

Endogamy and the Human Body: Honour Killing as Social Discipline in Girish Karnad's *Tale Danda*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, and Iyayam's *Pethavan: The Begetter*

T Marx

Professor, Department of English, Pondicherry University, Puducherry-605014

Email: drtmarx@pondiuni.ac.in | Orcid id: [0009-0005-9327-5533](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9327-5533)

Abstract

This paper undertakes a comparative literary-sociological study of caste pride killing (honour killing) as an instrument of caste discipline in three major South Asian literary texts: Girish Karnad's historical play *Tale Danda*, Vijay Tendulkar's social drama *Kanyadaan*, and Iyayam's novella *Pethavan: The Begetter*. Drawing on B. R. Ambedkar's structural theory of caste endogamy, Johan Galtung's framework of structural and cultural violence, and postcolonial feminist theory, the paper argues that what is popularly euphemized as 'honour killing' is, in fact, caste pride killing, a pre-meditated act of social discipline designed to preserve endogamy, police female sexuality, and reproduce hierarchical power. All three texts dramatize the same fundamental contradiction: the body of the transgressing woman becomes the contested site where caste sovereignty and patriarchal authority converge, while the Dalit male body is rendered perpetually subordinate regardless of education, talent, or official status. The paper further argues that all three authors-writing in different regional languages, historical periods, and generic modes-arrive at a unified verdict: reform gestures such as inter-caste marriage cannot, by themselves, dismantle a structure that is, as Ambedkar argued, self-reproducing through social imitation and the terror of violence. By reading literature against lived history, this paper contends that the 'honour' invoked to justify such killings is nothing more than caste pride-the desperate self-defence of a hierarchy that cannot survive rational scrutiny.

Keywords: *honour killing, caste pride killing, endogamy, Dalit literature, structural violence, cultural violence, inter-caste marriage, patriarchy, graded inequality*

Introduction: Naming the Violence

The phrase 'honour killing' is among the most deceitful coinages in the vocabulary of social violence. It attributes honour to the perpetrator and erases the victim. When a village panchayat in Tamil Nadu condemns a young woman to death for loving a Dalit man; when a brahmin father is forced to promise publicly that he will poison his own daughter; when the parents of an inter-caste couple are dragged behind elephants through the streets of a medieval Karnataka town-there is no honour at work. What operates in each instance is caste pride: the ferocious, organized refusal of a dominant group to allow its boundaries to be crossed by the bodies, desires, or marriages of those it claims to own. Indian literature has recognized this reality long before journalism or policy discourse found adequate language for it. Three literary works, separated by geography, language, and era-Girish Karnad's *Tale Danda*, Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, and Iyayam's *Pethavan: The Begetter*-constitute a devastating account of

caste violence in which the desire for inter-caste love and marriage ignites catastrophic social retribution.

The theoretical scaffolding of this paper rests on three pedestals. First, B. R. Ambedkar's 1916 Columbia University paper, "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development," which identifies endogamy as the structural essence of caste and traces sati, enforced widowhood, and child marriage to the arithmetic logic of keeping endogamy intact. Second, Johan Galtung's distinction between structural violence-the systematic use of social, political, and economic structures to violate basic human needs-and cultural violence-the norms, beliefs, and practices that legitimize such violation. Third, the postcolonial feminist insight that looks at how, in patriarchal caste society, the woman's body is simultaneously the territory on which caste sovereignty is inscribed and the primary casualty when that sovereignty is threatened. Together, these frameworks allow reading the three literary texts not as isolated tragedies but as representations of a single, continuous social machine.

The paper proceeds through five main analytical sections: an examination of the Ambedkarite framework as it applies to all three texts; a reading of honour killing as structural and cultural violence; a gendered analysis of the female body as caste property; a comparative analysis of the failure of reform and the complicity of idealism; and a conclusion that reads across the three texts to assess whether literature can offer what Ambedkar demanded--the annihilation of caste.

Ambedkar's Endogamy and the Structure of Caste Violence

Any serious engagement with caste violence in Indian literature must begin with Ambedkar. In "Castes in India," he demolishes every mystical, racial, or occupational explanation for caste and replaces it with a structural one: caste is the *superimposition of endogamy on exogamy*-the forced imposition of within-group marriage upon a population that had originally practised clan exogamy. He argues: "To the group that is desirous of making itself into a caste, the maintenance of equality between the sexes becomes the ultimate goal; without it, endogamy can no longer subsist. In other words, if endogamy is to be preserved, conjugal rights from within have to be provided for; otherwise members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. For the same, the conjugal rights have to be provided for from within. It is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of two sexes within the group desirous of making itself into a caste. It is only through the maintenance of such equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact, and a very large disparity is sure to break it" (Ambedkar: 2014, vol 1. p. 10). Endogamy, then, is the load-bearing wall of the caste edifice. Sati, enforced widowhood, and child marriage are not ancient traditions but functional mechanisms to manage what Ambedkar, with clinical precision, calls the 'surplus woman' and the 'surplus man'-the widowed or unmarried individuals who, if left free, might marry outside the group and rupture its closure.

This structural logic illuminates all three literary texts with particular force. In *Tale Danda*, the inter-caste marriage of Sheelavanta, a cobbler's son, and Kalavati, a brahmin girl, is not merely an individual love affair but a structural rupture. Basavanna himself understands this with unnerving precision:

Until now it was only a matter of theoretical speculation. But this--this is real. The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of Varnashrama Dharma. Bigotry has not faced such a challenge in two thousand years.

I need hardly describe what venom will gush out, what hatred will erupt, once the news spreads. (Karnad 38)

Basavanna's warning is prophetic. When the marriage is solemnized, it does not remain a private event; it becomes, in Ambedkarite terms, a direct attack on endogamy itself-which is to say, on the entire caste system. The brahmin establishment's response is therefore not disproportionate from the perspective of caste logic; it is precisely proportionate. Damodara Bhatta and Manchanna Kramita orchestrate a coup, and the new king Sovideva orders his soldiers to arrest and execute the parents of both bride and groom. The horror of the punishment-eyes gouged out, bodies tied to elephants' legs and dragged through the streets--is designed not merely to punish but to terrify every future generation into compliance with endogamy.

The same Ambedkarite logic governs *Pethavan*. Periyasami, a Dalit sub-inspector who has achieved educational and professional distinction, commits, in the eyes of his community's antagonists, an act of structural transgression by loving Bhakkiyam, an upper-caste woman. The village panchayat's verdict-that Bhakkiyam must be killed by her own father-is the activation of the ancient machinery Ambedkar described. Periyasami's education and government rank are irrelevant; he is, as Imayam insists, 'perceived as a Dalit first and as a sub-inspector later' (Imayam 4-5). His house has been set on fire twice; his cattle freed and slaughtered; his fields burned; his parents beaten: a systematic programme of annihilation directed not at a person but at the upward-mobile Dalit who has dared to approach the endogamous boundary from below.

In *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar transposes the same structure into an urban middle-class register. Arun Athavale's very first extended speech to Jyoti, framed as a marriage proposal, is actually a vivid catalogue of caste degradation that the Dalit body has been compelled to inhabit:

Will you marry me and eat stinking bread with spoilt dal in my father's hut?
Without vomiting? Tell me, Jyoti, can you shit everyday in our slum's village
toilet like my mother? Can you beg, quaking at every door, for a little grass for
our buffaloes? Come on, tell me. (Tendulkar 17)

This is not merely a rhetorical question; it is an inventory of structural deprivation. Arun knows-and his knowledge is itself a product of caste socialisation-that the gulf between his body's inherited conditions and Jyoti's is not personal but systemic. Where Ambedkar identifies the mechanisms by which endogamy is maintained through violence against women, Tendulkar shows us the psychological interior of a Dalit man who has internalized the violence done to his community and finds in the brahmin woman an object simultaneously of desire and resentment. The marriage, therefore, is not-as Jyoti's father Nath imagines-an experiment in social integration; it is, from the outset, a site of unresolved structural antagonism.

Structural and Cultural Violence: The 'Khap Panchayat' as Killing Machine

Johan Galtung's tripartite framework-direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence-provides the most precise analytical vocabulary for what all three texts depict. Structural violence, as Galtung defines it, "can be characterised as the intentional use of physical or psychological power to violate the basic needs of individuals; it is a permanent state of violence as it is mostly accepted as the norms of the society which can be legitimized" (Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" 167-91). Cultural violence is the set of norms, beliefs, and practices that "legitimize and naturalize structural and direct violence" (Galtung, 'Cultural Violence' 291-305). In the literary works under study, these three forms operate simultaneously and reinforce one another in precise, traceable ways.

In *Pethavan*, the village panchayat (Kangaroo Court) is the institutional form that structural violence takes. Its verdict that Bhakkiyam must die is reached not in secret but in public, with the full participation of women as well as men, old as well as young. A young woman carrying a baby on her hip advises Pazhani: "You should pour pesticide down her throat and lock her in a room. However much she screams or shouts, don't open the door and don't give her even a mouthful of water. In a short while the story will be over" (Imayam 2). This is cultural violence operating in its purest form: a woman demanding the murder of another woman, not from personal animosity but from the internalized logic of caste purity. The community is both the perpetrator and the legitimizing authority. As M. Elavarasan observes in his reading of Imayam, that this exploitation "becomes a legitimate one in the minds of the villagers and is thus transmitted to generations as culturally legitimated practice" (74).

The translator of *Pethavan*, Gita Subramanian, captures the peculiar quality of this violence in her translator's note: "No amount of clever crafting can substitute the kind of passionate repugnance that Imayam feels against this barbaric [practice] of preserving caste purity through murder" (iv). The word 'crafting' is telling: cultural violence is itself a form of crafting-the continuous manufacture of consent to atrocity. Imayam refuses that craft; his prose is deliberately stripped of aesthetic embellishment, forcing the reader to confront the violence without the pleasures of beauty.

Karnad's *Tale Danda* dramatizes the institutional complicity of both religious and political structures. King Bijjala initially offers protection to the Sharanas, but the moment the brahmin establishment and the new claimant to power, Sovideva, see an opportunity, the protective structure dissolves. The killing of the inter-caste couple's parents is state-sponsored murder. Gundanna's account makes the structural nature of the violence unmistakable:

It's harrowing! A while ago-the king's soldiers arrested Haralayya and took him to the city square. They also brought Madhuvarasa there and then-as the city watched-they plucked their eyes out-plucked out their eyes with iron rods-bound them hand and foot and had them dragged through the streets-tied to elephants' legs ... Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones-they died screaming! (Karnad, Act III, sc. xii 81)

The key phrase here is "as the city watched." The execution is public by design. It is not a crime concealed in shame; it is a spectacle staged to reassert caste sovereignty and to remind

the watching populace of the dangers of transgression. This is structural violence made theatrical-a performance of power intended, as Galtung argues, to be reproduced in every observer who takes its lesson home. The play's stage direction noting "a reaction of horror from those present" is significant: the Sharanas, who had welcomed the marriage as social progress, are now paralysed. The horror of the punishment neutralizes the moral courage of the reformers. Direct violence has accomplished what no argument could: the re-stabilization of the structural order.

Tendulkar's structural violence in *Kanyadaan* is subtler but no less devastating. The violence visited on Jyoti's body by Arun is not random domestic abuse; it is explicitly framed by Arun himself as a species of caste revenge: "What am I but the son of a scavenger? 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" (Tendulkar 44). This confession reveals the depth to which structural violence has colonized the Dalit consciousness: Arun's violence against his wife is, in his own account, the downward transmission of the violence done to his ancestors by upper-caste men. He reproduces the structure he resists. Seva's analysis is the most clinically accurate in the play:

Your dalit son-in-law, who can write such a wonderful autobiography, and many lovely poems, wants to remain an idler. He wants his wife to work. On top of that, for entertainment, he wants to kick his wife in the belly...In this way he is returning all the kicks aimed at generations of his ancestors by men of high caste. (Tendulkar 47-48)

Structural violence, Galtung reminds us, is self-reproducing: when a husband beats his wife, it is violence; when a million husbands beat their wives, it becomes structure. Seva's diagnosis-that Arun's domestic violence is not aberrant but structural-is the most damning verdict Tendulkar offers on the impossibility of reform through marriage alone.

The Female Body as Caste Property: Gender and the Enforcement of Endogamy

Ambedkar's analysis of the 'surplus woman' as the central problem that caste endogamy must solve through sati, enforced widowhood, or child marriage reveals a foundational truth: women's bodies are not merely participants in the caste system-they are its primary site of regulation. All three literary texts make this explicit, each from a different vantage point.

Imayam's *Pethavan* is the most unflinching in its depiction of the female body as caste territory. When the villagers discover Bhakkiyam's relationship with Periyasami, their response is immediately and overwhelmingly sexualized: groups of young men expose themselves to her, asserting communal ownership over her body (Imayam 21). The sexual humiliation is not incidental but structural; it communicates to every woman in the village that her body belongs to the men of her caste, not to herself. An elder in the panchayat demands similarly degrading punishment to suppress her desire (Imayam 11). Rape is invoked as a disciplinary correction of female sexual autonomy-a clarification that the woman's body is communal property whose disposal is the community's prerogative, not the woman's own.

The title of Tendulkar's play, *Kanyadaan*—literally 'gifting the daughter'—encodes this proprietary logic in the very institution of marriage. The girl is a commodity transferred from her father's household to her husband's; she is not an agent choosing her own life. As Dhanavel, a literary commentator notes, Tendulkar "seems to suggest that such marriages can never be harmonious" not merely because of personality incompatibility but because the woman who crosses caste lines is simultaneously claiming bodily autonomy that the caste system has never conceded to her (100). Jyoti's mother Seva, the most realistic voice in the play, articulates the impossibility not in caste terms but in terms of embodied culture: "You have been brought up in a specific culture. To erase or change all this overnight is just not possible. He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it" (Tendulkar 13). Seva is right, but for reasons she cannot fully articulate: the culture she is describing is precisely the caste system, which has shaped the bodies, habits, desires, and thresholds of pain of every character in the play.

Jyoti's transformation through the play—from a soft-spoken, highly cultured brahmin girl into a woman who declares her Dalit identity with fierce conviction—is the text's most radical proposition. She does not merely marry across caste; she re-inscribes her body within Dalit identity: "I am not Jyoti Devlalikar now. I am Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger. I don't say harijan. I despise the term. I am an untouchable, a scavenger" (Tendulkar 70). And yet Tendulkar is too honest a playwright to make this an unambiguous triumph: Jyoti's declaration is made in the context of a marriage defined by violence, exploitation, and humiliation. The female body, even when it chooses transgression, remains the site of the most intense caste and gender punishment.

Karnad's *Tale Danda* addresses the female body as caste property through the figure of Kalavati, the brahmin girl given in marriage to the cobbler's son Sheelavanta. Kalavati is not a speaking character in the play; she is the occasion of the catastrophe rather than its agent. This silence is itself significant. The inter-caste marriage is celebrated by the Sharanas and condemned by the brahmins; it is planned, solemnized, and destroyed by men. Kalavati's own desire, consent, and suffering are absent from the text—a structural erasure that mirrors the erasure of the female in all discourses of caste honour. The play thus reproduces, even as it critiques, the logic it is anatomizing: the woman's body is the stakes of a contest between men. However, this does not diminish Karnad's critique; it sharpens it. By making Kalavati invisible, he shows us that the caste system's violence against women operates through invisibility as much as through spectacle.

In Hindu canonical literature, as the texts under study note, the caste hierarchy claims divine sanction: "The four-fold caste system was created by me by differentiating people according to their guna and karma ... It is better to follow one's own Dharma, righteously established, even with all its blemishes, than the Dharma of others" (Bhagavad Gita IV.13, III.35, qtd. in Dhanavel 100). The critical implication of this citation within the literary criticism of Karnad and Tendulkar is that the oppressed themselves internalize this logic, "accepting any insult or injustice, stoically enduring [it] because they are destined to be so" (Dhanavel 100). This is the deepest form of cultural violence: the victim becomes the enforcer. In *Pethavan*, Bhakkiyam's own mother, overcome by community pressure, turns against her daughter. The maternal body, which ought to be the last refuge, becomes an instrument of the panchayat's will.

The Failure of Reform and the Complicity of Liberal Idealism

One of the most significant contributions of all three literary texts to the discourse on honour killing is their unflinching scrutiny of liberal reform itself. None of the three authors allows the progressive characters in their narratives to escape complicity in the violence they nominally oppose. This is not cynicism; it is a rigorous analytical recognition that caste endogamy cannot be dismantled by individual acts of symbolic transgression—a recognition that aligns precisely with Ambedkar's argument in *Annihilation of Caste* that inter-caste marriage, while necessary, is insufficient without the demolition of the scriptural and structural foundations of caste itself.

Nath Devlalikar, the MLA and socialist idealist at the centre of *Kanyadaan*, is the text's most sustained study in the pathology of liberal complicity. When Jyoti announces her intention to marry Arun, Nath's response is rapturous:

Seva, until today, 'Break the caste system' was a mere slogan for us. I've attended many intercaste marriages and made speeches. But today I have broken the caste barrier in the real sense. My home has become Indian in the real sense of the term. I am happy today, very happy. (Tendulkar 23)

The tragedy here is not merely personal but epistemological: Nath has confused his daughter's body with his political programme. He has invested Jyoti's marriage with the weight of his ideological project, making her suffering the collateral damage of his self-congratulation. By the final scene, when Nath delivers a hypocritical public speech praising Arun's autobiography in order to protect Jyoti from further beatings, his daughter strips away every self-deception: "Your speech today was not only lousy, it was a hireling's speech. You attended the meeting against your wishes, you praised that book against your wishes" (Tendulkar 66). The idealist has become a coward, and the daughter who was his experiment confronts him with that cowardice.

Basavanna in *Tale Danda* is a more heroic figure than Nath, but Karnad subjects him to the same analytical pressure. When the question of approving the inter-caste marriage arises, both Basavanna and the elder Kakkayya hesitate. Kakkayya's formulation reveals the gap between ideology and practice: "A Sharana boy marries a Sharana girl . . . But if you're going to see it as a Brahmin girl marrying a cobbler's son—well, we don't know how to answer you" (Karnad 37). The reformers have abolished caste in the language of the spirit but have not yet abolished it in the language of the body. When Basavanna finally gives his blessing and the wedding proceeds, his endorsement triggers the catastrophe he had feared. The play ends with virtually everyone dead—and the perpetrators of the caste order, represented by Sovideva, enthroned. Karnad's verdict is sombre: a twelfth-century reform movement that brought all communities together under the banner of devotion could not survive a single inter-caste marriage. Ironically, the institution of endogamy proved stronger than the vision of Basavanna.

Karnad, as Dhanavel observes, "has appropriated the historical material to suit his own dramatic design"; his aim is 'not so much to give a historical account of the incidents as to show their relevance to the contemporary Indian society' ('History and Mystery' 98). Written in the context of the Mandal-Mandir agitation of the late 1980s, *Tale Danda* asks its contemporary

audience to recognize in the spectacle of twelfth-century caste violence the same political dynamics that were tearing India apart in its own time. As Sukumar Muralidharan notes in his analysis of the Mandal-Mandir dichotomy, “Mandir seeks to deflect this quest for power by offering an illusion of power . . . to maintain the customary order of precedence in the social hierarchy through a ritual consolidation along religious lines and the subordination in perpetuity, of the minority community” (Muralidharan 24). The religious fanaticism that destroyed Basavanna’s reform is not a relic of the past; it is the grammar of Indian politics in every era.

In *Pethavan*, the failure of reform is the failure of education and the state. Periyasami has crossed every official threshold: he is educated, employed by the government as a sub-inspector, financially stable. The liberal democratic state has, on paper, granted him full citizenship. Yet the village panchayat—an institution that operates outside and beneath the state—recognizes no such citizenship. Its authority is older, deeper, and more immediately terrifying. The structural violence of the panchayat is a sustained programme of erasure that the state has consistently failed to counter. As the text makes evident, even when parents accept inter-caste marriages, “the society threatens the parents with weapons such as humiliation, social boycott and ostracization. As a result, parents break the marriage or they forcefully resort to honour killings as they need to be part of the system which is ready to throw them out” (Imayam).

Pazhani’s final act of sending his daughter away and then killing himself by drinking pesticide is the most devastating indictment of the failure of reform in all three texts. He does not save himself; he sacrifices himself so that his daughter might survive. It is an act of love that the caste system has made possible only through death. The novella ends abruptly: “In the morning those who went to the fields came running back and said, Vandikkaran House Pazhani has consumed Polidol and is lying dead in the fields. The dog is running in circles around the dead body. The whole area is reverberating with its howls” (52). Bhakkiyam escapes to an unnamed, unnarrated future. The abrupt ending is itself a political statement: the novel refuses to offer the consolation of resolution. Reform is incomplete, unfinished, haunted by the bodies it leaves behind.

Literature, History, and the Possibility of Annihilation

Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* argued that the destruction of caste required not merely political will or social goodwill but the demolition of its religious and scriptural foundations. “Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling,” he wrote; “Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind” (57). The three literary texts under study may be read as dramatizations of precisely this thesis. In all three, the physical violence of honour killing is preceded and enabled by a state of the collective mind—a set of beliefs, norms, and affects so deeply embedded that even those who consciously oppose caste (Nath, Basavanna, Pazhani) cannot escape the structures it has built inside them.

The role of religion in sustaining this state of mind is addressed most directly in the canonical texts invoked within the critical apparatus of the literary study. The Bhagavad Gita claims divine sanction for the four-fold caste system and counsels the oppressed to accept their lot as the just reward of past karma (Bhagavad Gita IV.13, III.35, qtd. in Dhanavel 100). The critical implication, as the comparative study of Karnad, Tendulkar and Imayam notes, is that

"the suppressed communities could not rise up as they should have. The developed communities did not lend an encouraging hand either. Politicians have played only a dubious role in their efforts towards social justice" (Dhanavel 100). All three texts confirm this analysis: the political establishment-Bijjala in *Tale Danda*, Nath in *Kanyadaan*, the village panchayat in *Pethavan*-either actively perpetuates caste violence or is too weak to resist it.

Yet literature does something that theory alone cannot: it inhabits the emotional interior of its characters. Imayam's Pazhani drinking pesticide in a field while his dog runs circles around him; Jyoti declaring herself an untouchable and telling her father not to touch her for fear of being scorched by 'my fire' (Tendulkar 70); the bodies of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa torn apart by elephants in a public square-these are images that lodge in the conscience rather than the intellect. They do not merely argue against honour killing; they make it viscerally, personally, irrefutably real. In this sense, all three socially conscious authors operate in the tradition Ambedkar himself exemplified: the insistence on making the invisible violence of caste visible, on naming it without euphemism, on refusing the consolation of aesthetic distance.

The comparative reading of the three texts also reveals important differences in the authors' implied prognoses. Karnad, writing from the vantage of history, suggests a cyclical pessimism: reform arises, flourishes briefly, is crushed by religious-political reaction, and the cycle resumes. Tendulkar, the realist playwright, refuses both optimism and nihilism: Jyoti's final declaration is an act of defiant self-identification that refuses to be absorbed into any easy political category. She is, as she says, "Jyoti Arun Athavale, a scavenger" (Tendulkar 70), and the fire she invokes is the fire of someone who has survived destruction. Imayam, the Tamil writer, offers the bleakest structural diagnosis: the panchayat system, the village community, and the family are all equally instruments of caste violence, and the only escape is flight, not transformation.

Taken together, these three texts constitute an implicit answer to the question Ambedkar posed: can caste be annihilated? They do not answer it with optimism. But they perform, through literature, the act of bearing witness that Ambedkar himself demanded-the insistence that caste violence be seen for what it is: not honour, not tradition, not divine ordinance, but the organized terror of a social system that has run out of any justification other than force. The real killer in *Pethavan*, *Kanyadaan*, and *Tale Danda* is not the panchayat, not the brahmin priest, not the Dalit husband-it is the centuries-old institution of caste endogamy, which has made every human relationship in the subcontinent hostage to the question of who may marry whom.

Conclusion: Caste Pride, Not Honour

This paper has argued, through a comparative reading of Karnad's *Tale Danda*, Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, and Imayam's *Pethavan: The Begetter*, that what is popularly called 'honour killing' is more accurately understood as caste pride killing. The three texts, in different generic forms and regional languages, converge on the same structural diagnosis: the violence is not an irrational excess but the logical operation of a system whose survival depends on the enforcement of endogamy, the policing of female sexuality, and the annihilation of any cross-caste desire that threatens the hierarchical order. Ambedkar's structural theory of caste provides the theoretical framework that makes this visible: endogamy is the engine; sati, enforced widowhood, child marriage, and honour killing are its fuel. Galtung's framework of structural

and cultural violence names the mechanisms by which this engine operates at the levels of institution, community, and consciousness simultaneously.

The three authors also share a critical diagnosis of liberal reform. Nath's idealism, Basavanna's revolutionary spirituality, the Indian state's formal guarantees of equality-all are shown to be insufficient against a social machine that reproduces itself through terror and through the deeply internalized consent of its victims. The inter-caste marriage in each text is not a solution to caste; it is a probe that reveals the depth of caste's hold on social life. The woman who crosses caste boundaries is punished most severely, confirming what feminist theory has long argued: she is the primary site on which caste sovereignty is inscribed, and therefore the primary target when that sovereignty is challenged.

The significance of these texts in the contemporary moment cannot be overstated. Honour killings continue across India-in Dharmapuri, in Udumalpet, in districts whose names appear again and again in reports that could be summarized as retellings of Iyayam's fiction. The fiction, in each case, preceded and predicted the fact. Literature does not merely reflect social reality; it reads it more accurately and more humanely than policies can. Karnad, Tendulkar, and Iyayam have, across five decades, provided their societies with the most rigorous and compassionate analysis of caste violence available in any medium. To read them together is to understand that the killing of Bhakkiyam, the destruction of Jyoti's marriage, and the massacre in Basavanna's Kalyana are not three separate stories but one-the story of a society that calls its violence honour and its fear pride, and that has not yet found the courage to call either by its true name.

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar declared that "you cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster [caste]" (89). These most articulate writers, writing decades after Ambedkar, return the same verdict. Caste will not be killed by a marriage. It will not be killed by a speech, a law, a commission, or an election. It will be killed-if it is killed-by the accumulated weight of witness: by every reader who finishes *Pethavan* and cannot look away from the dog howling over Pazhani's body in the field.

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Author Bio:

Dr. T. Marx is a Professor in the Department of English, School of Humanities, Pondicherry University, with over 26 years of teaching experience. His research and scholarly interests span Drama, Comparative Literature, Contemporary Literary Theories, Subaltern Studies, and Translation Studies.