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THE TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN TALEDANDA TO HIGHLIGHT THE SOCIAL AND  
POLITICAL CONFLICTS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Historicity of the text is always necessary to reflect upon various ills of the society, in form of discrimination, subjection, repression, rejection and so on. Society and politics are two poles of the society that influences the socio-political dimensions of time being. History bears both good and evils in form of literature. A significant amount of Indian literary work deals with social political themes, Girish Karnad, one of the greatest modern Indian playwrights, wins the highest literary accolade in the nation, contributing with zeal and vigour. Girish Karnad Taledanda is concerned with the uglier aspects of Indian society, both historical and contemporary. The work portrays the caste system as a bloodthirsty regime. Intercaste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a cobbler boy results in bloodshed and calamity for the sharanas of Kalyan. Sovideva's plot is to sow discord between his father, Bijjali, and Basavanna, and to depose Basavanna from the court by accusing him of treasury mismanagement. By combining these two distinct storylines, Karnad attempts to emphasise present social and political tensions in our culture, such as the Mandir-Mandal controversy. This study will examine social and political disputes exist in the text as well as in the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** caste-system, inter-caste marriage, bloodshed, Mandir and Mandal conflict neo-colonization.

Literature is a microcosm of society. Indian literature has made a significant contribution to the development of socio-political sensitivity in terms of caste, prejudice, and so on. In "A Bend in the Ganges" (1964), Manohar Malgonkar shows colonial socio-political reality; Khushwant Singh projected socio-political turmoil, which resulted in psychological distress during the process of choosing a nation. Rohinton Mistry addresses the use of political power to further the goals and ends of a powerful ruler. Girish Karnad, one of India's most celebrated modern playwrights, has been awarded the country's highest literary honour for his contributions to contemporary Indian theatre, the Padma Shri. His plays have earned widespread acclaim and recognition across the world, owing to his ability to universalize the human and societal crisis via the medium of dramatic performance. In his plays, he draws on Indian mythology and history to represent contemporary issues

such as social-political conflict, religious controversy, caste system, religio-political conflict, and so on. At the same time, his plays convey a strong and unmistakable Western philosophical sensibility, which can be seen in his plays. Stories of Taledanda are "time travel adventures that take you back in time to learn the history of the majority religion (Hinduism) turning against itself."

*It is impossible to read Tale-danda without being reminded of current social and political events, particularly the Nehruvian age of disillusionment, as well as events in the immediate aftermath of the Mandal Commission Report and the destruction of Babri Masjid in the name of Ram Janma Bhoomi. The drama causes us to sit up and take notice to the age-old Varna problem, as well as consider possible solutions.*

Karnad selects mythical or historical characters capable of conveying his message of portraying contemporary society. He connects the past and present aesthetically via the use of mythical or historical people such as King Bijjali or Basavanna, and compares them to modern issues. Kirtinatn Kurtoki has stated about his plays, "Karnad's plays are totally contemporary in vision or attitude."

Karnad's Taledanda is a two-decade historical play that concludes in 1168 AD. In the city of Kalyan, a man named Basavanna collected a group of poets, mystics, social reformers, and thinkers. Together, they ushered in an age unmatched in Karnataka's history for its ingenuity, audacity, and devotion to social justice. By avoiding Sanskrit, they spoke about God and man in their own tongues. They were anti-idol and temple worship, respectively. Indeed, they eschewed any notions of "friction force" in favour of the human enterprise's concept of mobility and development. They espoused gender equality and appreciated dedicated, hard work. They were adamant opponents of the caste system, both in theory and practise. This final act earned Karnad attempts to illuminate contemporary society's terror and orthodoxy by connecting this past incident to the present, and through the past, as he states in the play's preface—"I wrote "Taledanda" in 1989, as the "Mandir" and "Mandal" movements were demonstrating once again how pertinent the questions posed by these theoreticians 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 explores two distinct historical threads— (i) Sovideva's plot to divide his father, Bijjali, and Basavanna. Sovideva incarcerated his father in order to ascend to the crown, and Jagadeva subsequently assassinated his father. Sovideva's mind was poisoned by the two unscrupulous counsellors, Damodhar Bhat and Manchankramit, in order to eliminate Basavanna from the court by accusing him of budgetary mismanagement. On the other hand, modern India has similar instances in which a brother betrays another sibling and a son betrays his father. All politicians are lousy advisers in politics. They conspire against one another to seize control, and as a result, the common people die, like in the carnage in Kalyan. (ii) In Kalyan, an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin bride and a cobbler husband culminates in carnage and tragedy for sharanas. Similarly, in contemporary India, lower-caste persons are not permitted to marry members of higher castes. Even members of the lower castes are not allowed to access the shrines of the higher castes. In the twenty-first century, they are still unable to attend any religious festival together. Lower caste individuals face serious discrimination as inferiors. Although India has begun to refer to itself as futuristic, the people's ethos remains customary, not dynamic. The caste system is the most vital social issue in this play. The Brahmin, or upper class, Hindus, think of the caste system as an ideal system for society. They would not tolerate violations of the caste system, like inter-caste marriages or upper-caste or lower-caste people touching each other, eating or living together. But with the passage of time, there is 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.

In the play's very first scene, we explore about the caste system's inadequacies and how miserably it was administered by the people of that era. Jagadeva, a Brahmin by pedigree, visits his ailing father with his comrade Mallibomma, a low caste tanner. Although they are both sharanas, Mallibomma is reticent to visit Jagadeva's residence due to his low birth, and Jagadeva continues to coerce him. Following that, we learn how Bhagirathi warns Mallibomma about his low caste. This is exposed in the following conversation:

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 now. I'd better return home, too.

JAGADEVA: That won't do. You must come in. Don't be afraid. I'm here. Come on!

*(He starts dragging Mallibomma by his arm. Mallibomma resists.)*

The second scenario demonstrates the king's frailty. Although Bijjali is the king, he is born a barber and belongs to a lower caste; as a byproduct, he feels insecure regardless his position as king. This is divulged in the following conversation: *"One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber-a shepherd-a scavenger!"*

In the marriage ceremony, we witness caste system at its most heinous and repulsive form. Madhuvarasa, a Brahmin, and Haralayal, a cobbler, agree to marry their offspring. It was an astounding issue in those days, and the Brahmins saw it as a blatant violation of their ideal system. Madhuvarasa and Haralayal make this determination, as they are sharanas, not brahmins or cobblers. They visit with Basavanna to seek his approval. And here we witness Basavanna's amazement, delight, trepidation, reticence, and contemplation. Although he is the one who ignited the flame of the Varnashrama system's abolition, he fears for the marriage's consequences and rejoices since he never imagined his dreams would come true so quickly. Because it is a basic notion that will be plasticized via this marriage, he also considers the couple's future.

BASAVANNA: "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."

The play is a great illustration of the game of power politics in which we find ourselves at this moment in time. At the price of humanity and brotherhood, everyone strives to express their individuality. The play begins with the introduction of Jagadeva, who has abandoned his old parents in order to pursue a political career. This foreshadows the entire socio-political stereotypes of the play, which are reflective to so-called progressive society in the contemporary era. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the study highlights neo-colonialism in the caste system. The passage implies an indirect inference of upper caste dominance over others, and one religion to the next has some similarities to neo-colonialism. It portrays upper caste rule over lower castes as a method of providing assistance in terms of money, job, food, housing, and a secure existence under their leadership. By invoking holy text, they normalised all of these types of bigotry. They purposefully portray this subordination as a manifestation of God's love, a method of charity. Domination as a way of subjection and liberation, rejection as a means of redemption.

The caste system has existed historically for a reason, and the lower castes must adhere to it. However, at its root, the entire notion serves solely to propagate ideology, as indicated by my Marxist, which is natural and claimed to be neutral. However, in reality, it is a sort of standardization that has an evil connotation. The motif is political subjugation in opposition to liberation, religious supremacy in opposition to emancipation, and mental traumatization in opposition to rationality. The irony is that all of them are presented as normal, natural, and impartial, implying that they will fulfil both purposes, which are plainly not same. Thus, the study demonstrates that how history is treated in works of art and literature, particularly in Indian Literature in general and Girish Karnad's plays in particular, is influenced by the socio-political landscape of contemporary society.

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