

A Contrapuntal Reading of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: October

Year: 2025

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Veerasamy, P. "A Contrapuntal Reading of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2025, pp. 174–79.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS1-Oct.9872>

Dr. P. Veerasamy

Guest Faculty, Department of English, School of Humanities
Pondicherry University, Puducherry

Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar's Kanyadaan has been construed in many ways by various scholars. Published in 1983, the play holds caste as determining factor of the life of the characters. The play echoes the social reality still now as it withholds the binary divides explicitly. The two characters, namely Jyoti, a Brahmin girl with liberal ideas, and Arun Athavale, a Dalit boy with vengeful nature, are united through marriage. Admiring at his poetic calibre, Jyoti voluntarily marries him against her status and trusts a good life. Unaware of Arun's long-standing oppression, she becomes his life partner and befall prey to his brutal nature. So far, the play has not been interpreted from contrapuntal frame. Through contrapuntal frame, this paper identifies the minor narrative that is vital to any coherent academic discourse.

Keywords: Contrapuntal, Caste Conflict, Gender Violence, Inter-Caste Marriage

Methodology and Research Gap: Many researchers have already ascertained class and caste conflict, feminism, modernism, power structure, the concept of new woman, Dalit perspective, gender violence, patriarchy, inter-caste marriage and so on in Vijay Tendulkar's play, *Kanyadaan*. This paper identifies the contrapuntal dimension by exploring the micro-cosmic world, the hypocritical nature of the main characters, namely, Nath Devalikar, the Brahmin socialist, and Jyoti's father, her mother, Seva, a social worker, Arun, her husband's realistic and fretful life and Jyoti, as a conformist as well.

Introduction

The term, "contrapuntal," coined by Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*, suggests the inclusion of minor narratives that are usually not taken into account in the traditional historiography. As the two sides of a coin, the binary oppositions are unavoidable components of the analysis. The traditional and grand narrative glorify their elitism and deliberately neglect the prejudiced consciousness of the major and minor characters to show their grandeur. To prove all ignored narratives more important and vital to a sincere and coherent discourse, Edward Said recommends contrapuntal reading which includes the excluded. He remarks about contrapuntal reading: "We must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 32). J. A. Cuddon in his *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* highlights it:

a mode of reading which reveals how some literary texts are deeply implicated in the ideologies of imperialism and colonialism. Borrowing the term from music, Said argues that such reading demands looking for what is not said and examining the significance of small plot lines and other marginal elements of a text. In doing so, the critic provides a counterpoint to the long-accepted reading of a text and uncovers its colonial implications. (155)

Proud and Liberal Family: Nath Devlalikar, a member in the State Legislative Council, brings up Jyoti and Jayaprakash as liberals. He is not shocked and admonished Jyoti when she proposes her idea of marrying a Dalit boy, Arun. Instead, he reacts: “I know it doesn’t make a difference. But if my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn’t have pleased me as much . . . Well, I’m telling you the absolute truth” (*Kanyadaan*, I, i. 23). Only her brother, Jayaprakash alerts her to be cautious because marriage “is a knot tied for a lifetime” (*Kanyadaan*, I, i. 25). Her mother, Seva is an active member in transforming an equal society. On Jyoti’s decision of marrying Arun, she expresses her views: My concern is not over his being a dalit . . . your life has been patterned in a certain manner. You have been brought up in a specified culture. To erase or change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different from you in every way. You may not be able to handle it (*Kanyadaan*, I, i. 27). But Jyoti ascertains her interest to the family members: “I feel that he can be trusted. His poems and autobiography have inspired me with complete faith in him” (*Kanyadaan*, I, i. 25). Dr. Ambedkar in his “Annihilation of Caste” reiterates the same idea as “The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste” (31).

The Dalit Life: Prior to their marriage, Arun details her about his house: “If you see my father’s hut you’ll understand my predicament. Ten of us, big and small, lived in that eight feet by ten feet hut . . . No clothes on our back, no food in our stomach, but felt very secure. Here, these damn houses of the city people, they’re like the bellies of sharks and crocodiles, each one alone in them” (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 31). Here, contrapuntal frame allows to mention the abode of the lower-class persons like Arun. Besides, he expresses his unpredictable nature to Jyoti as “I feel safe on the street lost in a crowd. The bigger the crowds, the safer I feel. My heart shudders when walls of cement and concrete surround me. I feel I must get up, run, get lost in the crowd” (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 31). She is not reminded of her mother’s advises by the time and remains constant supporter of Arun’s stories and grows too affectionate towards him.

This discussion brings more light on the subaltern voice. While talking to Jyoti, Arun explicates the historical subalternity: “Our grandfathers and great grandfathers used to roam, barefoot, miles and miles, in the heat, in the rain, day and night . . . till the rags on their butt fell apart . . . used to wander shouting ‘Johaar, Maayi—baap! Sir-Madam, sweeper!’ and their calls polluted the brahmins’s ears” (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 32). Arun’s being a Dalit does not affect Jyoti’s family initially and there is no slightest opposition raised by them.

But Arun reminds her a kind of world in which Jyoti would live in. He says that “Will you marry me and eat stale bread with stinking dal in my father’s hut without vomiting? Tell me, Jyoti, can you shit everyday I our slum’s village toilet like my mother? Can you beg, quaking at every door, for a little grass for our buffaloes? (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 32). He warns her: “And you thought of marrying me. Our life is not the Socialists service camp. It is hell, and I mean hell. A hell call life” (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 32). Arun’s narration of the life of the Dalits is usually not unearthed but demeaned. Yet, the voice of the upper class remains a prototype and the argument demands a method or lens which voice to the voiceless. Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz in their “A Postmigrant Contrapuntal Reading of the Refugee Crisis and its Discourse ‘Foreigners Out! Schlingensiefel’s Container” propose the need for the contrapuntal reading as: “a kind of contrapuntal way of thinking that would have a destabilising effect on established orders of knowledge and stimulate critical reflection. Such an epistemic approach directly interrogates conventional knowledge; it calls upon us to confront and re-examine everyday routinised practices” (109-110).

Arun’s Subverting Role: Arun turns into violent whenever he is upset. His discourteous tendency is visible when he shouts: “I want to set fire to the whole world, strangle throats, rape and kill. Drink up the blood of the beasts belonging to your high caste society . . . Like a corpse, I live on (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii. 32). In

a vengeful voice, he mutters: "It's a jolly game, Caught a brahmin dame" ((*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.33). Once Jyoti teases him, he twists her arm and regrets, but he explains her psyche to her "When someone throws challenge at me, I lose all control" ((*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.33). This shows his instant opportunity to resist and react to the bossy people like Nath.

The contrapuntal view probes the business done by Arun's ancestors. Arun's narration of his family trade, that is, brewing the illicit liquor and more profitable makes Jyoti's family members restless. Doing this job is a fun for him and exposes the stark reality of involving all members to run the business. The way he narrates is strange to Jyoti's family, but he is intentional in his mission. Tendulkar photographs the down trodden life exactly as he speaks through Arun: "If we are children, there's work for them also, to wash glasses and plates, to fetch paan and cigarettes. And very good income in the tips" ((*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.35). This is shocking element for Jyoti's high-class family because they are never exposed to such an environment and not even heard of it. Here, contrapuntal approach creates many mini narratives to explore these minute nuances Arun's life.

Nath Devalikar, the Liberalist: Jyoti's father, Nath is not upset giving away Jyoti in marriage to Arun instead, he feels that he has broken the caste barrier through this inter-caste marriage. When his son and wife object Jyoti marrying Arun, he reacts radically: "Are manners and culture your ancestral property?" ((*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.39). His son is very much displeased with Nath for his blind belief on Arun. Jyoti's mother is hypocritical in this issue. She determines not to accept Arun, Jyoti's husband. Like members of the aristocratic families who always reject the lower caste, Jyoti's mother Seva and her brother Jayaprakash deliberately reject Arun to maintain their elitism.

Nath's practical mind wants to create an egalitarian society. He remarks it to his wife: "society cannot be changed through words alone. We have to act as catalysts in this change. The old social reformers did not stop with making speeches and writing articles on widow remarriage" ((*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.41). He confesses the hegemony of the elites on the Dalits: "We have oppressed them for generations. We should be guilty about this" (*Kanyadaan*, I, ii.44). Edward Said cites this alternative view, narration as "new narratives" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 51).

The Counter-Narrative: Arun exhibits his real face after the marriage. He visits Jyoti's home, drunk expresses that he is not fit to dine with them. The long-standing oppression of the high class makes people like Arun so subservient and submissive. He treats his marriage with Jyoti an opportunity to react against the upper class and beats Jyoti severely when she is pregnant. The oppression is two-fold in his life: one in the hands of the aristocrats and at his home thorough his father coming home everyday drunk. He is vexed at his father beating his mother half dead" (*Kanyadaan*, II, i. 55). He grieves intensely that no one wiped her tears. He repeats what his father has done to his mother. He bemoans at his nature: "I m a barbarian, barbarian by birth. When have I claimed any white collar culture" (*Kanyadaan*, II, i. 55). Satheesh Chandra K and R. David Raja Bose in their, *Social Problems In Vijay Tendulkar's Kanyadaan* comment on Arun's life: He does not hesitate to use physical, mental, psychological and even sexual violence against Jyoti to exploit, abuse and threaten her on the name of his lower caste" (JETIR, 366).

Contrapuntal perspective exposes wife-beating practice which is always hidden due to its ignominy. Arun in the play beats Jyoti in the belly. From Seva's point of view, Arun "is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste" (*Kanyadaan*, II, i. 58). Thus, "The point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 66-67). Seva perceives Arun's resistance as a mighty force through his objection of the so called highborn. Shireenbanu Siraguppi, in her "The Tension Between Ideology and Realities in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*" observes the godly and the beasely self of Arun as "Arun is both the beast, and the lover. Arun is the demon, and also the poet. Both are bound together, one within the other, they are one. So closely bound that at times it is not possible to distinguish the demon from the poet" (4).

When Arun transpires himself into a writer, his demeanor is changed completely. His hegemony and highhandedness are visible when he exposes his uncouth manners to Nath through his posture in front of him. When he invites Jyoti's father at his home to inaugurate his first autobiographical novel, he reminds him about the Progressive Dalit Literature Circle, the orientalist evidence. This directly announces the existence of the forum exclusively for the Eastern literature which is always ignored by the metanarrative demeaning it as exorcist. Contrapuntal lens offers an inclusive perspective of the oppressed Arun.

When the Subaltern Speaks: Arun, being a subaltern to Nath, his brahmin father-in-law, does politics with Nath through negation: "our Nath is what we call a very profound man. His wide ranging vision does not miss anything of value. He would surely have read my autobiography. Tell me, Nath saheb, have you read or haven't you read it?" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 63-64). The newly achieved acclamation makes him dominate his father-in-law. While inviting Nath along with friends Vamanseth and Hammeer Rao, Arun is too political. He tells Nath "they insist, that you should preside over the discussion of my autobiography. Right" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 64). Arun affirms that Nath would be present on the day and informs Nath that only his friends have taken his consent granted to chair the discussion. His ironical nature is evident when he says: "Nath saheb doesn't like such things? [To Nath.] But they said Nath is a Socialist, an MLA, he will certainly agree. Nath saheb cannot refuse; besides, he is also my father-in-law, . . . that's what these people were saying" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 64). He makes his father-in-law to abide by his orders politely and also to be present on the day by saying "they have already printed your name in the posters and invitations" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 64). Seeking consent is immaterial for Arun and subdues his father-in-law as if he is a master.

Arun is more alarming of the fact that his transformation into literary luminary has resulted in "heartburn in the upper caste, socialist father-in-law" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 65). He is reminded of his status and fortunate to have Jyoti as his wife. But the subordination of his class from time immemorial makes his self more bitter towards the elites. So, he continuously mocks his father-in-law. His father-in-law, a socialist, sidelines his invitation. But, Arun is stubborn to draw him to the inauguration. He torments his father-in-law. Pointing to his two friends, he torments his father-in-law:

These people believed you were a well-wisher of the dalit community. That you championed the cause of 'A well in every village for the dalit.' You launched a satyagrah for that cause. You deliver socialist addresses at the State Assembly. With the trumpet call of idealism, you got your daughter marked to a dalit. Therefore they thought you would surely come to this discussion (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 66).

Nath Devalikar, the Hypocrite: This is how the play connects the subaltern voice as well as the elitist hegemony through contrapuntal frame. It allows bringing harmony of narration and makes the play more intertwined. Reacting to Arun's change of behavior, the blackmailing tone and domineering attitude, Nath admonishes him after Arun and his friends leave his home: "Scoundrel! . . . He prints my name without even asking me . . . he wants to blackmail me. As though I'd go down on my knees before him. As though I overlook my daughter's misery and shower him, with superlatives. I was nauseated by his overweening arrogance" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 66). Saying so, he forgets his liberal policies and Arun's being his son-in-law and demonstrates his hypocritical nature to Seva, his wife: "he . . . his visit has polluted this drawing-room, this house, and this day . . . It stinks . . . I feel like taking a bath, like cleaning myself! Clean everything! This, furniture, this floor . . . all this . . . he has made them filthy, dirty, polluted!" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 66). He shows his repulsion: "Why did I have to come into contact with a man like this? A man like this . . . Why?" (*Kanyadaan*, II, ii. 66). Finally, he resolves to attend the meeting to protect his daughter's life.

Jyoti's Reaction: Jyoti dislikes him for attending the meeting against his will and speaks on the book against his standpoint. She too torments Nath: "I would have rather died under torture. Why did you make that speech? Did you have to dole out charity to me?" (*Kanyadaan*, II, iii. 74). She too substantiates the narration from her part to make contrapuntal cohesion. She displays her socialist view and overbearing language towards her father as she notices his "deceitful speech" and his eyes drip poison on Arun during the speech. She pin points that he is stringent and negligent and as a result of his hatred, he does not meet Arun after the meeting.

She rebukes her father's hypocritical nature and opines him to uproot and destroy evil from man and remarks that man is not always a godlike-person, instead beastliness is very much inherent. She has the liberty to tell her father, rebuke him and admonish him when Arun is dehumanized. She is deeply offended by her father's hypocrisy and resolves to be Arun's wife forever. The contrapuntal frame various possibilities of unearthing the interplay. Edward Said puts it as "In addition, one must connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support" (Culture and Imperialism, 67).

Projecting himself as a liberalist to the external world, Nath does not comply with Arun's negating attitude. He strongly expresses his repulsive nature when Arun coerces his power as a writer. This seems to be the Occident's view over the Orient, Nath, the Occident and Arun, the Orient. This disparity is created by man to show his domination over the other. Edward Said in his Orientalism adjudicates the man-made structure: "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either. Said recalls the Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico's in Orientalism "that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities-to say nothing of historical entities-such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made" (Orientalism, 5). The contrapuntal reading simplifies the opinion that characters like Nath and Arun are

there as yin and yang to create a harmonious discourse without any bias. Said exalts the East as "There were-and are cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than . . . anything that could be said about them in the West (Orientalism, 5). In *Kanyadaan*, Arun, represents the East and has his history and certain customs of his own, but for people like Nath, the Occident, Arun's history and customs are inherently brutal and savage, but "greater" (Said) the culture of any other persons like Nath.

Jyoti, the Conformist: Observing the hypocritical role of her father, Jyoti turns out to be a transformed woman. She does not want to call herself Jyoti Yadunath Devalikar, but Jyoti Arun Athvale, a scavenger. Jeetendra Singh Rajawat in his, Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan: A Study Of Man-Woman Relationships In Modern Context* conforms that Jyoti "turns out to be an appliance to smash the obstruction of nonconformity and to establish the distinctiveness of Arun in the deceitfulness of caste barrier" (JETIR, 302). The play grapples with politics of power between the Brahmins and the Dalits. From brahmins' side, Nath exhibits the patriarchal power and Arun, from the Dalits. The contrapuntal lens identifies the victim between two diabolic powers is Jyoti. She remains a transformed and traditional woman towards the end of the play. Sandhya Saxena and Shaifali Saxena in their, "From Dilemma to Disillusionment: A Study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*" concludes that Arun is the victim of the caste-ridden society and he "maliciously victimizes Jyoti as she represents the caste that has been in the role of the victimizer, for ages" (Shodhshauryam, International Scientific Refereed Research Journal, 193).

Findings and Conclusion

Thus, the contrapuntal reading permits us to explore not only the dominant characters but also the subaltern. This is viewed as two sides of a magnet and yin and yang, contrapuntal analysis explores the experience of the orient as well as the occident, and the master and the slave. Interpretations are of many kinds. But the contrapuntal reading analyses the interconnectedness of the both. Here, Nath represents the Occident and Arun, the Orient. Usually, the experience of the subaltern character like Arun is excluded from the elitist historiography. Nath, the domineering and hypocritical figure, wants to be hegemonic outwardly when Arun invites him to the meeting. Arun, a subaltern, makes a counter attack on the brahminical world view of Nath through language. Jyoti, Nath's daughter, too finds a room for expression and voices out as a new woman. Therefore, contrapuntal method acts as a "process of maintaining a particular style of life" (66), according to Said.

Works Cited

1. Ambedkar. B. R. "Annihilation of Caste." <https://ccnmitl.columbia.edu> PDF. 20.11.2025.
2. Chandra, Satheesh K and R. David Raja Bose in their, Social Problems In Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*. Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research. May 2019, 6.5. (p. 364-367). PDF. file:///F:/K/JETIR1905Y51.pdf. 20.11.2025.
3. `Cuddon, J. A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.5th ed. Wiley and Blackwell, UK, 2013. PDF. 29.09.2025.
4. Hill, Marc, and Erol Yildiz. "A Postmigrant Contrapuntal Reading of the Refugee Crisis and Its Discourse: 'Foreigners out! Schlingensief's Container.'" Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe, edited by Anna Meera Gaonkar et al., 1st ed., transcript Verlag, 2021, pp. 109–30. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv371bzgk.9>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2025.
5. Rajawat, Jeetendra Singh. "Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*: A Study Of Man-Woman Relationships In Modern Context." Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research. June 2019, 6.6. file:///F:/K/JETIR1907N80.pdf PDF. (p. 298-303) 20.11.2025.
6. Said. Edward. W. Culture and Imperialism. Vintage Books: New York, 1994. PDF. 29.09.2025.
7. ---. Orientalism. Vitage Books, New York, 1979. PDF. 20.11.2025. https://monoskop.org/images/4/4e/Said_Edward_Orientalism_1979.pdf 20.11.2025.
8. Siraguppi, Shireenbanu. in her "The Tension Between Ideology and Realities in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*" International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research, A Peer Reviewed, Referred, Indexed and Open Access Journal. Vol. 12, Issue 2-2025. (p. 1-5).
9. Saxena, Sandhya and Shaifali Saxena. "From Dilemma to Disillusionment: A Study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." Shodhshauryam, International Scientific Refereed Research Journal. 1.1 (p. 192-196). 2018. PDF. SISRRJ1818921.pdf 20.11.2025.
10. Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. Surjeet Publications: New Delhi, 2016.