

A Comparative Study of *Look Back In Anger* by John Osborne and *Kanyadaan* by Vijay Tendulkar

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Abstract

This study states in brief some of the findings as a comparative study of two selected plays viz. **Look Back in Anger** by John Osborne and **Kanyadaan** by Vijay Tendulkar on the lives of their contemporary youth in British and Indian society respectively on the theme of domestic violence of youth. This thematic study concentrates on the actual living condition of the contemporary youth, their poverty, their social backgrounds, their exploitation and discomfort, their suppression and disillusionment which resulted in their violent reactions to their troublemakers who exploited them in the past.

Introduction:

Both John Osborne and Vijay Tendulkar are perhaps the most popular and stalwart dramatists in their respective country. Both playwrights have made the major contribution in their literary career. Osborne is the most revolutionary British playwright who has broadened the limitations of the Post-Modern British Drama with his novelty of content and presentation. He is associated with Angry Young Man's Theater. He presents his plays on the lives of educated lower middle class graduates, who become misfits in the society due to unemployment. He has successfully portrayed the mood of despair, anger and frustration of the post-war generation in England. His plays realistically depict the problems of angry young men in Britain. He attacks British institutions, the aristocracy, politicians, captains of industry, journalists, mediemen, churchmen, critics and sexual hypocrites in his plays. *Look Back in Anger* is one of the famous plays of Osborne, which made his image of angry young man and made him the greatest dramatist in English. The play presents the contemporary youth and their violence. *Look Back in Anger* shows Jimmy Porter's violent and aggressive reaction to the upper class. It results from his disillusionment due to his undesirable living condition and poverty.

Vijay Tendulkar's contribution to the Marathi theatre is very important as it has set a new trend of experimental theatre. He is perhaps the most prolific and controversial among the Post-Independence Indian playwrights. He is an icon of the avante-garde Indian theatrical movement of the modern era. Over the last few decades he has captured the life-world of the contemporary Indian in order to identify the sources and nature of violence. His plays have created storm in society. Though his eyes are focused on the middle class and its suffocation, his chief targets are the human mind, the way of life and the complexity therein. Vijay Tendulkar writes his plays to account the disillusionment and aggressive violent reaction of young educated generation against his society. He is associated with the Marathi Experimental Theatre, presents his plays on the lives of educated lower class graduates, who become misfits in the society due to unemployment.

Their disillusionment reminds them of their traditional suppression by the upper caste and reacts violently to avenge the troublemakers. His play, *Kanyadaan* depicts the problem of untouchability in the Indian society and the violence and disillusionment of the Indian youth. The play focuses on the contemporary social problems associated with domestic violence between the spouses, which is generated out of the class differences of spouses. *Kanyadaan* shows Arun's violent and aggressive reaction to the upper class.

Comparative Conclusions:

Look Back in Anger and *Kanyadaan* are based on the contemporary social problems of the two respective societies. Both the dramatists are interested in accounting the situation that creates the social problems but not to present the problem with its remedy. This is their common approach in presenting the social problems. They express the disillusionment of the heroes who behave rudely and violently with their wives of their own choice from the upper class as a reaction to express their 'anger' against the upper class.

John Osborne was inspired by the playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, G. B. Shaw, and Tennessee Williams in writing and presenting social problem of the society in theatre. He was also inspired by Strindberg, Chekhov, Oscar Wilde and D. H. Lawrence to write on the themes such as isolation of man, man-woman relationship, their erotic attachment and their marital tension resulting from differences in class backgrounds. He presented picture of contemporary social and political life in England. Like John Osborne, Vijay Tendulkar was also inspired by Tennessee Williams, presenting the social problems in the contemporary society on the stage. He was inspired by some foreign writers and modeled his plays on their themes. He selected what he wanted from their work, handled it in his own manner, shaped and designed it and made it his own. He writes about the life around him. Thus both the writers have the same influence of Tennessee Williams.

Both the playwrights have the same thread of presenting social problems in their respective societies on the stage. They both tried to visualize the actual situation in the contemporary society. *Look Back in Anger* presents the social problem of educated young men in the contemporary English Society. The play gives the real picture of futile existence of young men in the backwash of Suez war. The problem of unemployment was severe in England. Liberalism and individualism is the offshoot of the French revolution, which brought the concept of 'Welfare State', the state which is based on the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. This brought free education to rich and poor alike. It resulted in the establishment of many Redbrick Universities in the various small cities of England. The effects of this all, the unemployed educated graduates were produced with doubt, despair and controversial personality such as Jimmy's temperament. It also reflects the problem of social disparity. It comes into focus when Jimmy Porter, a working class man marries Alison, an upper class girl. This confrontation between two cultures in the family leads to the conflict of the play. In *Look Back in Anger*, John Osborne follows the trend of G. B. Shaw, presenting the social problem of educated young man Jimmy Porter and his futile existence in the society. John Osborne becomes more successful in presenting a social problem on the stage. He has successfully portrayed the mood of despair, anger and frustration of the post-war generation in England. *Kanyadaan* also presents the social problem of untouchability in the Indian

society in the form of Arun and his family. Untouchables were deprived of the basic human rights. They did not have place in the society. They were suppressed by the upper classes for a number of years. As an untouchable, Arun and his family have to lead a very miserable and suppressed life. The play portrays the problems such as poverty and unemployment in the society. The problem of unemployment in Maharashtra is an offshoot of the efforts made by Yashwantrao Chavan who made the free and compulsory education to all resulted in the growth of educated unemployment. There was no work for young men in the society even for the highly educated ones. The play also presents the problems of unemployment, poverty and social disparity in Indian society. He adheres to the trend of realistic writing in the play such as John Osborne. In short, both the plays deal with the theme of social realism.

Both the playwrights depict the poverty of educated graduates from their respective societies and their exploitation on the same line. Both the playwrights are successful in conveying the readers that the major cause of their poverty is their lower class status and their upbringing in their families. Both the protagonists are fed up with the social taboos forced against them and both try to rebel against this. Both protagonists are successful in their revolt against the upper class and make their wives to bow before them. Both have same spirit of revolution who raised voice against the traditional injustices made by upper class. They both face the same miseries and humiliation in the past. They have same insulted and humiliated family background. Thus the experience of poverty, exploitation and discomfort is common in both protagonists. Both are nervous for their aforesaid life experiences. They are hated particularly by their upper class mother-in-laws for their low class status. In short, in both plays, playwrights have depicted the protagonists being influenced by their adverse history. The present is nothing but the reaction to their past experiences.

The exploitation shown in both the plays is of social and economic kind. In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy is exploited economically due to contemporary social situation. Though he is highly educated, he is left unemployed. Jimmy is the victim of social circumstances. In *Kanyadaan* the exploitation of the untouchable by the upper class has been shown. Arun, being an untouchable is exploited by the upper castes in the society. Both the protagonists exploit their wives spiritually and sexually. Arun seems to be more aggressive in his exploitation of wife than Jimmy. Arun exploits his wife physically and kicks her during pregnancy.

The suppression of wives by their husbands is yet another theme in both the plays. The protagonists of the plays take satisfaction in giving trouble to their wives in the same manner though they are from different societies. They show the traditional image of woman in general which seems to be inferior to man. There is the same patriarchic tradition in both the societies in which woman has to bear troubles and injustices from her husband. The women characters in both the plays seem to be weak and powerless. Sometimes the women characters try to revolt against the harassment made by the men in the play but their revolt is suppressed due to the patriarchic system in society. John Osborne and Vijay Tendulkar have portrayed the traditional image of woman who bows to her husband in spite of his immoral and rude activities. Both the playwrights have depicted the real social picture in which women are subordinated by male characters.

They do not express their personal reactions to this pathetic situation of women. So both playwrights seem to be neither anti-feminists nor pro-feminists.

John Osborne and Vijay Tendulkar write their plays to account the disillusionment and aggressive violent reaction of young educated generation against their respective societies. John Osborne, associated with Angry Young Man's Theatre, presents his plays on the lives of educated lower middle class graduates, who become misfits in the society due to unemployment. Their disillusionment reminds them of their traditional suppression by the upper class and react violently to avenge the troublemakers. His plays realistically depict the problems of the angry young men in Britain. Vijay Tendulkar, associated with the Marathi Experimental Theatre, concentrates similarly on the disillusionment of educated young men who remember their traditional suppression and react violently against the upper class.

These two playwrights are particularly interested in showing the domestic violence of spouses, the violence is generated out of the class differences of spouses. Social disparity of the spouses is the major cause of the violence in the family. The play *Look Back in Anger* reflects the Social disparity in the British society whereas *Kanyadaan* reflects the social disparity in the Indian society. The British society was divided into two classes i.e. the upper class and the lower middle class. In which the lower class was exploited and suppressed in the hands of the upper class as shown in *Look Back in Anger*. The roots of the class system in British society are found in its capitalism, where the dividing line was drawn between the owner and the worker of the factory. But in Indian society, the caste system is a typical traditional social system and supposed to be the blot on the Hindu society. The history of the origin and development of caste system in Hindu society has a long tradition. It is said that the caste system in Hindu society is gifted by *Manusmriti*. Hindu society is subdivided into castes and sub-castes to such an extent that the entire social life of Hindus totally depends upon caste system and its customs. The vedic culture divided the Hindu society into four groups or classes known as Chaturvarnas based on the merits and social duties of a class or varna. Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were superior varnas to the Shudra varna in every respect. In the course of time, the shudra was treated as the lowest varna and it was its duty to serve the other three varnas. They were denied the basic human rights and were deprived of dignity and necessities of life. So they remained backward both socially and economically. These untouchables were regarded as depressed classes. The violence generated in *Kanyadaan* is only due to caste system in Hindu society whereas in *Look Back in Anger* is due to class system in the British society.

Both the plays trace the violence of youth in their respective society. The only difference is the intensity and its type. The violence shown in *Look Back in Anger* is mostly in the verbal form whereas the violence in *Kanyadaan* is both in its physical and verbal form. The violence in *Kanyadaan* seems to be brutal and wild than the violence in *Look Back in Anger*.

Both the protagonists are having similar tendency and anger against the upper class/caste. Jimmy, the protagonist of *Look Back in Anger*, is having poor family background. Though he is an educated university graduate, he does not have good job. He seems to be dissatisfied with the present situation that results into his anger against the upper classes. He rents his anger upon his wife who belongs to the upper class. He

abuses her and uses obscene words to her and her parents. Arun, the hero of *Kanyadaan*, has to face the same situation in the Indian society. He has to lead the same kind of life such as Jimmy. He makes the upper class responsible for his miserable condition and expresses his deep anger against his upper class wife. Resultantly, he beats her and abuses her in her pregnancy. In brief, both the protagonists are from lower class/ caste who frequently express their anger against their exploitation. Thus, though both the playwrights are from different family backgrounds and different locations, they have focused the common aspects of their respective society.

Both the playwrights give the description of British and Indian culture by keeping the conflicts of the play at the centre. Jimmy uses Helena as a sexual partner in the absence of his wife which shows the recognition of extramarital relations in the British society that seems to be so natural. It reflects the free and frank Western culture having loose sexual codes and conducts which is different from the Indian culture. Though Arun beats his wife Jyoti, he really loves her. He sticks only to her in his whole life. It reflects the traditional Indian culture having virtuous heritage in which husband and wife are supposed to be together though they quarrel with each other. They are not tagged together for time being. They come together forever in happiness and in sadness. They have to stick up with each other even though they are not willing to live together. It is said that, as per Hindu philosophy the marriage is a divine knot tied by God in between husband and wife. The play shows the image of Hindu woman as a Pativrata who lives with her husband in spite of miseries and injustices done by him. In brief, the cultural patterns of both the societies – Western and Indian are poles apart. One offers total freedom whereas other expects moral bond.

Both the plays became popular and contributed more in the glory of their author. *Look Back in Anger* got popularity in England as well as in other countries in Europe owing to novelty of its contents. *Kanyadaan* also became popular to some extent but it was criticized for its presentation of the typical manners of untouchables, their behaviour such as their habit of drinking, their abusing and beating to their wives and their violence in family, which affected deeply on the psyche of untouchables in the real contemporary society.

The titles of both the plays are meaningful. Both the titles give the central idea and conflict of the play. The title of the play *Look Back in Anger* is suggestive and meaningful. Jimmy looks back in anger to the upper class and their white collar culture. He does not forget the class consciousness of his upper class mother-in-law. He becomes angry against everything and everybody around him. He looks back in anger to the time when he was ten years old and watching his father dying. Jimmy also looks back to the era of Edwardian settlement and complacency in which there were causes to fight for. His contemporary society was full of chaos and futility which made young men of Jimmy's temperament angry and violent. The title of the play *Kanyadaan* is named after one of the rituals in the Hindu marriage, in which a daughter is offered permanently to the bridegroom by her father. After this ritual, father cuts off all his rights upon her. She becomes the property of others. In the play *Kanyadaan*, Nath offers his daughter to Arun. Though Arun beats her and abuses her parents, she cannot leave him and cannot go to her parents. Nath does not have right upon her. He does not keep her in his house because he has already offered her to Arun. She has to remain with him. She has to accept the situation

as it comes. So the titles of both the plays seem to be apt and appropriate. It attracts the attention of the spectators.

The language of both the plays is rough and unsophisticated with more use of colloquial words and some expletives. The speeches are full of derogatory and obscene words which bring no difference in the expression of the violence. The subject matter is highlighted realistically by both the playwrights, so that both the plays touch and create deep impression on the spectators.

The play *Look Back in Anger* adheres to the conventional unity of place as the whole action of the play takes place only in Jimmy's one room flat. Though it does not follow strictly the unity of time it has unity of action. The play *Kanyadaan* also sticks to the conventional unity of place as the whole action of the play takes place only in Nath's old block of a building in a middle class colony. It does not follow strictly the unity of action and time.

The end of both the plays is surprising one as the hero and heroine come together. The hero and heroine of the play, *Look Back in Anger* come together after a period of estrangement. This end of the play is totally unexpected. The end of *Kanyadaan* seems to be unhappy and surprising though the hero and heroine come together at the end, because Jyoti, the heroine of the play accepts the miserable life of untouchable as a challenge, which she is not willing to live.

The flashback technique is common in both the plays. *Look Back in Anger* is a full length play of ninety six pages. It is divided into three acts and four scenes. The action of the play takes place in a logical and coherent manner. The action moves backward and forward in the past and the future. *Kanyadaan* is a play of seventy pages. It is divided into two acts and five scenes. There is logical correlation between acts and scenes. The technique of flashback used in both the plays is similar. The action moves from present to past and present to future. But the structure of both the plays is not similar. The Play, *Look Back in Anger* is of three acts whereas *Kanyadaan* is of two acts.

Protagonists of both the plays seem to be dominant and pushing other characters into the background. Jimmy, the protagonist of *Look Back in Anger* dominates the action in the play. *Look Back in Anger* is like a one man play in which the protagonist is pushing everything and everyone else, into the background. The characters such as Alison, Helena, and Cliff have got less weightage. In *Kanyadaan* all characters of the play including Arun, Nath, Jyoti, Jayaprakash and Seva have contributed similarly to the building of the play. Though it is true, Arun's character seems to be more dominant in the play because of his violent action and obscene dialogues. Arun's violence is the central motive of the play. The action goes on due to only Arun's character. In both the plays, dramatists give dominant position to the hero. The heroine is depicted as the victim of exploitation.

The protagonists of both the plays are fond of literature and art particularly the verse literature i.e. the poetry. The protagonist of *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy shows his deep interest in verse and expresses his feelings in the form of poetry somewhere in the middle of the play. He too is fond of playing Jazz. The protagonist of *Kanyadaan*, Arun is also a poet. He writes a number of poems which impress Jyoti and makes her to love

him. Arun becomes a famous writer. He writes an autobiography on his miseries and the troubles faced in the life. In conclusion, the protagonists of both the plays love literature and art.

The milieu and place of action in *Look Back in Anger* and in *Kanyadaan* are different. *Look Back in Anger* concentrates on the immediate period after World War II in Birmingham. At that time the British society was divided into two classes viz. the upper and lower middle class. It means that the class system was rooted in the British society even though it is known as a developed country. The minds of British people have not changed their traditional set up of society having the class system which is rooted deeply in the psyche of British people. But the milieu and place of action in *Kanyadaan* is different. It is Post-Independence milieu of India and action takes place in Pune. During this milieu the untouchables in Indian society enjoyed the fruits of social reforms and concessions and reservations in jobs due to the laws for overall improvement of untouchables even though Arun has been ill-treated by the upper castes as an untouchable. It means that the new law ended untouchability outwardly and brought materially good days to untouchables in free India. So the law cannot change their mind sets being influenced by class consciousness and caste system-Untouchability that is deeply rooted in the minds of respective communities.

The present study therefore concludes that the social eradication of the class system and caste system in the British and Indian society respectively is possible theoretically but not possible practically. It cannot be eradicated from the minds of people. External social change is easier but inner change to stop certain bad traditional practices is difficult. The impact of traditional practices is more than law.

To sum up, both the plays are with social purpose. Both writers have depicted the actual problem in the society before the readers to discuss the particular problem and made them to think over it but failed to suggest any suitable remedy to the problem.

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