



RELEVANCE OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AS PORTRAYED IN KARNAD'S TALE-DANDA

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Abstract:

The play Tale-Danda by a very well-known playwright Girish Karnad has the socio-religious movement called Sharana movement initiated by the South Indian Saint, poet, philosopher and philanthropist Basavanna at its background. The play vividly portrays the origin, evolution and the downfall of the historical Sharana movement in 12th century city of Kalyan in South India. The play is full of violence incidences. The events in the play are shown as in 12th century but it seems relevant in the present times in India as well. We are still struggling to get rid of age-old curse of communal violence in India. We are somehow successful in diluting the intensity of communal discrimination but still we have to go miles ahead as this filthy, inhuman discrimination has fathom rooted in Indian social psyche.

Key Words: Basavanna, Sharana, Violence, Caste Discrimination, Bijjala, Varnashrama, Bijjala, Kalavati, Sheelavanta

Introduction:

Girish Raghunath Karnad acclaims a very seminal place in Indian Drama and Theatre in English. He is best known for his technique of retelling the history and myths in the context of modern times through his plays. The present play *Tale-Danda* is a fine example of Karnad's versatility as a dramatist. He has borrowed the theme of this play from a very famous episode in Indian history that talks about the socio-religious movement initiated by a South Indian saint, philosopher Basavanna. This movement emerged as a great social revolution in the city of Kalyan. The revolutionary followers with Basavanna opposed idolatry and discrimination based on caste and gender. They believed in and upheld the human values like equality, fraternity and justice. Basavanna tried to bring people from various strata of the society under one refuge of Lord Shiva. He devoted and sacrificed his life for the cause of a noble society based on human values. Unfortunately, the movement which had the foundation of non-violence turned into a massive violent crusade.

Theme:

Karnad wrote this play when 'Mandir' and 'Mandal' conflict was in surge India. Karnad was greatly influenced by it. In the preface to the play, Karnad himself mentions it as, "I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the 'Mandir' and the 'Mandal' movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered." It clearly underlines Karnad's social concern that is the backbone of his writings. The play speaks about the theme of caste and gender discrimination at length. There are two prominent events in the play which lead to violence on a mass level. The first event is related to Prince Sovideva's ambition and its execution to capture the throne and second is the marriage of a Brahmin girl Kalavati with a low caste cobbler boy, Sheelavanta. Both these events bring havoc and bloodshed on mass level in the city of Kalyan.

Communal violence is not a new notion in India. The sun of our freedom

arose with the curse of communal violence on a mass level. We are celebrating 75 years of independence this year with a great zeal and enthusiasm. But, at the same time we have failed to get rid of the age old curse of communal discrimination in and out. Still we witness the events of communal violence now and then. The superiority complex on the part of upper caste people and the inferiority complex on the part of lower caste people are responsible for the rise of communal discrimination in the society. The upper caste people consider themselves as superior and deny equality to the people

JAGADEVA: Come in.

MALLIBOMMA: 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.

JAGADEVA: Come on. Let's show them.

MALLIBOMMA: You go in. I'd better return home, too. (2)

Mallibomma is too afraid and hesitates to enter in Jagadeva's house even after the insistence by latter. This denotes how the notions of caste inferiority are fathom rooted in the psyche of Indian lower caste people. Mallibomma is a common man.

whom they consider and treat as inferior. On the other hand, the low caste people consider themselves as inferior to the upper class people and hardly strive for equality considering it as their fate. In the play, Jagadeva is an upper caste Brahmin but he doesn't believe in caste discrimination as he is involved in Basavanna's Sharana movement based on equality. He invites Mallibomma, a tanner by birth and a Sharana to his house. Mallibomma hesitates to enter in Jagadeva's house as he is conscious of his caste even after becoming a Sharana.

But even the royal people are also haunted by this social inferiority complex. The King Bijjala narrates his story to his queen Rambhavati regarding his transformation and promotion from lower caste Barber to a royal King.

BIJJALA: Your family – the Hoysalas, You may be Kshatriyas.

But I am a Kalachurya. Katta churra. A barber. His Majesty King Bijjala is a barber by caste. For ten generations my forefathers ravaged the land as robber barons. For another five they ruled as the trusted feudatories of the Emperor himself. They married into every royal family in sight. Bribed generations of Brahmins with millions of cows. All this so they could have the caste of Kshatriyas branded on their forehead. (14)

The comment and the honest, humble confession by King Bijjala brings into focus, how the caste system originated from the Varnashrama system has the air-tight compartments. Basavanna strives to bring the society into existence based on equality and human values. He attracts and fascinates people from all strata of the society irrespective of caste, creed and gender. His followers follow him without any doubt and with full of devotion. As a result, the proposal of the marriage of a lower caste Sheelavanta and a Brahmin girl Kalavati comes forth. This revolutionary decision proves as a

huge shock to the upper caste Brahmins. The upper caste Brahmins can't digest this humiliation. The protest starts against this proposed marriage. They decide to take revenge upon sharanas. The conflict between upper caste Brahmins and sharanas heightens its intensity and the non-violent movement turns into a bloody havoc. The thorough city of Kalyan is turned into bloodshed. The historical would be marriage consequents into huge disaster. Both the families of bride and groom are captured and killed inhumanely. The merciless scene is described one sharanas as,

GUNDANNA: 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 –
 Ayyo! How can I tell you? –
 Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones –
 they died screaming! (81)

The description give an idea of violence and cruelty that is gushed out of hatred in the minds of upper class Brahmins towards any type of efforts that would challenge the Varnashrama system. Brahmins capture the political power with the help of Prince Sovideva and all the

sharanas are taken upon. The whole city witnesses bloody violence. King Bijjala is captured and murdered by Sharanas led by Jagadeva. Prince Sovideva as per the advice of Brahmin adviser Manchanna orders to kill Sharanas. He is ablaze with hatred and anger as he orders,

SOVIDEVA: Pursue them. Don't let them escape. Men, women,
 children – cut them down. Set the hounds after them.
 Search each wood, each bush. Burn the houses that
 give them shelter. Burn their books. Yes, the books!
 Tear them into shreds and consign them to the wells.
 Their voices shall be stilled for ever – (90)

Sovideva has turned into a violent beast who knows only feeling of hatred and revenge. The play ends with a mass destruction, bloodshed and violence. Sovideva comes to the throne who is declared as the king to protect cows, Brahmins and Varnashrama dharma. To conclude, the play *Tale-Danda* is a revolutionary play in the sense it showcases the rise and downfall of the revolutionary social movement called Sharana. The play is written with 12th century as background. The play records communal violence in that time. The movement which was started to establish peace and harmony in the society, unfortunately brought into havoc and bloodshed on a mass level. People who believed in non-violence became violent to retaliate violence showcased by the rulers. It seems that nothing has changed drastically as even today the cases and unfortunate incidents of communal violence are witnessed and recorded not only in India but all over the world. Still there is a hope of mankind. We have to go miles away before we sleep. Basavanna quotes his optimism as, "Some day this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison-house of varnashram, will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as a human being. As a

bhakta. As a sharana. That is inevitable. But we have a long way to go. You know the most terrible crimes have been justified in the name of sanatana religion."

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