the evils of society with his creative vigour. His play, Kanyadaan peels off the layers of Indian castes-psychology while presenting the complex, conflicting and tense relationship between the Indian middle-class Brahmin and socially outcast or untouchable Dalit community which is still a prevalent issue in some parts of India. The head of the Brahmin

family, Nath Devalikar, an MLA is very much inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Yusuf Meherali and Sane Guruji. Being social reformer, he wants to bring a social change in society by allowing his only daughter, Jyoti to marry Arun Athavale, an educated Dalit boy. Nath never thinks about her future or how she will manage with different social milieu of the Dalit class. Being too fascinated and impressed by Arun's poetry and writings Jyoti falls in his love. She makes up her mind to marry him whom she has known only for two months. Blinded by the pseudo-love of Arun, Jyoti couldn't even understand the warning of her brother. But the bridge of her inspired ideology which was built in her heart and mind from her childhood for improving people and changing society suddenly collapses after marriage when she faces traumatic experiences, the unbearable violence of her husband. She realises that it is not possible to improve people and change society. C. Raghavendra and P. Sreenivasulu Reddy aptly states:

"Jyoti, in spite of being an educated girl, is forced to accept her fate as Arun's wife even though she does not like it. She comes to know that it is not possible to change people. Thus, Vijay Tendulkar remarkably explores the conflict between two different castes in Indian society. He also presents violence against a woman in spite of her good education and high caste."²

The traumatic and horrific experience of suffering, pain and agony in Jyoti's life crosses all limits when Arun gives her brutal and inhuman treatment during her pregnancy. Her suffering married life makes her father restless. Time is the greatest healer which heals the greatest wounds. Nath thinks that everything will change with the passage of time and the intricacies will remove from his daughter's life. With the passing of time changes occurred in society, culture, religion and casteism.



But with the changing of time, the Dalit poet, Arun remains unchanged as he still remembers the mistreatment and the stir of 'untouchable' meted out to his family and forefathers at the hands of Brahmins.

As a psychoanalytical playwright, Tendulkar has probed into the psyche of his female characters. He has explored their ideas, feelings, emotions and reactions in familial and social milieu. In this world of science and technology, where the whole world has become a global village, love has become a matter of only loss and profit. It has no emotion and affection, but only selfish motives. It brings out conflict, tensions, hollowness and the double-standard nature of men against women which cause despair and frustration in Tendulkar's female characters. His portrayal of suffering women like Jyoti has been accustomed to existing intricate social situations. The play presents the plight of a woman whether she belongs to the age of science and technology, whether she is educated like Jyoti, she had no other way except to dance to the tune of male hegemony. She mutely accepts her suffering fate in the male-dominated society like Laxmi in Sakharam Binder, Sarita and Kamala in Kamala, Gauri in Ghashiram Kotwal and Ammu in The God of Small Things. As a voiceless animal, they are the silent sufferers of male aggression. Jyoti's silence itself reveals the agony of her heart. Dr Beena A Mahida aptly comments:

"Woman has always been a slave to her male counterpart, be it the eighteenth century or the twenty-first century."³

Jyoti is never found complaining about her suffering. Whatever the readers come to know is through the account provided by Seva. Jyoti becomes a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband, who himself develops violent and aggressive tendencies after years of oppression suffered by the people of his Dalit community. As Shailaja B. Wadikar comments :

"Arun always remains conscious of his lower class origin and inflicts on Jyoti inhumane cruelties.

Constant awareness of the suffering which the Dalits have undergone such as eating stale, stinking bread, flesh of dead animals, etc., renders him violent."⁴

Husband and wife must understand each other's mental and emotional make-up. Each partner must learn to communicate one's needs to the other and ask for fulfilment. Otherwise, even a love marriage between a liberated man and woman can run into trouble for either spouse as it happens in the case of Jyoti and Arun. Jyoti has to work and earn while Arun spends it on his drinks. He comes every night taking alcohol and brutally beats her as if she has no sentiments. She is brought up psychologically on the idealistic bridge of fundamental nobility of man but has to live as a wife with a man who treats her beastly.

Thus, after a few months of their marriage, Jyoti returns to her parent's home and is determined not to go back to Arun due to Arun's barbarous nature of beating. After a few days, Arun himself comes looking for Jyoti at his father-in-law's house to apologise for his violent behaviour and brutality against Jyoti. He repents for what he has done and desires to begin life afresh with Jyoti. The complexity of his behaviour comes to light when Seva, who is not convinced of his apology, asks him the reason for his beating Jyoti. He responds to his mother-in-law very arrogantly :

SEVA : ...WHY DO YOU BEAT JYOTI?

ARUN : 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...we make love to them...but the beating is what gets publicized...

SEVA : Drunk or sober, wife-beating is called barbarism

ARUN : I am a barbarian, a barbarian by birth. When have I claimed any white collar culture?" (KD: 540).

Apart from being educated, Arun unnecessarily follows the footsteps of his father by drinking and beating his wife up to the cry out of her heart. In spite of being educated and smart, Jyoti couldn't



appose her husband's brutality. She loves him wholeheartedly in spite of being abused and brutally beaten up by him. In Kanyadaan, Tendulkar shows Jyoti, Seva and Arun's mother loyal to their husbands. Like typical Indian women of the patriarchic society, they consider their husbands as their 'Pati Parmeshwars'. In the patriarchic society, women have no personal opinions of their own. Arun's mother mutely bears the unbearable beating of her husband. Nath rejects his wife, Seva's apprehension about accepting Arun as her son-in-law. Jyoti surrenders herself to the violence of her husband without raising her voice against him.

In the second scene of the second act, Seva admits Jyoti to nursing home due to her suffering from an internal wound in her stomach as Arun beats and callously kicks on the belly of his pregnant wife.

Despite her torture and suffering, Jyoti decides to return to her husband. Impressed by Arun's autobiography and poetry, Nath thinks that Arun will change a day into a sensible husband. But Nath fails to understand the strange behaviour of his son-in-law. Arun describes through his writing exploitations, humiliations and violations which are meted out against women of the society but in reality exploits his wife, Jyoti.

Being upset due to his daughter's exploitation, Nath refuses the invitation of Arun for the chairmanship of his book publication programme. But Nath knows that his refusal will happen to damage the public image of his son-in-law, Arun, who will take it out through more torture and suffering on the pregnant Jyoti. Seva disappointedly tells Nath :

"If you don't go to the meeting, God knows what he (Arun)...in his madness...will do to Jyoti. Therefore, you will have to go. You will have to preside over the function. You will have to praise the book, because this is the only option left us." (KD: 554)

While talking about Arun's inferiority complex, callous and merciless forms of violence in

Kanyadaan Shailaja B. Wadilar suitably points out:

"The violence projected in the play has three dimensions: physical, psychological, and verbal. Psychological violence is noticed in Arun's cruel inhuman treatment to Jyoti, which is also his way of overcoming his inferiority complex. The vicious pleasure that he seeks from it is shocking. It speaks volumes of the degenerated mode of living peculiar to the Dalits or the backward caste people in our society. Verbal violence can be seen in Arun's abusive, obscene language."⁵

Nath proves his experiment on inter-caste marriage allowing his daughter, Jyoti to go into the clutch of Arun, a Dalit who proves to be more villainous after marriage by inflicting physical and verbal violence against her. M. Sarat Babu aptly points out:

"Tendulkar presents the real situation where Nath is as much responsible for Jyoti's misery as Arun."⁶

Tendulkar expresses his concern by the way of his creativity over the decaying human values and presents how it can be fatal for his female characters. Kanyadaan exposes subjugation, trauma, torture, suffering, agony and exploitation of women in their marital relationships. No doubt many laws, rights and movements are made to empower women yet they will not be able to get justice in the male-dominated society until men don't change view towards them.

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