

**A STUDY OF KANNYADAN: DILEMMA OF
SHIFTING CULTURES**

AAGE KRASHNA SANDIPANRAO
DR. B. A. TECH. UNIVERSITY,
LONERE, INDIA

Abstract

As India is a multicultural and multireligious nation-state has been facing several problems since ancient time. Among these problems caste system is very crucial. In this modern time also the earlier formed caste system exploits particular group of societies (which are from lower class and castes) without directly forcing them. However, educational development in the modern time brought awareness regarding this direct and indirect exploitation. The aftermath of this results in the intermingling of different castes into one. But, ambivalently it has created clashes between different castes and in their cultural practices. Therefore, these different caste-cultures are being taken apart from each other and rare signs are there to mix them up. It seems that the awareness of exploited people leading to have revenge with an angry manner instead to develop a new developed society. Although, the traditional cultural practices determines the civilized or uncivilized manners of people but we need to identify ourselves – firstly, and ‘them’ and we need to accept each other with a rational attitude.

Keywords: *Caste-culture, freedom, communication, civilized, uncivilized, domination, determination of identity.*

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Indian societies are mostly divided by their different religions and castes. Sometimes, these religious and caste variations create disorder in the social construction. Therefore, the word secularism began the point of discussion in India from the time of partition. Afterwards, it has been used by several politicians as well as intellectuals. As Nehru proclaimed about India at the time of independence, that '*a secular state and exhorted India to 'lessen her religiosity and turn to science'*'.

However, the paper concerns with the study of Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kannyadan*. The play very vividly shows caste differences create violence. It also raises the point that although we are ready to accept each other but it is not that much easy to conciliate. The different castes are having their own cultures and people from the particular caste develop their own selves under that 'caste-culture'. Before understanding *Kannyadan*, there is a need to understand what the term culture means to us with a modern perspective. In general, culture is a thing of commonality. By which, we the human individuals accept traditional rules and regulation, values, ethics, customs, and behavioural patterns collectively. However, culture is very broad in context. Culture is everything which is being consciously and commonly accepted and performed by a group of people. It includes all the fields of human behaviours, which are performed externally, internally, and personally. These fields can be categorized as arts, social behaviours, religious behaviours, behaviours related to profession, and personal behaviours. Arts involves, writing; particularly literature, painting, sculpture, music, movies, and etc. Social behaviour comprises rules of social behaviour – values, social traditions, clothes, food, games, celebration manners; celebrating of festivals, official programmes, and family programmes, politics and so on. Religious behaviours deal with religious beliefs; according to castes,

which results in the performance of actions of people. And last but not least, personal behaviours. It is related to thinking of individuals, styles of eating food, occupation of individual and others. By all these examples it can be said that 'culture is a dynamic idea which is being determined by the behaviours of individuals and which also determines the behaviours of individuals.' Therefore, culture is a part of general performance. Whereby, people perform their acts and roles according to set rules by the tradition and people also set rules for their performance. Eliot's emphasis of culture, in the words of Raymond Williams, as a whole way of life is useful and significant. Regarding this he says:

Culture . . . includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar' (250).

Thus, culture is a combination of necessary human activities. Moreover, culture, according to me, can be seen in relation with three different terms, that is 'civilizational culture' – related to historical aspect of culture; 'socialized culture' – related to common behaviour of an individual in the society, which we think that ought to be good; and 'religious culture' – which signifies the influence of religious ideas on the cultural practices.

The cultural performances in Indian societies are different in terms of castes. Therefore, acceptance of culture is conscious but it always may not be rational. Conscious acceptance of culture may lead you towards crippled formation and practice of cultural ideas by which a particular class may be benefitted but, rational acceptance always leads towards firm and authoritative ideas of culture by which, we accept culture with its merits and demerits. In relation to this Raymond Williams says that,

The consciousness can be a false consciousness, or partly false...Where this is so, the maintenance of that consciousness, which is often likely tube to the immediate interest of a particular

class, is no longer, in any positive sense, a function. We should be wise, therefore, to distinguish between the general, theoretical relation between conscious culture and a whole way of life, and the actual relation or relations which may at any one time exist in society (254)

This common and conscious culture develops on the economic foundation. The group which holds the economic power becomes more dominating and manipulates that culture.

Moreover, the culture is always being represented in art or literature by which, writer catches some significant moments from the society and tries to describe them through the work of art. These moments could be happy or pathetic; the writer represents them as they are. Walter Peter wrote the notorious sentence in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*;

Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake(Williams 179-80).

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kannyadan* is not only a gripping story of a young woman belongs from Brahmin family but, it is a story of two different cultural ideologies which have been developing in the same geographical area but they are different on the basis of castes. These cultures dynamically attempted to shift from one's place to another, unconsciously or consciously to be intermixed. Jyoti is a young and educated girl from learned Brahmin family falls in love and later marries ArunAthwale who belongs from 'dalit' family – socially inferior class. Jyoti's family proclaims that they are progressive and they practice democracy in the family. When Jyoti says, 'I want to tell you something'. The father of Jyoti called Nath replies, '...say it then, who stops you? We have democracy in this house and we are proud of it. Democracy outside and dictatorship in the home, we don't know these two-timing ticks.' (K-4)the situation signifies a one context of culture which is being practiced in the higher class families which also shows their thinking process. Whereas, when Arun is asked

by Jyoti's mother about the planning of illness, food, house, and other such problems which consequently arise because of lack of money after marriage, Arun replies to the question very simply that *'We don't worry about such problems.... We shall brewing illicit liquor.... The man bribes the police and the wife serves customers'. People call her aunty.*"(K-21) This innocent answer of very serious question indicates that it is nothing but the things which people experience in their routine life. The situation explicitly gives clear picture of two contradictory cultures in which their routine lives are very distinct. Such experiences of dalits make them rough in tone and behaviour. But the question arises that, is it a right manner to express ourselves. Regarding this Raymond Williams argues that,

The objection, as a matter of fact, is not to telling anyone anything. It is a question of how one tells them, and how one would expect to be told oneself. Nor is this merely a matter of politeness. It is really a matter of how one would be told oneself: telling as an aspect of living; learning as an element of experience. The very failure of so many of the items of transmission ... is not an accident, but the result of a failure to understand communication. The failure is due to an arrogant preoccupation with transmission, which rests on the assumption that the common answers have been found and need only to be applied(333-34).

Cultural formation depends upon the caste system by which determination of identity – superior and inferior, of individuals and a caste too. In this context Andre Beteille argues,

Caste system may be described as systems of cumulative inequality. Advantages of status tend to be combined with advantages of wealth and power, and those who are socially under-privileged also tend to be at the bottom of the economic and political scales (129).

The people from different castes and classes have different behavioural patterns, according to their own caste and the availability of convenient life with some basic requirements- food, home, and clothes. The people who do not

have these facilities feel uncomfortable when they come in the civilized culture. It happens to ArunAthawale when he goes to Jyoti's home. He says, *'I feel uncomfortable in big houses....Our house is not like that.... What if the building swallowed me up in the blink of an eye?'*(K-16). For other people it may be nonsense behaviour but it is developed through social formation which they traditionally inherited, because their history is like that. Moreover, the caste system made them to live in poverty so that they can't even build good houses. The formation of their culture is different from other civilized people and, consequently they become "Other."

The anthropology of India has done much to gather the facts for construction of traditional culture, characterized by a caste system and autarkic villages. Moreover, portraying Indian culture as dominated by an essentialized "religion", it effectively characterized this culture as "the oriental other (Veer 196).

Cultural codes in particular caste system decide personal behavioural patterns by which the members in a family treat each other. As Arun says, *"men who sit and chat in the kitchen are pansies!"*(K-17). This signifies that women's place is in the kitchen and men do not go there. In comparison to Jyoti's family or in her cultural system woman has some rational freedom that Seva is a social worker and Jyoti is permitted to marry a dalit boy. But, normally the reciprocal action does not take place between these two different communities that is, particularly, higher and lower, because of socio-cultural and etiquette differences. As Arun says,

'Generation after generation, their (dalits) stomachs used to the stale, stinking bread they have begged! Our tongues always tasting the flesh of dead animals, and with relish! Surely we can't fit into your unwrinkled Tinopal world. How can there be any give and take between our ways and your fragrant, ghee spread, wheat bread culture?'(K-17)

Thus, the codes even of eating food also different and may be nonsensical but the reality cannot be hidden. However, Seva, Jyoti's mother does not like him not because of his caste but because of his inherent "culture." Although, as Nath says, that *'manners and culture, are not our ancestral property.'*(K-26) The play remembers us the play of John Osborne *Look Back in Anger* and the term *'angry young man.'*

Although, this situation is there Jyoti's father ready to give his daughter ArunAthawale in the marriage to conciliate two contradictory caste-cultures. The problem arises after this marriage. Arun starts to torture Jyoti as well as her father on the ground that they are Brahmin and from upper caste and they have been dominating and exploiting their caste since long time. Due to this, the feeling of hatred-ness is being developed in such communities. Therefore, the people in such communities are behaving in wrong manner. When Jyoti gets married she suffered with mental and physical torment given by Arun. Not only this but when Arun publishes his autobiography, he deliberately invites his father-in-law as a guest for his book release programme. In order to show superiority Arun gives derogatory treatment to Jyoti's father. This situation minutely expressed by Jayprakash, he says that, *...those who are hunted derive great pleasure in hunting others when they get an opportunity to do so. The oppressed are overjoyed when they get a chance to oppress others.'*(K-51) In relation to this Raymond Williams argues that,

The whole theory of mass-communication depends, essentially, on a minority in some way exploiting a majority. We are not all democrats now (333).

This process of shifting of caste-cultural domination also relates Foucauldian power relationships. These power relationships are politically socialized. In the play socially dominated becomes politically dominator and in other situation politically dominator becomes socially dominated. This is a shifting of power which comes through the shifting of ideological force from one culture to another. This is also a matter of cultural politics of domination being maintained by several means and ideologies. Cultural politics is a

perpetual process of resistance to manipulation. This is to determine the cultural self. The cultural self is recently being discussed and became widespread. The cultural politics takes place between dominator and dominated.

Thus, in the process of shifting between the cultures we have to eradicate the frontiers of caste and religion. The individuals from different cultural patterns should be recognized without the acknowledgement of caste and religion. Regarding this Andre Beteille rightly says, that

The sociology of group identities in India is written off right at the very outset. Does it even have the legitimacy to exist, one might ask, when the preamble to the Indian constitution defines us as a 'secular' republic, where equality is promoted among all citizens regardless of belief, faith, or patterns of worship. It certainly appears any way impinging on the state. On the other hand, the constitution itself recognizes and defines particular social groups – Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and the like(288).

The identification of people with their culture and civilization must be eradicated and as Edward Said argues that we must denationalise ourselves and should create a mix culture. In this process we can preserve our differences and maintain the mix culture also.

Tendulkar's this play is interesting because he gives tension to the readers or audience. He is providing the situation which is normally unexpected in which one decision must be taken to solve the problem and establish the peace in the family or society. The constituent identity of society comes with differences or in other words with inequality. So this kind of inequality might rarely develop a feeling of oneness in every individual. But there is a possibility that it will develop extreme awareness about caste, region, and religion.

To have harmonious and peaceful society every individual should be attached with wide sharing of emotions and experiences. The effect of this would be socio-cultural attachment among people. For that, particularly, government should provide some opportunities to increase contact among people.

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