

A study of casteism in Karnad's *Tale - Danda*

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Abstract

Tale-Danda is based on caste-politics and power-politics which is still prevalent in the life of national political history. Caste is quite deep within the skin of man. Everybody is trapped within the limits of his caste. It is a strange situation in the play which cultivates the terror and bloodshed not only in the play but also in the country. As a result, the common man is being tortured, exploited and trampled and it creates a network of situations in which man is captivated, chained, isolated and tortured. Such social tapestry is full of existential predicaments. The caste system is presented as a bloodshed policy in this play. The play takes us through an important caste-related social issue in historical and cultural perspectives. Karnad tries to highlight the contemporary socio-political conflicts of our society, like the Mandir and Mandal conflict. The present research paper aims to analyse discrimination, oppression and injustice, faced by people in caste based Indian society with reference to Girish Karnad's play *Tale-Danda*.

Keywords : Casteism, Exploitation, Inter caste, In humanism

Introduction

Girish Karnad (b. 1938) belongs to the formative generation of Indian playwrights who came to maturity in the two decades following independence, and collectively reshaped Indian theatre as a major national institution in the later twentieth century. The work of these playwrights has a historical connection with the modern theatre forms that emerged under the influence of western models in metropolises such as Calcutta and Bombay during the colonial period. Their modernity, however, is shaped by the unprecedented experience of political autonomy and new nationhood, and entails a rejection rather than continuation of colonial theatre practices. In modern Indian theatre, the years leading up to and following independence

in 1947 marked a period of disjunction during which both the commercialism of the Parshi stage (dominant until the 1930s) and the radical populism of the Indian peoples Theatre Association (dominant during the 1940s) became unsatisfactory models for the future development of urban drama. Caste-system is the most vital social issue in this play. The Brahmin or upper-class Hindu thinks caste system as an ideal system for society. They would not tolerate the violation of the caste system, like inter-caste marriage, the upper caste or lower caste people touching each other, eating or living together. But over time, there is a freedom to choose a profession, but not life partners, because the people have not been able to liberate themselves from the idea of caste and creed, and it remains an integral part of present Indian society.

Major Thrust

Tale - Danda by Girish Karnad is a powerful play and is a testament to his mastery of historical drama and social commentary. Written in Kannada in 1990 and later translated into English as “Death by Beheading,” this work delves deep into the complexities of 12th-century Indian society, exploring themes that resonate even in contemporary times. He was awarded the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1993 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994 in Kannada language for the play. *Tale-Danda* is about the rise of the radical protest and reform movement Lingayatism, in the 12th century Karnataka. The play was originally written in Kannada, and was later translated into English by the author himself. Karnad is known for the relevance of the themes discussed in his plays. Karnad’s *Tale-Danda* is not merely a historical retelling but a nuanced examination of social structures, religious reform, and the human condition. The play’s relevance extends beyond its historical setting, offering insights into the perennial struggles of individuals against entrenched societal norms and the consequences of challenging the status quo. In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad focuses on one of the most critical issues correlated with the caste system. The caste war and religious intolerance are still burning issues. *Tale-Danda* explores the evils of caste system which leads to the disintegration of Hindu society. The play was based on preaching and practice carried out by Basvanna, a social reformer and visionary of 12th century Karnataka. Basvanna believed in the equality of sexes and opposition to discrimination on the ground of caste system. Karnard also mentions the political and social atmosphere in India in 1990’s at the backdrop of Mandal Commission. The

historical incident is a vehicle for Girish Karnad to talk about present issues. Indian Politics has become more and more caste and religious oriented which has created drifts in the 'uniform' fabric of the society. Through vivid characterization and compelling dialogue, Karnad brings to life a pivotal moment in Indian history, using it as a lens to scrutinize broader issues of caste, gender, and power dynamics. *Tale-Danda* exemplifies Karnad's ability to weave together historical fact and dramatic fiction, creating a narrative that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally engaging.

The narrative of *Tale-Danda* unfolds in the kingdom of Kalyan, where the progressive King Bijjala supports the reformist Lingayat movement led by Basavanna. The play revolves around a controversial inter-caste marriage between Sheelavanta, a Brahmin man, and Kalavati, a woman from a lower caste. This union, facilitated by Basavanna and his followers, serves as the catalyst for the ensuing conflict. As news of the marriage spreads, it ignites a fierce backlash from orthodox elements within society. The conservative Brahmins, feeling threatened by the Lingayat movement's growing influence, pressure King Bijjala to take action against Basavanna and his followers. The king, torn between his support for reform and the need to maintain social order, finds himself in a precarious position. The tension escalates, leading to violent confrontations between the reformists and the traditionalists. Basavanna, disillusioned by the turn of events and the violence perpetrated in the name of his teachings, chooses to leave Kalyan. The play culminates in a tragic climax, with the newlyweds being brutally executed, symbolizing the crushing of the reform movement under the weight of entrenched social hierarchies. Set against the backdrop of 12th-century Karnataka, *Tale-Danda* draws inspiration from a significant period of social and religious upheaval. The play is centred around the Lingayat movement, a reformist sect founded by the philosopher and social reformer Basavanna. This movement challenged the rigid caste system and advocated for social equality, making it a controversial and revolutionary force in its time.

Set against the backdrop of 12th-century Karnataka, *Tale-Danda* draws inspiration from a significant period of social and religious upheaval. The play is centred around the Lingayat movement, a reformist sect founded by the philosopher and social reformer Basavanna. This movement challenged the rigid caste system and advocated for social equality, making it a controversial and revolutionary force in its time. Karnad meticulously researched this

historical period, incorporating authentic details that lend credibility to the narrative. The playwright's choice of this particular era is deliberate, as it allows him to explore themes of social change, resistance, and the clash between tradition and progress – issues that continue to be relevant in modern India. The historical context of *Tale-Danda* serves as more than just a setting; it becomes an integral part of the story, influencing character motivations and driving the plot forward. By grounding his play in this tumultuous period, Karnad creates a rich tapestry that interweaves historical fact with dramatic imagination, offering readers and audiences a glimpse into a pivotal moment in Indian history.

Girish Karnad's portrayal of the caste system and social hierarchy in *Tale- Danda* is both nuanced and critical. He presents the caste system not merely as a social construct but as a deeply ingrained aspect of 12th-century Indian society that permeates every facet of life. Through various characters and situations, Karnad illustrates how the caste system shapes identities, relationships, and power dynamics. The playwright doesn't shy away from depicting the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination. He shows how the system perpetuates inequality, limiting opportunities for lower castes while preserving the privileges of the upper castes. The character of Kalavati, for instance, serves as a poignant reminder of the restrictions placed on individuals based solely on their birth. Karnad also explores the psychological impact of the caste system on individuals. Characters from different castes exhibit internalized beliefs about their worth and capabilities, reflecting how deeply the hierarchy has been embedded in the collective psyche. This psychological aspect adds depth to the portrayal, showing that dismantling such a system requires more than just legal or social reforms. Through the Lingayat movement, Karnad presents an alternative vision – a society based on merit and devotion rather than birth. However, he realistically portrays the challenges faced by such reformist ideas, showing how entrenched power structures resist change, often violently. The backlash against the inter-caste marriage serves as a stark illustration of the lengths to which the beneficiaries of the system will go to maintain the status quo.

Conclusion

Tale- Danda stands as a seminal work in Indian literature, its impact reverberating far beyond the realm of theatre. Girish Karnad's masterful blend of historical insight and contemporary

relevance has ensured the play's enduring significance in discussions of social reform, caste politics, and the role of art in addressing societal issues. The written time of the play is very relevant because we have witnessed how Indian society suffered because of these caste-ridden movements. The play's unflinching examination of the caste system and its consequences continues to provoke thought and debate, making it a valuable text in academic and social circles. Its portrayal of the struggles faced by reformers and the complexities of implementing social change remains deeply relevant in contemporary India, where issues of caste and social hierarchy persist.

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