

Thematic Concern and Technical Features in Karnad's Tale-Danda

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Abstract

Girish Karnad, a writer, explores Kalyan-Kranti's last days in his play Tale-danda. Girish hopes to draw attention to the divisions in Indian society and government. The centuries-old societal problem of caste is given the attention it deserves. Sharana's effort to outlaw it was brought to life. The plot revolves on the unconventional union of a Brahmin bride and a Cobbler groom. The failed marriage and its aftermath highlight the crude nature of the caste system. Sovidev's political plotting against his own father, Bijjal, is emblematic of the universal lust for power. Karnad brilliantly illustrates the social and political tensions of modern civilization by merging these two subjects.

Keywords— Caste-system, Varnashram, Brahmin, Cobbler, Inter-caste, Political intrigue, Superstition.

I. INTRODUCTION

Girish Karnad is a major figure in the history of Indian English theater. He is now considered a major figure among living playwrights. He mines mythology and history for material, then reworks the stories so that they speak to contemporary issues in Indian culture. He had the ability to infuse the aesthetic elements of any real or imagined historical or legendary item into his art. Because of this, his plays will never go out of style. His works have the tone and expression of great drama," the eminent Kannada critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti remarks. Because of his brilliance and ability, he can make everything beautiful. Karnad is a writer who puts humanity first. All of his pieces are imbued with a deep compassion. Tale-danda, which literally means "death by beheading," is his latest drama that exposes the ugliness of caste politics in India.

Sharana's Movement of Karnataka, which occurred in the 12th century A.D., is the inspiration for the drama Tale-danda. There was a significant social and ecclesiastical upheaval in the 12th century A.D. Under Basavanna's leadership, the revolutionaries attacked idols, promoted gender equality, fought against the caste system, and promoted the idea that "the work is

worship." They attempted to raise people's consciousness via the medium of Vachanas, or free poetry. Basavanna, the finance minister of King Bijjal, gathered a group of people together who were unrivaled in the history of Karnataka and maybe the history of the world in terms of their ingenuity and social dedication in order to accomplish these goals. This Sharana's movement has certain communist and democratic ideas at its core.

The events of Tale-Danda revolve on the end of Bijjala's rule. Girish pulls together two different time periods. One example is Sovideva's manipulation of his father, Bijjal, and Basavanna to cause discord. A Brahmin bride and a Cobbler groom is another example of an interracial marriage. He seeks to shed light on the political and social tensions in today's world by integrating these two narratives into a single cohesive totality. It's fascinating to learn about Girish's world during the time he wrote this play. Mandal and Mandir clashes were rocking contemporary Indian society at the time. It was in 1989, when the Mandir and the Mandal movements were showing anew how pertinent the concerns raised by these intellectuals were for our period, that Karnad composed Tale-danda, as he explains in the play's

introduction. How dangerous it is to disregard the remedies they presented has been shown by the tragedy of what has happened afterwards and the religious fanaticism that has grabbed our national life today.

Girish explains his decision to include historical elements into the play. He eventually achieved his goal of reinterpreting historical events such that they would speak for individuals of all social classes. Haralayya represents the lowest caste in Indian culture, the Cobbler, whereas Basavanna, Sambshiva Shastri, Jagadeva, and Madhuvarasa represent the top caste, Brahminism. The Varna system, which includes the castes of tanners, barbers, and skimmers, represents the intermediate rungs of the Indian caste system.

Present-day India has no more well-known media figure than Girish Karnad. He is India's preeminent dramatist and an accomplished actor. Its profound critique of the problems plaguing modern Indian culture has earned Tale-Danda, which literally translates to "death by beheading," widespread recognition. This study analyzes Karnad's drama Tale-Danda from several angles, delving into its thematic themes, technical aspects, and various interpretations. Karnad has dabbled in many different subjects, including those dealing with the mythos, values, and history of India. Karnad has taken it upon himself to rethink and, if feasible, reorganize the social and political norms associated with caste. The nuanced significance of Religion is also something he worries about. Karnad's Interview Response:

When the "Mandir" and "Mandal" movements started demonstrating how contemporary the concerns addressed by these philosophers still are, that's when I composed Tale-Danda. This may or may not be intended as a critique of caste. Why do we continue to face the same challenges year after year? As cited in (Ravi Dayal:1993:138)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As Marjorie Boulton says (2019), An authentic drama has depth and dimension. a play is literature brought to life before the audience's eyes; the words on the page are supposed to be seen and experienced as physical objects on the stage. The dialogue and events unfold right in front of our eyes, however, if there are scenes in the play that are too gruesome to stage, they may be narrated by characters who are also present on stage and exhibit all the indications of terror and disgust.

A. Keith Berriedale (2012), Dramatic potential was

already there in Vedic rituals. A complicated series of rites, including an element of theatrical depiction, made up the ritual, which went well beyond the simple performance of songs or recitations in honor of the gods. Although elements of representation may be present in a ritual, the goal is not the representation itself but rather the direct religious or magical result the actors are seeking. Only when actors perform parts deliberately for the sake of the performance, to give pleasure to themselves and others, if not profit also, can we call it a drama proper.

"S. Ramswamy, (2011)," in Drama may "hold the mirror up to nature" in this way. "Every once in a while, somebody will say that he would rather wait for a play to come out as a book than to see a live performance of it," said Tennessee Williams, one of the most prominent playwrights: "where he would be distracted from its true values if it has any by so much that is mere spectacle and sensation and consequently must be meretricious and vulgar." Theatrical works may be read on paper. I read all of them. A play in a book is merely a ghost of a play, and not even a clear one, as I have learned through reading the works of serious playwrights. The written script of a play is not much more than a set of plans for a home that has not yet been constructed. It's the play's visual elements—its color, elegance, and height; its structural pattern in motion; its fast interaction of live people; and its ephemeral, cloudlike lighting—that make it so compelling, not the words on there. (Proceed on to Comino Real)

Veena Noble Dass (2016), The drama stands out for other reasons, too, including its examination of man's quest for authority. The play's events are driven by Tughlaq. Everything that happens is predicated on his need to be in charge and have absolute power. "His brain and knowledge become tools for use in the politics of power, its stratagems and counterstrategy, and his interests and goals become centered only inside the radiating circle of power, while the rest of his human impulses dry up and his wants become perverted. Nobody gets far crawling about on their hands and knees, he argues. I still have a ways to go. Crawling is beyond my means. And I intend to gallop.

Gulshan, T.A. Das, and Khan, T.A. Gulshan (2018), In the play, there is a lot of damage brought on by the misuse of knowledge. Yavakri, Raibhya, and Parvasu are all intelligent people, yet they all make poor use of their education. Karnad has made some observations on the current state of affairs. "Ascetic Lomasha in the myth imparts knowledge to the Pandava's and Karnad imparts it to the world by rewriting it," write Dr. Mrs. Gulshan

Das and Ms. Tanjeem Ara Khan. He thinks the tale has deep implications for modern life. The reckless misuse of information today is driving the planet to its doom. The author uses the myth as a platform from which to issue a social warning.

III. ABOUT TALE-DANDA

Idolatry and temple worship were both criticized by these intellectuals. They were a reflection of the rejection of the static in favor of the notion of forward motion and improvement in human endeavors. They upheld gender parity and lauded the value of laborious effort. They were staunch opponents of the caste system. The religious conservatives were outraged by their final action. Terror and violence put a stop to the movement. The author promotes his ideas via the sharanas. The author's opinions are being announced via the famous sharana saint poet Basavanna. The author's point of view is communicated via King Bijjala, whose character is quite similar to the duke's in Shakespeare's plays in terms of his noble thoughts and character. He also discusses this with kakkayya, a sharana and a saint of the same age who refuses to be touched by anybody. In

Tale- Danda, Karnad "discovers the vital relationship between contemporary society and

Literature adept in choosing the dialectical opposites such as tradition and modernity," as Y. Somalata puts it.

Conservative and progressive viewpoints; the spiritual and the material; the ideal and the practical; stability and change to reveal a lyrical progression...The caste system in Hindu civilization is the target of centrifugal and centripetal forces of change and opposition. (Somalata 2004:138)

Deconstructing caste and religion to find their true significance and reorganizing them for the greater good of society and the nation is a central topic of Karnad's Tale-Danda. Scene every scene, Karnad injects firmly held religious and philosophical convictions with a healthy dose of new thinking. According to the conventional caste system, a monarch is expected to originate from the Rajput or Kshatriya castes. The author provides a beautiful conversation between King Bijjala and Queen Rambhavati.

Bijjala: What is my caste? Tell me.

Rambhavati: We are kshatriyas.

Your Hosala family, Bijjala, could be Kshatriyas. But my caste identifies me as a barber, the Kalachurya. His Majesty King Bijjala comes from a long line of barbers.

My ancestors have been robber barons for 10 generations. For an additional five years, they served as the emperor's trusty feudatories. They wed into every conceivable royal dynasty. This was done so that they might be permanently marked as members of the Kshatriya caste.(Karnad:1993)

Karnad accomplishes a double feat here. He proves that the Kalyani monarch is a barber rather than a kshatriya. Further, he portrays him as possessing profound wisdom and high ideals, presumably to demonstrate that these qualities are not exclusive to any one ethnic group or culture. Once again, Karnad goes against deeply held cultural norms by deciding to have a boy regardless of his or her birthplace, caste, or religion.

If you're looking for a way to get your life's worth out of this world, go no further than "Bijjala: A son in the ultimate goal of human existence."

Basavanna: A sharana doesn't care about their biological parents. The guru's initiation into the path of wisdom is the true moment of birth.

That's what you think, Bijjala. You broke the holy thread and ran away from home when you were a kid. You don't give a damn about things like your ethnicity, religion, or place of birth. (Karnad:1993)

Karnad rejects the conventional wisdom that one's physical parents are the determining factor in determining one's caste or religion. Instead, one should use their level of education as a measuring stick. An counselor to King Karnad, a Brahmin named Manchanna Kramita, expresses his disagreement with the Vedic religion's practice of ceremonial animal sacrifice. It is wrong, cruel, dishonorable, and beastlike to offer fire offerings or any other kind of sacrifice to God for religious reasons, and it is also wrong to slay animals for our own needs. In Scene V of Act II, Brahmin sharana Madhuvarsa demonstrates his devotion to the cause of their great movement by offering the life of his daughter as a sacrifice.

The tragedy of Karnad's Tale-Danda illustrates how Basavanna's philosophy of forward motion and improvement in human endeavors inevitably leads to dread and slaughter. Karnad deconstructs the meaning of caste and religion through the conflict and confrontation that run parallel to one another in the drama, revealing a new community of sharanas who reject idolatry and temple worship, believe in equality of the sexes and hard work, and are opposed to the caste system. An same sentiment has been voiced by Pranav Josphipura: "...instead of deliberating on how to abolish the Varna system, Karnad presents it in a startling

manner without any solution...to treat an age-old problem without suggesting any solution raises serious doubts about the capacity of a writer." (Joshiapur: 2000:69)

The historical event that inspired Karnad to write *Tale-Danda*, which means "beheading," took place in the city of Kalyan in 1168 A.D. and was spearheaded by poets, philosophers, mystics, and social revolutionaries who sought to end the evils of the caste system and usher in a new era of social equality. It ushered in a period of unparalleled innovation, bold inquiry, and social dedication in Karnad. They avoided using Sanskrit and instead spoke to the people in their own tongue, explaining the existence of God. They sought to bring about a radical shift, held fast to the concept of progress in human endeavor, and were hostile to the status quo. They valued hard labor and the equality of the sexes even back then. The orthodox community's wrath and disapproval rained down severely on them because of their devotion to opposing the caste system. The movement petered out in a blaze of violence and horror. The language of the play is quiet relevant to the situation. According to Karnad:

Speaking reveals a man's caste, region of origin, and socioeconomic level in Karnataka as it does across India. The language of the play in the original Kannada form of Tale-Danda explores the consequences of this truth for a community working to eliminate caste and social inequity. As cited in (Ravi Dayal: 1993:138)

This view can be justified by taking few lines from the text:

"Malliboma : Don't be silly. I shouldn't have even stepped into this Brahmin Street. And you want me to come into your house? No. Thank you.

Damodara: Indrani, the Rigveda tells us that the four varnas flowed out of the primordial Man: The Brahmin from the head, the shudra from the feet."(Karnad:1993)

These two quotes illustrate how deeply ingrained caste prejudice was in people's minds and how it permeated all levels of society. Marx also addresses the societal deformities and negative outcomes that result from the division of labor. It established without a reasonable doubt that mechanization and specialization of labor, together with the resulting concentration of wealth and resources in a small number of hands, inevitably lead to crises.

By describing the communal battle in the city of Kalyan in North Kanara during the reign of Bijjala, the twelfth-century ruler, Karnad's *Tale-Danda* reveals the ugliness

and deformity of Hindu civilization. Many famous intellectuals and artists graced his court. Those remarkable minds were brought together by Basavanna, an officer in the king's service and a profound philosopher. They abandoned their castes to become Shiva sharanis. They used normal vernacular while discussing God. They rejected idolatry because they believed their physical being was the actual temple of God. They believed in social and gender equality and rejected any barbaric customs. When a Brahmin girl wed a Panchama boy, it sparked the bloody conflict between the sharanas and the orthodox. This noble cause ultimately failed. A shudra barber named Bijjala is elevated to the position of Kalyan's monarch. He explains how he attained kshatriya status in his own words:

For ten generations, my family has been at the top of the criminal food chain. For another five years, they served as faithful feudatories under the Emperor. They intermarried with every major royal family. Bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. They made it this far only to get the kshatriya caste symbol tattooed on their heads. That's why: (Karnad, 1993)

Sovideva is Bijjala's son from his marriage to the princess Rambhavati. Although he loves his son, Bijjala is appalled by Sovideva's lack of royal behavior. His sons by prior spouses often rise to positions of power in the community, yet he never favors any one of them. This has enraged Sovideva beyond measure. It's no secret that Bijjala is not liked by the higher-caste members of society. The only individuals, he says,

"in all my sixty-two years, who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking deep in their eyes, are the sharanas, Basavanna and his men." To wit: (Karnad, 1993)

Bijjala appreciates Basavanna and his troops for their help. However, this does not sit well with his son, Sovideva. He has nothing but contempt for Basavanna and his ideas. He is aware of the substantial sums Basavanna invests on entertaining his visitors. This leads him to believe that Basavanna has really plundered the royal coffers. So, he decides to throw open the bank as evidence. In order to get his father's approval, he plans to make Basavanna an outcast.

The sharanas inform Jagadeva about Sovideva's intention to release royal funds. Instantaneously, he rounded up thousands of sharanas and surrounded the structure. To keep Sovideva from messing with it, he does this. While all was going on, Basavanna showed there and sent Jagadeva to check on his sick old man. He

arrests Sovideva, verifies that the treasury is unharmed, and then lets him go. The fact that the wealth has been contaminated is seen as a miracle by many. Bijjala gives Sovideva a stern talking-to for his wrongdoing. As a result, Somideva is very upset, ashamed, and injured. He makes up his mind to get revenge on his dad and Basavanna. Bijjala's support for Basavanna's mission has angered the queen's priest, Damodar Bhatt, as well as the king's Brahmin counsellor, Manchanna Karamita. This leads them to conspire against Bijjala and Basavanna with Sovideva.

Manchanna and Sovideva Demodar plan to assassinate the king. They first have Bijjala's faithful attendants murdered, and then they lock him up in his own palace. This is why Basavanna has asked the sharanas to support the monarch. Although most of them are unwilling to help him escape from Sovideva. To calm Bijjala down, he pays her a visit, accompanied by a couple sharanas. He told him that Lord Shiva is the only one who can protect him from harm. Bijjala laughs and tears hysterically as he goes for Kappadi. A hidden entrance allowed Jagadeva and the other sharanas to access the palace. They are really disappointed that they cannot locate the Prince.

Jagadeva guides them to Shiva's inner sanctuary, where the elderly monarch has taken refuge. Bijjala holds the Linga tightly to shield himself. Jagadeva then fabricates that Basavanna personally delivered them to him. After the other sharanas leave the shrine on Bijjala's plea that they not murder him, Jagadeva, believing that Bijjala has come out to kill him, stabs him to death and then kills himself. At the same time as the victims are screaming, Brahmins are praising Sovideva. To quote Karnad:

After three centuries of hiding out in the shadows, the sharanas eventually reemerged as linguists, but they were still completely caste-ridden.(Shukla:1999:39)

Since religious extremism can bring down the Babari Masjid and kill thousands of people, he thinks Tale-Danda is still important today. He continues by saying that he hears echoes from those distant periods whenever individuals are killed in the name of a temple. This is why Basavanna's statements indicate to violence at mandir masjids: No matter the provocation, violence is always unacceptable. It's more worse to resort to it just because someone else began it. To do such an act in defense of a brick and mortar building is a blatant display of idiocy. Thus, Karnad is spot-on when he says, "It appears 800 years have addressed no difficulties. Right where we began is where we are now. Karnad's Tale-Danda shows the many ways in which society's

flaws manifest itself. In Tale-Danda, the discriminatory nature of the caste system in India is laid bare. Therefore, not only does Basavanna's campaign fail, but after a few hundred years, his adherents emerge as a new caste.(Ibid:40)

Karnad therefore reveals the negative cultural, social, and psychological implications of social deformity. Women of high caste in Girish Karnad's Tale-Danda conform predictably to stereotypes. They are compliant, yelled at to "mind your own business," or, even worse, rejected and sent home with their parents. The husband-wife relationship barely shows any signs of equality. Although she has the title of queen, in the eyes of the monarch she is little more than a common palace servant. The words of Elains Showalter are well applied to Rambhavati's predicament:

"We have viewed our ancestors as soulless victims, passively accepting the shackles of their lot across centuries, either oblivious to or unable to comprehend the ways in which they were marginalized from mainstream society." (Showalter:1977:11)

Sovideva's wife is the other lady in the palace. This silenced lady now has significance because of the shift in setting. The sarcasm and masculine egotism in Sovideva's remarks on this occasion are instructive. A woman's worth is judged only by her ability to reproduce, rather than on her own merits as a human being.

The play's most pivotal event, the wedding of a high-caste Brahmin's daughter to a cobbler's son, sets in motion a chain of tragic events that ultimately leads to the extinction of the species and the execution of Mahuvarasa and Haralayya. Both families have accepted sharias, thus the wedding may go on. Patriarchal societies are characterized by a power structure in which males predominate. The status of women as silent is unchanged. Lalitmba brings out the logistical issues that would arise from marrying a Brahmin girl to a shoemaker. However, her concerns and complaints are not addressed adequately. Madhuvarasa, her husband, brutally pushes them away. The reasons Lalitamba objects to the wedding make sense.

"Till the other day our daughter ran around barefoot. She was told it was unclean to touch any leather except deer-skin. How can she start skinning dead buffaloes tomorrow? Or tan leather?"(Karnad:1993)

The play's blurb includes an interesting explanation of the religion. Human equality is the central tenet of a new religion that emerged as a reaction to Brahminism's rigid ritualism. People's worth and reputation are not

affected by their caste. Each person is valued equally by the sharanas' deity, Lord Shiva. Women continued to be a voiceless and powerless minority, sometimes unaware of how much on the outside of society they really were. According to Showalter's analysis,

"Woman's relationships to themselves and society have been essentially static, as fixed as to render women of the past mute and dumb, unable to write, speak or even see the truth." (Showalter:1977:14)

The political intrigue is analogous to this societal sickness. Political misdeeds were always on display for Indian society. Disputes between siblings, parents, and children are all about control. Here, we see how Sovideva, son of Bijjal, gets poisoned by poor counsel. Basavanna is first targeted for removal from the court when Damadhar Bhat, Manchankramit, and Sovideva accuse him of misappropriating funds.

In Basavanna's absence, Sovidev begins preparations to access the government's coffers. However, the Sharanas, led by the youthful revolutionary Jagadev, decide to keep Sovidev in the Treasury Department until Basavanna's arrival.

Later, when Basavanna arrives and the money is counted, she finds no signs of fraud. Sadly, Sovideva's fascination isn't working. The traitors later seize a window of opportunity. They disarm Bijjal and lock him up in the palace itself. Sovidev takes over. To save him from his son, Bijjal is waiting for Basavanna to arrive. Although Basavanna arrives, the Sharanas do not undergo a dramatic change. Basavanna decides to leave Bijjal's destiny up to chance and go for the Sangama. In the meanwhile, the Sharanas suffer yet another tragic loss. The following exchange sheds light on the tragic situation.

GUNDANNA: It's harrowing. A while ago – the king's soldiers arrested Haralaya and took him to the city square. They also brought Madhuvarasa there – and then – then – as the city watched – they plucked their eyes out –

A reaction of horror from those present.

Plucked out their eyes with iron rods – bound them hand and foot had them dragged through the streets – tied to elephant's legs – Ayyo! How can I tell you? – Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones – they died screaming!

JAGADEVA: And no one intervened? what about the sharanas ?

GUNDANNA: They all watched, shut inside their houses. I can't stop shivering. It was horrible.

KALAYYA: Shiva! Shiva!

GUNDANNA: Now – they are impaling their bodies by the city gate –

The above episode exemplifies the extent to which the ruling class firmly enforced the caste system. We may also see its dreadful manifestation in today's political climate. It is clear that politicians are sowing division in the public for electoral gain. The politicians have encouraged the division of the big castes into smaller groups known as sub castes. The modern man has been making unintended progress. He's been to the moon and has plans to make Mars his home, but he still hasn't escaped the societal scourge that is caste.

The parents of the newlyweds are killed as a result of the sharanas' efforts to abolish the societal malaise represented by the caste system.

However, many people also lose their life due to political unrest. The outcomes of both of these are fatal. It's proof that human cultures have been plagued by problems ever since their inception.

Girish uses the aforementioned two strands to tell a narrative about another social ill: superstition. Idolatry, miracles, and a slew of end-of-life rites emerge as a result. This next episode illustrates the extent to which the populace was idolatrous and the efforts of the sharanas to counter it with education.

KALAYYA: Basavanna, these tribals have brought their god with them. You should see that idol. Rolling eyes. A tongue lolling out. It's very funny.

GUNDANNA (laughs): I think – the sooner you initiate them into our fold the better!

BASAVANNA: First and foremost, they need a safe place to lay their heads and a level area to set up their mats. The spiritual care we can provide for them can come later.

In this fashion, the great playwright of our day, Girish Karnad, combines historical events to depict the catastrophic ills of both the past and the present.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Mandir and Mandal movements were starting to illustrate again how pertinent the problems raised by these intellectuals, and Karnad reveals that he wrote Tale-Danda at that time. It has become clearer how perilous it is to disregard the solution they proposed in light of the horrors that have ensued and the religious zealots who have taken control of our national life today. In Tale-Danda, the discriminatory nature of the caste

system in India is laid bare. Unfortunately for Basavanna, his idealistic supporters betray him as he fights to eventually eliminate the caste system. The cultural, social, and psychological harm caused by societal deformity are all laid bare by Karnad. Basavanna's idea of forward motion and development in human endeavor is tragically shown in Karnad's Tale-Danda, which culminates in dread and slaughter. The upper caste ladies in Karnad's play Tale-Danda are portrayed in a stereotyped manner, being obedient and easily manipulated by their male counterparts, or worse, being rejected and sent back to their parents.

Taking as its inspiration the great revolt of the sharanas' of Karnataka in the 12th century A.D., Tale-danda is a revolutionary drama in every sense of the word. This piece was written, he says, against the background of the war between the Mandal and the Mandir Masjid. We have seen the harm that these caste-based movements have caused to Indian society, thus the play's historical period is particularly timely. It Tale-danda is still relevant today is evidence of it. Eight centuries have passed since the Kalyan-Kranti, yet killing continues for the same reason. The caste system is a profoundly sick institution, and it is likely that humankind will continue to see carnage among itself for the foreseeable future. This exemplifies Girish Karnad's skill in selecting subjects for his plays that would endure throughout time.

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