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**Ideology as Surveillance: A Foucauldian Analysis of Vijay Tendulkar's  
*Kanyadaan***

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**Abstract:** Vijay Tendulkar, in most of his plays, investigates the interplay of political ideologies, casteism, social injustices, and gender inequalities by integrating them with the private and domestic spheres. *Kanyadaan*, a Marathi play by Tendulkar, is examined as a critical site where the personal life of the Devalikar family becomes entangled with the political ideologies of Nath, an MLA. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's concept of the Panopticon, originally designed by Jeremy Bentham, this paper examines how the mechanisms of ideological surveillance operate within the play. Through the lens of the Panopticon, the study argues that ideology functions as an invisible, powerful force that shapes the behaviour of individuals and their identity. Nath, being at the centre of the ideological structure, is the controller, i.e., the Panopticon observer. Jyoti, his daughter, is the subject of surveillance being monitored, a victim of ideological observation caught between her inherited liberal ideals and the harsh caste realities. Arun, a Dalit, is the disruptor of the system, i.e., anti-Panopticon. *Kanyadaan*, in a nutshell, symbolises invisible power and control operating within the modern households of contemporary societies.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Power, Panopticon, Caste, Gender, Surveillance.

**Introduction:** The term 'Panopticon' is an architectural design put forward by Jeremy Bentham for prisons, insane asylums, hospitals, and factories in the mid-19th century. The progressive modern democratic state needed a different sort of system to regulate the citizens, instead of torture and placing prisoners in dungeons. This structure of a modern-day prison, where a prison tower is built in the centre, unseen by the prisoners, and from that vantage point, the prison guard will be able to see inside all the cells without wasting much time. The prisoners only knew that they were being continuously watched, and any act of disobedience could be punished with death. Driven by this fear, they developed self-regulation and self-discipline. The Panopticon offered a powerful internalised coercion,

achieved through the constant observation of the prisoners, separated from each other with no interaction and communication amongst them. It paved the way for Michel Foucault, who developed his views on power and surveillance in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1975), at a greater level using the ‘Panopticon’ as a metaphor. Foucault explored further how modern institutions exert power and control over the less powerful ones. He extends this concept to hospitals, factories, courts, schools, and even social media. There is a similar kind of surveillance and control mechanism that exists in all of these contexts. Individuals internalise this feeling of being watched, regulating their behaviour even in the absence of a direct observer. In Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, this theoretical framework enables us to read ideology itself as a panoptical mechanism. It is a Marathi play about an upper-caste, liberal family in Maharashtra. Nath Devalikar, an MLA, and his wife Seva have two children, Jyoti and Jayaprakash. Jyoti decides to marry Arun Athawale, a Dalit poet with a difficult upbringing. Nath supports the marriage, believing it will help break caste barriers, while Seva expresses strong concerns about the match. After the marriage, Jyoti faces domestic violence and struggles with Arun's anger and drinking habit. The idealistic expectations of the family clash with the harsh realities of their daughter's suffering. Tension grows within the family as they confront the consequences of their decision. The play ends on an unsettling note and leaves the family divided and questioning their choices. Parallel to the other tensions, we can see how the family's liberal ideals, caste reformist beliefs, and patriarchal expectations operate as forms of internalised surveillance. In this study, Nath Devalikar, the father, is thus examined through the lens of the panoptic controller, who embodies ideological authority within the family; Jyoti, the daughter, represents the subject shaped and disciplined by her father's idealised authority; and Arun, the Dalit man whom Jyoti marries, functions as the anti-Panopticon, resisting incorporation into Nath's ideological framework. In contrast, Seva, the wife, and Jayaprakash, the son, are ignorant and portrayed as unaware participants within this system.

**Discussion:** Nath Devalikar, a modern and educated MLA, demonstrates progressive values and occupies the position of the Panopticon observer within his family. His liberal ideology becomes the standard point by which other members of his family—namely Seva, Jyoti, and Jayaprakash—must judge, monitor, and regulate themselves. When he meets Arun for the first time, he brings him under ideological inspection, positioning himself as the examiner and gatekeeper for Jyoti's choice. This reveals his control over his family and his ideologies. Later, he says to Seva, “Until today, ‘Break the caste system’ was a mere slogan for us. I have attended many inter-caste marriages and made speeches. But today I have broken the caste barrier in a real sense... I'm happy today, very happy... I have become new” (Tendulkar 23). This highlights the extent of selfishness and authoritarianism he can reach to fulfil his desires. He even interrupts Seva when she warns him about their future. For Nath, the act of accepting a Dalit boy stems from his wish to prove his ideologies in a real sense and set an example for his idealist society, rather than from love for his daughter. This demonstrates his

dominance over his principles and his audacity to sacrifice his daughter's life for his experiments. Even when, after marriage, Nath realizes there are problems between Jyoti and Arun and that his daughter feels unhappy with him, he reminds the family of the ethics and rigid norms of society: "In that case, we have to accept the situation. Jyoti has married him" (Tendulkar 36). He remains unwilling to abandon old customs and ideologies despite a changing society. He dreams of creating an ideal society and family, which proves practically impossible. "The values I uphold in my public life are the values I live by in my personal life. I will never use compulsion on anyone who is capable of thinking" (Tendulkar 37). On one hand, he claims there is no partiality for his family in the eyes of society. Yet, his inability to see his daughter's predicament marks him as a failure as a father in society. Secondly, Jyoti's role in this system symbolizes Foucault's concept of subjectification. She is constructed as the ideal liberal, caste-reformist subject who must monitor her thoughts and actions to remain faithful to her father's ideals, even when they conflict with the violent realities of caste. Jyoti passionately justifies her decision to marry Arun and seems to embrace her father's ideology unquestioningly and undoubtedly. Like him, she believes it is an act of social reform to marry a lower-caste boy while they belong to a higher caste. "Once in a while. But right or wrong, what does it matter anyway? I made a commitment and now I can't run away" (Tendulkar 29). Ignoring her desires, she considers herself to be an agent of change, which makes her a subject under the authoritarianism of her father. Even after suffering domestic abuse from Arun, she rationalises his violent acts as a sacrifice for social change. She starts considering herself under self-surveillance, controlling her anger, fear, and disappointments. It is evident that her reactions are monitored under Nath's ideological surveillance, as she denies her trauma and violence to remain true to reformist goals. Towards the end, she understands that she was a construction built for the role of ideological purpose only by her father. She exposes the cost of this by accusing Nath of using her as a guinea pig for his social experiment:

"It was you who made us learn these lines. And scores of poems like them. This drug, Bhai, has entered and mingled with our blood. The poison has numbed our entire consciousness. We cannot run away. To save one's self by running away may be the smart thing to do and other people may get away with this kind of cleverness, but even if running away was the general rule of conduct, we shall continue to recite 'March on, oh soldier!' and continue to lose our lives as guinea pigs in the experiment and you, Bhai... You will go on safely, rousing the God sleeping in man" (Tendulkar 69).

Thirdly, Arun, a Dalit man who resists incorporation into Nath's ideological framework, disrupts this surveillance structure, refusing to become the disciplined subject that Nath's liberalism always demanded. Foucault's idea describes the "watching eye," or the system that tries to make everyone behave in a certain way. Arun, in the play, refuses to

behave in the ways imposed by Nath. He never falls into the trap of being an ideal Dalit son-in-law. When Arun first visits Nath's home, Nath questions him about his life, education, background, and everything. Nath wants to see whether Arun fits his plan for a reformed society or not. Arun seems uncomfortable and suspicious, as he will not allow Nath to treat him like a project or case for his experiments. Also, he wants to marry Jyoti for social revenge. From generation to generation, the lower-caste Dalits are ostracised and considered untouchable by the upper-class society. Seva, too, did not want Arun as a son-in-law due to his lower social status. "Power-structure operates through caste in the form of victimization, exploitation, threat, violent treatment against the victim, and changing patterns of exploiter-exploited" (Yadav and Singh 20). Marrying Jyoti will bring her to his level, and she too will suffer just like them, be it economically, socially, or emotionally. "What am I but the son of scavengers? We don't know the violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives... we make love to them... but the beating is what gets publicized" (Tendulkar 44). He beats Jyoti to take revenge for the harshness that the upper-caste society has always shown them. Nath always wants to alter the social formations, but that is an idealistic experiment where he wants to monitor people according to his wishes. After marrying her, Arun is expected to be thankful to Nath, but he does not do that. He says he does not want Nath's charity. He never becomes the grateful Dalit Nath imagined. Arun rejects this authoritarianism, thus being an example of anti-Panopticon. Arun calls Nath a hypocrite and rejects his role as a helper or reformer.

This Foucauldian perspective illuminates again the gendered dimension of surveillance in the play. Foucault's theory has been extended to show how women's bodies and behaviour are policed within the domestic sphere through patriarchal norms and expectations. Through *Kanyadaan*, the ideological power exerted by Nath Devalikar on his family has tried to place the other members in their liminal roles. Even though Jyoti was a literate lady and Seva, a member of a social organisation, their voices were curtailed, and actions were performed on the instructions issued by Nath. The invisible power operates under the guise of social reforms. *Kanyadaan* critiques how these political beliefs infiltrate the personal space of the Devalikar family and how emotions and trust issues are overridden by ideological surveillance. The Panopticon is built of ideals, expectations, liberal convictions, and promises that monitor behaviours—particularly that of Jyoti—instead of walls and watchtowers.

Women are under constant watch by men, not only in the economic field but also in their own domestic arena. The unseen yet understood "set of laws" constructs the gender in a male-deterministic world. It thus threatens the groundlessness of democracy and the modernity of a society that worships male supremacy. Marriage relations are the most intense focus of

constraints for women, who are kept under constant surveillance by the patriarchal code of conduct (Paul 90).

Nath constantly gives instructions and tries to guide Jyoti's and Seva's thinking and actions throughout the play. He repeatedly speaks over Seva and expects her to follow his lead at every step. When Seva questions Jyoti's decision to marry Arun, Nath repeatedly justifies it while arguing with her. He says, "Not only is he a middle-class man, he is a Dalit. He has been brought up in the midst of poverty and hatred. These people's psychological makeup is altogether different... We must try to understand him, and that is extremely difficult" (Tendulkar 27). Although Seva is educated and actively involved in political groups, he does not give much importance to her ideals and continually overrides her opinions. Nath never physically threatens either of these women, but his ideology compels them to internalise his expectations, particularly Jyoti. His idealistic beliefs work to discipline the women in his household subtly yet powerfully. Even though Jyoti suffers on a personal level, she idealises her father's beliefs and considers marrying Arun to be the correct decision. Even when she realises her mistake, she does not reject Arun because she completely trusts her father's judgment about the situation. This shows how thoroughly she has been disciplined under her father's authority. It demonstrates that power operates through internalised ideals rather than through physical force alone. Seva repeatedly warns Nath and Jyoti of the effects of this 'wrong move', focusing on the fact that it is the woman who suffers more in any marital relationship. When Nath takes Arun's side and supports this experimental marriage, Seva questions, "Does it mean that my daughter's life is to be used for an experiment? Is that what you are saying? You may have your views. I cannot accept them. I am her mother. If you ask me, I will say that Jyoti can never be happy with that man... If you like, take it from me in writing" (Tendulkar 28). Throughout the play, Seva's voice is marginalised, despite her active involvement in social work. This illustrates that even someone engaged in social reform is not free from ideological control within a patriarchal private sphere. She is expected either to agree or to remain silent about family decisions, which are governed by patriarchal authority. "Jyoti evolves as the female 'other' in the established patriarchal cultural world... She accomplishes her emancipation in the domestic colonization, though the egotistical, hypocritical, and authoritarian attitude of patriarchy limits women's liberty only in their sexual roles as culminated in wifhood and motherhood" (Paul 91). Educated Jyoti is unaware of this 'gender trouble' and becomes a part of both her father's experiment and Arun's 'jolly game'. She reveals the cost of being a woman who lives under political, patriarchal, and panopticon power. Sacrificing her own life at the altar of two patriarchs, she attains a brighter vision of 'being'.

**Conclusion:** Tendulkar paints a powerful picture of how ideology takes root within the most personal parts of our lives. Drawing on Foucault's concept of surveillance, *Kanyadaan* shows that control sometimes works by shaping people's thoughts and making them believe

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that they are doing the right thing, even when it causes harm. The characters of the play begin to internalise certain ideas so deeply that they stop questioning them. What is striking here is how ideas that seem modern, liberal, or progressive end up controlling people when they are followed blindly. Nath believes he is working for the social good, but his beliefs turn into rules that his family is expected to follow without hesitation. Jyoti, especially, feels the weight of these expectations as she tries hard to live up to them, even when her personal life falls apart. The pressure comes from a constant need to stay true to what she has been taught is 'right'. 'Marriage' becomes the site where surveillance is most intense, where Jyoti is inspected through ideals of reform, respectability, and sacrifice that control her choices, instead of surveillance through physical walls and towers. This kind of power becomes even more troubling when we look at how it affects women. The play shows that women, even when educated or socially aware, are often expected to sacrifice their comfort, opinions, and happiness to serve a bigger idea. They are rarely the ones making the rules, but they are the ones most affected by them. *Kanyadaan* reminds us that power comes from belief systems that seem noble but leave little space for disagreement or emotion. In the end, the play pushes us to think more carefully about how ideals, however well-intentioned, can limit freedom when they demand full loyalty without room for complexity. True progress needs awareness and the courage to question even the ideas we have been taught to believe in most.

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